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Transfer students in theatre: A narrative study of transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions

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Transfer students in theatre: A narrative study of transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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ABSTRACT

The transfer student phenomenon in higher education is as increasingly complex as the transfer students causing the phenomenon. The collection of narratives in this study reflected transfer experiences of theatre students who were navigating the educational pipeline from community colleges to four-year institutions to major in the theatre discipline. An analysis of the narratives using Schlossberg's transition theory (1984) and the Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman transition model (1995) identified the issues of transfer which impacted theatre students as they transferred from community colleges to four-year institutions. The issues of transfer identified in the study were simultaneously unique to the theatre discipline and reflective of the literature on the issues of transfer students.

While most higher education institutions have developed transfer programs to assist students as they navigate the educational pipeline between institutions, it is also essential for each academic discipline inside the academy to develop a plan for assisting transfer students moving in the discipline from community colleges to four-year institutions (Borden, 2004). Discipline or program level transfer programs will assist transfer students in understanding the nuances of the individual discipline or department, including requirements, policies, procedures, and deadlines (Handel, 2007). Recommendations for assisting transfer students in the theatre discipline are provided in this study. By working together to develop creative and collaborative transfer initiatives, theatre programs at community colleges and theatre programs at four-year institutions may provide a smoother transition for future transfer students in the theatre discipline.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

I stood on the stage wedged between the president of my college and the governor of my state watching the steady stream of graduates file into the basketball arena for commencement on May 14, 2009. I had the honor of being the faculty representative to read the name of each graduate prior to them being handed their community college diploma. I love May graduation because it is when the majority of my theatre students graduate and it is wonderful to watch them end their time as community college students and move on to pursue their next dreams as the newest alumni of our college. In 2009 there were fifteen of my thirty theatre students graduating, and I could list where each one was headed and what their dream was as they walked across the stage by me. It was a memorable evening as families took pictures of the graduates with the performing arts faculty. We had spent so many hours together with them in the theatre while they sang and performed on the stage. The faculty gave out hugs of congratulations or best wishes to the new alumni and posed for tons of pictures, which were sure to be appearing the coming days on the popular social network called Facebook. As I removed my graduation gown and hood after the commencement reception, I found myself breathing a sigh of relief. There had not been one negative interaction following the 2009 graduation.

It is sad that I now spend graduation with butterflies in my stomach because of one negative interaction I had following a commencement ceremony seven years previously. One of my favorite alumni and a former theatre student had confessed to me in early fall of that academic year that he planned on majoring in technical theatre when he transferred to a four-year institution following graduation from the community college. Excitedly we had

worked together all year to choose the right theatre program for his dream and financial situation, as well as to get him accepted into a theatre program at a state university. He had even competed for and won a scholarship to study theatre. He was on his way and I was so excited for his future. His parents, however, were not happy with his decision and chose commencement to express their disgust with the one person they felt must be responsible for their son's seemingly unthinkable decision to major in theatre.

I had met his mother on numerous occasions over the previous two years while her son had completed his Associate of Arts degree and participated in numerous performing arts productions. She had always seemed so supportive and kind to her son until I expressed my congratulations to her son following commencement. She walked right up to me and said accusingly, "...you helped him get into that theatre program and a scholarship." I replied that I thought it was wonderful that he had received a scholarship and admission to the program. She looked me square in the eye and said, "Well, I certainly hope he can stay with you once he is done and can't find a job in theatre. NOBODY can get a job in that field." My former student looked so sad at that point while he watched his favorite faculty member being confronted by his mother on what should have been a happy occasion.

Unfortunately, I was struck dumb over the negative treatment of this mother at that time and stood in disbelief at what had occurred as the mother had stormed off pulling my former student by the arm. I have since developed a standard repertoire of responses about studying theatre at the community college, choosing to pursue further study in theatre at a four-year institution, and even possible careers in theatre. I have also learned that this mom was not alone in her fears for her child's future as he transferred to a four-year institution to pursue a degree in theatre.

The transfer student phenomenon in higher education is as increasingly complex as the transfer students causing the phenomenon. A review of the literature on transfer students revealed that higher education institutions like my community college are responding to the complex needs of transfer students through research, programming, formalized agreements, and collaboration. The literature implied that higher education institutions of all levels will continue to face the transfer phenomenon in the future and will have to continue to develop creative, collaborative solutions to the multitude of concerns transfer students like my alumni encounter as they navigate between institutions of higher education to study theatre.

While the literature on transfer students was clear on the responses being developed at the institutional level in both community college and four-year institutions, Borden (2004) concluded his research on the transfer phenomenon by stating that individual academic units or each specific discipline in higher education needed to understand how the transfer experience impacted the students who were transferring into that specific discipline of study. As a community college theatre faculty member and director, I have witnessed the transfer experience through the eyes of my theatre students who are navigating the educational pipeline from the community college to a variety of four-year institutions with the desire to continue their study of theatre.

The Director: Setting the Stage for the Study

I have been theatre director and a theatre faculty member at a Midwestern community college for the past eight years. Prior to this, I was a speech and drama director at an inner-city high school for ten years where I ran a large, award winning program that was well-known in the state. Through my professional work, I have directed theatre at every level of

education from the elementary through university level. These professional experiences have enabled me to work with theatre students at every educational level.

Many students with whom I have worked have navigated the educational pipeline with the goal of earning a theatre degree from a university and they have each taken their own unique path through the educational pipeline. Some students move directly from their high school theatre to a four-year institution's theatre program, but others choose to attend a community college first to get the "basics" done and then move to a four-year institution to study theatre. Some have been recruited to particular theatre programs while others have auditioned for a spot in a selected theatre program. Still others have tried life at a four-year institution and found they weren't "ready for it," or at a performing arts school and found the program was too narrowly focused, and a few even attended several four-year institutions, before reverse-transferring to the community college. These are just a few of the myriad of stories about navigating the educational pipeline that I have heard over 17 years as a theatre educator.

As a community college theatre educator, I am responsible for designing and teaching theatre curriculum, as well as directing an annual season of plays including designing all the technical elements of each production. In a nutshell, I consider myself privileged to earn my living by telling and re-telling stories on stage through vocal, physical, and visual means. My students and I collaborate on understanding a text, a narrative, or a script in order to represent it to an audience.

I work closely with students every day as they begin their college experiences, and their experience in theatre at the community college often leads to a desire of a career in theatre. As an academic advisor for the discipline, I am influential in the transfer decisions

of potential theatre majors as they research transfer possibilities at a variety of higher education institutions, as they audition for scholarships or admittance to a program of choice, and as they take the initial steps in their navigation of the educational pipeline between their community college and other institutions. The close relationships I develop with my students through the course of our work in theatre often results in students maintaining contact with me after they have reached their four-year institution. They have regularly shared their joys, triumphs, and concerns about what they have seen, felt, and lived throughout the transfer experience.

For some of my past theatre students, the transfer process into a theatre department at a four-year institution was an easy, almost seamless transition. For other theatre students, the transfer process felt like the students were portraying the title role of Darwin in a new play called “Survival of the Fittest: The Life of a Theatre Transfer Student.” Many felt like the transition was an unfair game where they were treated as if they were second-class citizens and weren’t provided with all the information that was necessary to make the transition smooth. Some felt like they were looked down upon by the four-year institution and others felt like they weren’t given the same breaks as a student who had been at the four-year institution since their freshman year. Over my years of working with students transferring into theatre programs at four-year institutions, I began to see emerging patterns as the student’s shared their transfer stories with me, which led to my exploration of the transfer student phenomenon and the impact that transferring from a community college to a four-year institution had on theatre majors.

Gaff Tape: Theoretical Underpinnings

Since the Russian theatre director Constantine Stanislavsky introduced the principles of realistic presentation or “The Method” to actors and thereby influenced the future of modern theatre, performances have presented real life through the illusion of theatrical design elements that look like reality to the audience (Courtney, 1987). The proscenium arch found in many theatres enables the audience to view the performance through a mythical fourth wall into the character’s world. To be successful, the character’s world should be believable and realistic in representational theatre. Anyone who works professionally in theatre knows that the reality the audience sees is far from the reality of what is holding together the set pieces, the scenic elements and sometimes even the costumes. Many times a particular element like Gaff tape is used as the underpinning to hold together the backstage elements of a performance thereby providing a solid foundation from which the audience can view the presentation.

While Gaff tape is an almost universal theatrical underpinning used to hold many performance elements together, this research was tied to philosophical underpinnings that connected scholarship to professional practice, as well as to theory. Johnson and Golombek (2002) advocated that teachers should interweave their understandings of theory and research relevant to their chosen field throughout the research process.

In doing so, teachers theorize in language they feel comfortable using, whether it be narrative descriptions, recounting of specific events, depictions of visual images, metaphors that weave their life stories together, or references to or from theory and research. (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 7)

We reflect on the continuity of our experiences through the use of narratives. Stories, or narratives, are embedded in the socio-cultural contexts from which they emerged and they

are reflective of the socio-historical discourses from which they came (Gee, 1999).

Narratives enable the educator to reflect on what she knows and to integrate her professional and personal worlds in ways that may seem subjective. However, Johnson and Golombek (2002) noted, "...it is this integration of personal and professional that can inform in authentic ways (p. 7)." Schon (1983) referred to this as "knowing-in-action" and that this form of inquiry was really a dialectical relationship between practice and theory (Clarke, 1994; Edge & Richards, 1998). Johnson and Golombek (2002) remarked "...that ultimately, narrative inquiry enables teachers not only to make sense of their professional worlds but also to make significant and worthwhile change within themselves and in their teaching practices" (p. 7).

Whereas many narrative researchers in sociology and sociolinguistics frame their entire inquiry within an in-depth review of existing theory and research, educational researchers tend to frame their inquiry within their experiences. Therefore, it is impossible for me as a theatre educator to ignore my love or understanding of the world of theatre, the nature of educational theatre, or the experiences I know a theatre major encounters while they study in a theatre program. Likewise, as a practicing professional artisan, it is impossible for me to ignore my field of expertise and knowledge of arts-based research in my personal research projects (Leavy, 2009).

It was my hope at the onset of this narrative research that I would learn through the experiences of theatre students in order that I would be able to better understand and serve transfer students I would be working with in the future. I fully expect that my knowledge of the nature of the transfer experiences of theatre students will continue to change and grow long after the context of this study and its resulting conclusions has faded from significance.

Because the transfer phenomenon has been on the rise for my entire professional career, it is likely that I will probably gain knowledge and theorize on the transfer phenomenon and its impact on theatre students throughout my professional life as an educator.

Technical Difficulties: A Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing numbers of students transferring between community colleges and four-year institutions that has been reported in the literature on the transfer phenomenon, little has been written about the transfer experiences of students into specific higher education disciplines, including the fine arts disciplines. Likewise, few of the studies on transfer student experiences have been qualitative in nature and rarely does the research on transfer students reflect an in-depth analysis of individual student transfer student experiences as told from the student's perspective in a particular discipline. Clearly, there is a need for all disciplines of the academy, including the theatre discipline, to understand the experiences of transfer students in their discipline in order to help ease the pathway between institutions for this ever-growing student population.

A review of the literature on theatre in higher education resulted in a reflection of what theatre practitioner's value: theatrical production reviews and reports on creative solutions to production design elements. Only a very small number of findings about the theatre discipline in four-year institutions were found and most of the literature on theatre in the academy reflected theatre programs in England and very little on the theatre discipline in higher education in the United States. Most literature on the theatre discipline in the United States is nearing thirty years old, having been written during the British push for Theatre in Education standards of the 1980s. There were slimmer results about theatre in community

colleges and nothing found on the experiences of transfer students in theatre. This study adds to the small body of research on the theatre discipline in higher education in the United States and, simultaneously, it illuminates the experiences of past community college theatre students as they navigated the academic pipeline to four-year institutions in pursuit of the dream of a theatre degree.

Directing the Show: The Purpose of the Study

It is the primary job of a theatre director to drive the production from inception through conception to facilitation of the final performance. As the “director” of this study, my first initiative was to establish the purpose of the study. The purpose of this research was to conduct a qualitative inquiry that resulted in a collection of stories or personal narratives about transfer student experiences in theatre. The collection of narratives reflected the student’s experiences as they navigated the educational pipelines from the community colleges to their four-year institutions. I utilized narrative inquiry methods and an analysis of the narrative findings to identify the issues which impacted theatre students as they transferred from community colleges to four-year institutions.

My goal was to determine if the issues which theatre majors perceived impacted them in this transition were the same as those identified in the literature review on the transfer experience by transfer students. Likewise, I wanted to know if any of the issues identified by the theatre majors experiencing the transfer phenomenon seemed to be unique to the culture of the theatre discipline. By completing an analysis of the narratives of transfer students in theatre and comparing the findings with the literature on the greater transfer student phenomenon, I attempted to meet Borden’s (2004) challenge that specific academic units

need to be analyzing how the transfer experience impacts individual majors in higher education.

Dramaturgy: An Overview of the Study

When a theatre director begins work on a new play or theatrical piece, she often consults with a dramaturg, a theatrical historian/researcher, to provide insight into the myriad of phenomenon present in the theatrical work. I like to look at the life of the playwright, the historical elements that influenced the playwright, and the aspects of real life in any play I am directing. Because the transfer of students between community college and four-year institutions is a phenomenon of daily life in higher education, in-depth study of the phenomenon makes sense. To understand a phenomenon of daily life, it is essential to know the impact the phenomenon has on the people who are living and surviving the phenomenon. Phenomenological study is a useful tool for understanding the human experience and the personal meaning behind the experience (Worthen, 2002). One way to identify the process of a phenomenon and the implications on the people involved in the phenomenon is to hear the first-hand, narrative accounts of the people most impacted by the phenomenon.

To hear first-hand stories is to witness a type of performance, specifically, the narrative performance (Carlin, 1998). The narrative account that is the result of the performance reflects the participant's feelings, experiences, and their interpretation of the meaning of the phenomenon. Because I was looking at a phenomenon that was specifically impacting transfer students in theatre, I utilized a technique common in arts-based research and performance studies by conducting a narrative analysis of their collective accounts to identify common themes describing the transfer experience of theatre students as they moved

from the community college to the four-year institution (Leavy, 2009). These themes were then compared to the literature review on the transfer issues faced by transfer students across higher education to determine which issues identified by the narrative analysis were unique to the theatre discipline.

Designing the Show: The Research Questions

After exploring the phenomenon in a theatrical production and understanding the nuances of the history of the production, a theatre director moves into planning the design of the performance or deciding on the major elements of the play. For me, this is one of the most creative aspects of the show because the sky can be the limit in the design. It is the director's dream before the reality of limitations sets in. The design of this study on transfer students in theatre was guided by my desire to learn more about the process transfer students in theatre lived as they navigated the educational pipeline between institutions so I could better serve future students who were charting the same course.

I focused on several research questions in my research design that reflected process theory found in qualitative methodology. According to Maxwell (2005), process theory focuses on the meaning, context, and the process of a phenomenon being studied which is best illuminated through the use of open-ended, inductive inquiry. Since transferring between institutions of higher education is a process of transition, the research questions were designed to: (a) illicit narratives about the *meaning* of events and activities to the students involved in the transfer process; (b) illicit narratives about the influence of the physical and social *context*, or the theatre and its unique culture, on the events of the

phenomenon under study; and (c) illicit narratives about the *process* by which the events, the activities, and their outcomes occurred (Maxwell, 2005).

As a theatre director, I often develop several creative designs at the onset of a production and then narrow the designs into a few creative building blocks that I really want to emphasize for the audience. Those building blocks will be present throughout all the aspects of the production. In this study, specific research questions were designed to illuminate the process of transition for transfer students in theatre. The questions were:

1. How do former community college transfer students in theatre describe the transfer process?
2. How do former community college transfer students in theatre describe the major obstacles or roadblocks encountered as they transferred from community colleges to a four-year institution?
3. How do former community college transfer students in theatre describe their excitements and anxieties as they transferred from the community college to the four-year institution?
4. How do theatre majors describe their level of overall preparation for transferring into a theatre major at a four-year institution?
5. How do former community college transfer students in theatre describe the assistance they received in the transition from their community colleges and their four-year institutions?
6. How do former community college transfer students in theatre describe the assistance they received in the transition from their theatre department in their four-year institution?

These six questions were at the heart of my inquiry into the experiences of transfer students in theatre and served as the building blocks for all aspects of the study.

Setting the Scene: Limitations of the Study

During the blocking and designing of a play, the theatrical director works within certain limitations. It is great to dream at the onset of any production but there are limits on every production. Limitations are often what I call the great “reality check” of the performance that the director operates within. Sometimes the limitation is the budget or the financial scope of the production. I have often asked myself how “big” can the show be within the budget? Another limitation might be time. How much time do I realistically have to pull this show off?

Every production I have ever directed was limited in design and scope by the time the production opened. Similarly, this study on the transfer experiences of community college theatre students was limited in both design and scope. The design of this research study used two primary methods of data collection: (1) a focus group of theatre transfer students at a single four-year institution who had transferred into the institution from a variety of community colleges; and (2) individual interviews with theatre transfer students from the same community college who transferred to different four-year institutions.

The individual interviews were purposefully sampled with my past theatre students because I could readily invite a variety of theatre students who had transferred to a variety of institutional types to participate in the study. While this allowed me to understand a variety of transfer experiences, the design choice also meant that as I went into the interviews, I was

intimately familiar with at least parts of their histories, their theatre and academic experiences at my community college.

To only focus on the narratives of students I was intimately familiar had the possibility for a study shaded in a multitude of researcher biases. Thus, while the individual interviews with theatre transfer students from the same institution might have resulted in an interesting case study of my past students' transfer experiences and would have provided a nice variety of narratives to analyze, the design choice of using two methods of data collection was deliberate because I wanted to illicit narratives about experiences of transfer from a variety of community colleges that I was not intimately familiar with. The choice of using a focus group of students from a variety of community colleges who had transferred to a single four-year institution resulted in a unique opportunity for students to share with one another their transfer experiences into the same institution and in some instances to learn from another's experience. The focus group provided a broader reflection of the transfer experiences of theatre students as they moved from a variety of community colleges to a four-year institution, as well as a unique opportunity to bond with other transfer students going through similar circumstances.

While the deliberate design choice of using two primary methods of data collection, the focus group and individual interviews, resulted in a broad collection of theatre transfer narratives, it was soon revealed in our initial discussions that the participants in the study were far from reflective of broad, cultural backgrounds. Each participant in this study was a current resident of the same state although several were in the process of transferring to four-year institutions out of state. Each of the participants had attended community colleges, a couple had even attended more than one community college, one had attended a four-year

institution and then reverse-transferred to a community college, and each participant had completed an associate degree from a community college prior to transferring to a four-year institution. All the participants were within four years of age of one another and self-identified as being between 19 to 22 years of age. As the participants shared about their backgrounds, it was evident that they came from a variety of family backgrounds and socio-economic statuses.

Theatre is very much a collaborative art form and is dependent upon a variety of people to present a single performance to an audience. As I designed this study on transfer students, I knew that I could not ignore my own background or influences on the study at any turn. Just as I know that the director is the guiding force in any theatrical production, and the designer of a major research project such as this one, influences the study in much the same way as the director of a play does.

As I got to know the students in this study I was struck by the similarities between the students and myself, and the differences too. We were all Midwesterners who shared a common love and passion for the arts and theatre in particular. Despite our 20+ year age gap, we all shared a common dream of “making it” in what is commonly referred to as a “non-traditional” career path. While we were all from a community college background, my experience in the community college was never from the perspective of having been a community college undergraduate student. Having spent my entire undergraduate time at the same four-year institution, I only knew the community college from the side of being a faculty member in a community college. In the time period that I went through as an undergraduate student in the same Midwestern state as the students in this study, the community colleges were largely places to study a technical field rather than what the

community college system in the state evolved into for this group of undergraduate students. Because of the differences and similarities I shared with the transfer students in theatre, it was also important to me that I self-reflect through the course of this study and share my own experiences as a theatre educator throughout the study. Therefore, my personal narrative often interweaves with that of the students as they collaborated with me to help me understand their perspectives on the transfer experience.

To Be or Not to Be: Definitions

To better understand this narrative inquiry on transfer students in theatre, several terms relating to the transfer phenomenon, narrative, and theatre were defined:

Transfer Terminology

The *transfer phenomenon* refers to the increase in students transferring between educational institutions. Historically the *transfer path* in higher education was from a community college to a four-year institution, a *vertical* or *linear transfer*. A student who transfers between educational institutions is referred to as a *transfer student*. A student who transfers from a four-year institution to a community college or enrolls at a community college while attending a four-year institution is referred to as a *reverse transfer student* (Arnold, 2001). To transfer in, out, and between educational institutions is referred to as *transfer swirl* and a student who moves in, out, and between educational institutions is referred to as a *transfer swirler* (McCormick, 2003).

Narrative Terminology

Narrative is a mode of verbal presentation that involves the telling of events (Prince, 2003, p. 59). Narratives are also referred to as stories, accounts, or tales. “To narrate” is to

tell a story and the person telling the story is a *narrator*. *Literary narratives* are stories created from imagination, often have little or no grounding in actual events (Smith, 1998, p. 237). In contrast, *personal narratives* are the oral stories individuals tell one another. *Narrative inquiry* refers to a theory that knowledge comes from experience that is relayed through story (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). *Narrative analysis* is the process by which a researcher extracts a theme or themes from the stories of lived experiences and re-stories the elements in a way that illuminates them for the reader's understanding (Kim, 2006, p. 4).

Theatre Terminology

Theatre is a term that refers to a physical structure or the building and/or space where a performance or play happens (a “playhouse”). It also refers to the dramatic action performed to an audience which may or may not be based upon a script. When “theatre” is combined with “education,” in the case of *Theatre Education* (United States) or *Theatre in Education* (United Kingdom) it refers to an avenue of studying theatrical elements as part of school curriculum. *Theatre Education* may also be referred to as *Theatre Arts* or the *Theatre Discipline*. A *theatre major* is a student who has declared or is planning on graduating with an educational degree in the theatre discipline. The theatrical profession is often referred to as “*the theatre*” (Courtney, 1987, p. 135).

The term *theatre* is often used interchangeably with the word drama. *Drama* refers to a stage play (“dramatic literature”) or a particular style or genre of script (“a drama”). A *dramaturge* is a playwright or historian working with a specific company or play. *Dramaturgy* is a taking a dramatic perspective on life or society. A *dramatic act* is a change or transformation in a state or affairs. A *dramatic action* is a concrete, physical expression of

a role by an actor or ensemble. *Dramatic action* is also a method of inquiry where the players are “seekers of knowledge” as they theorize about a role. A *dramatic process* is something that underlies the creation of meaning by the dynamic unity of thought and/or action. To *dramatize* is to give dramatic life to narrative (Courtney, 1987, p. 35-36).

Perform/Performance is to present to others an action that creates meaning. A performance is the player’s engagement in a role or production. A *performer* is one who engages in performance (also known as “actor” or “player”). In theatre, “to perform” is to re-present human life and to use specific skills to communicate the presentation to an audience. *Performance Theory* refers to the performance event as the “territory” while the frames of reference to understand the territory are “maps” (Courtney, 1987, p. 98-99).

The Reviews: Significance of the Study

As a graduate student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University, I wanted to conduct research that would be personally useful to me as a community college practitioner and would simultaneously allow me to provide research to the theatre discipline on the transfer experiences of theatre students. It is my hope that this research will help theatre practitioners at community colleges and four-year institutions understand the transfer experience from the point of the theatre students navigating the educational pipeline. Theatre practitioners, including myself, will be better able to assist future transfer students and ease the pathway through the pipeline if we understand what the experiences of the transfer students in theatre are like from the student’s point of view.

Since I am a theatre practitioner, this research project on transfer students in theatre allowed me to give back to the discipline who fostered my love of performance, theatre, and

story. The communication and theatre faculty of my educational history influenced my navigation through the educational pipeline and were instrumental in my decision to become a theatre professional. In the infancy stages of this inquiry I read my horoscope in the Des Moines Register on Friday, June 15, 2007. It was quite prophetic when it said “you’re surprised by how much you still don’t know about your given line of work. Look at your scene in ways you haven’t before. Ask questions. You’ll be fascinated by what you learn” (p. 8B). I have that horoscope on the bulletin board above my desk as a reminder to always look at what I am doing in a new way. It is my hope that the narratives in this research will provide valuable insight into a growing population of theatre students that I am fascinated by: transfer students from community colleges.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to present my research on the transfer process of students in theatre, it is necessary to first review the research findings on the broader issue of transfer students. The research practices utilized to study transfer students and the corresponding results of studies on the transfer phenomenon helped me to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of transfer students and from the perspective of two- and four-year institutions that are working to understand the phenomenon. Since all of my participants were choosing to major in an aspect of theatre at a four-year institution, it was also necessary to understand what theatre is, to understand the nature of the theatre discipline in education, and to define the contexts of theatre that students may focus upon during their course of study.

Because each major is unique inside a four-year institution and each major has its own rites of passage or nuances and coursework inside the discipline, it is also important to identify the unique situations a student who majors in theatre may encounter during their study of theatre. The rites of passage or nuances and the coursework unique to the theatre discipline set the theatre major apart from the greater population of students in a four-year institution. Taken together, the research on the transfer phenomenon and the research on the theatre discipline in education provide a unique framework from which to view the transfer student in theatre as they navigate the educational pipeline from community college to four-year institution.

The Transfer Phenomenon

According to community college researcher Arthur M. Cohen, “half the students beginning postsecondary education in America start in a community college” (2005, p.85). Hurst and Bradburn (2001, as cited in Cohen, 2005) claimed more than 70% of entering college students in 2001 have the desire to obtain a bachelor’s degree or higher. As these students transverse the educational pipeline in their quest to earn an advanced degree from the higher education system, they are faced with a myriad of challenges.

Community colleges and four-year programs are simultaneously working independently and cooperatively in their efforts to ease the path for transfer students. By studying the transfer student phenomenon and developing specific programming initiatives designed to meet the complex needs of transfer students, the educational pipeline is becoming easier to navigate for all students including the transfer student in theatre. The study of the transfer student phenomenon has resulted in the following questions:

1. Who are transfer students and why do they choose this path through the pipeline?
2. What are the unique challenges faced by transfer students as they navigate the pipeline?
3. What are community colleges or two-year institutions doing to meet the needs of students who plan on transferring to a four-year institution?
4. What are four-year institutions doing to meet the needs of students who transfer into their institution from a community college or other two-year institution?
5. How are two-year institutions and four-year institutions working together to ease the path through the educational pipeline for transfer students?

A review of the literature on transfer students answers these five questions and helps institutions of higher education understand the transfer student phenomenon. Through careful analysis and planning by institutions of higher education, future transfer in theatre may not feel as though they are playing the title role in the play “Survival of the Fittest” in their navigation of the educational pipeline.

Who Are Transfer Students?

Transfer students are not easy to define as they are as varied as the number of majors in a typical four-year institution. Likewise, the reasons students may transfer are as varied as the reasons why students attend community colleges or four-year institutions. “Transfer students vary in age, gender, race, ethnicity, employment patterns, persistence, academic backgrounds, and socio-economic backgrounds” (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001, p. 89). Even students with a career, technical or vocational focus at a community college are common candidates for the transfer process. Dougherty (1992), and Hunter and Sheldon (1980) estimated that approximately three-fourths of all vocational and career students want to achieve a baccalaureate degree after they complete their program at a community college.

As varied as transfer students are, the transfer decision process is just as complex. The transfer decision involves diverse criteria encompassing the “student’s community college experiences such as [the student’s classification as] academic or vocational or no major, financial aid status, receiving associate degree, number of credits earned in first year, and cumulative GPA at community college” (Yang, 2005, p. 153). Additionally, institutional characteristics such as the size of the community college and four-year institution, the percentage of minority, women and part-time students, and the number of four- and two-year

institutions in the student's resident state figure into the transfer decision for the student (Yang). Common predictors of a student's choice in the transfer process include the "student's background characteristics including age, gender, family socioeconomic status, parent's education, high school diploma type, the student's educational expectation, and financial constraints" (Yang, p. 153).

The traditional, linear or vertical transfer student is one who completes a two-year degree and moves on to work toward a baccalaureate degree at a four-year institution. Arnold (2001) pointed out that today's students may not follow the traditional transfer model: "Students move in and out of attending college, they move in and among institutions in the entire postsecondary sector, and they may have goals in mind that do not necessarily make a six year graduation rate a meaningful statistic" (p.53). Borden (2004) reported that "since the 1970s the majority of undergraduate degree recipients have accumulated degree credits at more than one institution and over a time-span longer than the two to four years required for the degree" (p.10).

Arnold (2001) broadened the definition of transfer students to include reverse transfer students who are full time students at a four-year institution yet they enroll at a community college for a selected course or two. Reverse transfers also include co-enrolled/dual enrolled students who are simultaneously enrolled in a community college and a four-year institution, and graduate students who enroll in a community college for personal growth reasons or to enhance their employability. The Indiana Commission of Higher Education (as cited in Borden, 2004) reported that reverse transfers from four-year to two-year institutions were more frequent than the more traditional forward transfer from the two-year to four-year institution.

Alfredo de los Santos and Irene Wright (1990) were the first to identify an additional type of transfer student as the transfer swirl who moves in and amongst various higher education institutions as they pursue a baccalaureate degree (Borden, 2004; Townsend, 1999). Transfer swirlers were documented by McCormick (2003) who categorized eight multi-institutional attendance patterns that represent the complexity of transfer students:

1. trial enrollment (experimenting with the possibility of transfer by taking a few courses);
2. special program enrollment (taking advantage of unique programs and programs offered at other institutions);
3. supplemental enrollment (accelerating progress by taking additional courses—during the summer, for example—at another institution);
4. rebounding enrollment (alternating enrollment at two institutions);
5. concurrent enrollment (that is, double dipping);
6. consolidated enrollment (taking a collection of courses at various institutions to complete one institution's degree program);
7. serial transfer (one or more intermediate transfers on the way to a final destination);
and
8. independent enrollment (taking courses unrelated to the degree program, for personal or professional interest, at other institutions).

With the wide variety of transfer students, the number of transfer tracks these students might travel on, and the diverse rationales for transferring between institutions, it is not surprising that each transfer student might experience a variety of challenges in the transfer adjustment.

Challenges of Being a Transfer Student

There are many challenges transfer students face as they move through the educational pipeline. Transfer students face academic (academic skills and performance, faculty-student interaction, advising and planning, and career focus), psychological (level of self confidence) and environmental challenges (campus adjustment and involvement, personal management, and finances) as they move between the community college and four-year institution (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001). Sandeen and Goodale (as cited in Eggleston & Laanan, 2001, p. 90) identified a variety of issues transfer students must deal with, once they reach the four-year institution:

...negative attitudes toward transfer students, admissions issues, registration problems, new student programs issues, problems with academic advising, student financial aid problems, housing issues, problems with student activities involvement, career planning and placement issues, publication resources, adjustment to institutional change, articulation, and special academic opportunities

When a student transfers between institutions, they may experience a phenomenon that Hills identified in 1965 as transfer shock. This is when a student experiences a temporary lowering of grades or GPA soon after entering their new institution. Transfer shock has been documented in studies by Keely and House (1993), Hills (1965), Nolan and Hall (1978), Townsend (1993, 1995), Webb (1971), and Williams (1973), which show transfer students experiencing difficulty adjusting to the rigorous academic standards of a four-year environment. Transfer students should expect that their academic performance will improve the longer they remain at the institution they transferred to (Arnold, 2001; Hills, 1965). After reviewing 62 studies on transfer shock, Diaz (1992) found that 67% of the

studies showed that students recover from transfer shock and that most students experienced less than one half of a grade point or less drop in their grade point average.

Transfer shock may accentuate feelings of alienation for the student upon initially transferring to the new institution. Bennett and Okinaka (1990) identified this alienation as transitional trauma and believed this occurred as a result of the student being unfamiliar with the norms, values, and expectations of the four-year institution. Lee (2001) referred to a phenomenon he identified as the policy knowledge gap where the information a student received about the transfer policy at the two-year institution would somehow become inaccurate or even obsolete when they reached the four-year institution. Transitional trauma coupled with the policy knowledge gap is frustrating for the transfer student but can be even more frustrating for the minority transfer student who may also be facing cross-cultural communication barriers at the four-year institution (Lee, 2001).

Lack of financial resources adds to the transitional trauma a student may feel. This may be felt particularly by a community college student transferring to a four-year institution where the tuition and fees may be considerably higher than at the community college (McDonough, 1997). The shift from need-based to merit-based financial aid in many states makes it increasingly difficult for low-income students to qualify for financial aid (Boswell, 2004). Non-Asian minority transfer students and low-income transfer students may be at even a greater risk for not completing their baccalaureate degree when compared with their white counterparts from families of higher annual income (Bender, 1991; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen, 1988; Richardson & Skinner, 1992). The financial aid impact on transfer students has been studied by the National Baccalaureate Roundtable sponsored by the Lumina Foundation who found that “Cumbersome financial aid rules and requirements tend

to impede, rather than encourage, students from transferring and completing a degree” (as cited in Boswell, 2004).

In general, students of color experience greater inequalities of educational opportunity than their white and Asian counterparts do. On every indicator of educational participation and attainment, minority students as a group are statistically behind white students. According to Chandler (as cited in Boswell, 2004), “They are less likely to complete high school, less likely to enroll in college, more likely to attend a two-year than a four-year institution, and far less likely to complete a baccalaureate degree or enroll in graduate or professional programs” (n.p.). These conclusions indicate that the higher in education a minority student achieves, the less minority presence is felt. This leads minority students to feel increasingly isolated the higher they travel up the educational pipeline. When feelings of isolation couple with transitional trauma and transfer shock, minority students are at great risk for dropping out following transfer and may not complete their baccalaureate goal.

Credit acceptance or credit loss is an area of concern for transfer students as they move between institutions. Community college credits may not be accepted at the four-year institution because of a low grade earned in the course, the credit was earned in a non-college-level course, the credit was actually duplicate credit for the same course haven been taken multiple times at the community college, or the credit earned was over the maximum amount allowed for transfer according to four-year institutional policy (Arnold, 2001). Students with vocational-technical credits or career training may have greater difficulty transferring to a four-year institution. Articulation of vocational and career course credits

earned at a community college may be inconsistent for transfer students entering a four-year institution (Arnold, 2001; Keener, 1994).

Whether a student is moving between a vocational program to a baccalaureate degree or between a community college and a four-year institution, the transfer process can be full of challenges for a transfer student. Community colleges are rapidly developing programs to address the unique needs of transfer students, to enhance the student's transfer preparedness, and to ease the transfer process for students.

Community College Approach

To ease the pathway for transfer students, community colleges are developing transfer centers where students can attend transfer workshops, go on campus visits to four-year institutions, and obtain advice on their course of study, financial aid or scholarships and guidelines on transferability of vocational/career program coursework (Zamani, 2001).

Along with transfer centers, community colleges are also developing honors programs with enhanced academic curriculum and transfer alliance programs where academic rigor equals that which is found at a four-year institution (Kane, 2001). Transfer centers, honors programs and transfer alliance programs serve as methods of improving transfer student preparedness.

If a community college does not have a formalized transfer center, most have advisors (professional staff or faculty) to assist students in the transfer process. To be effective in assisting transfer students, advisors should be trained in the most up-to-date information on the transfer process, articulation agreements for specific programs, dual enrollment

programs, and the requirements that need to be fulfilled in order to obtain a baccalaureate degree (Arnold, 2001).

With community colleges being a primary training ground for technical and career programs coupled with the many technical or career students looking at transferring on after program completion, many community colleges have moved to require a general education core for most technical and career programs. The state of Maryland has gone so far as mandate that its required general education component be at a transferable level. A new phenomenon is emerging in occupational transfer as a few community colleges have worked with four-year institutions to craft occupational transfer agreements where “chunks” of occupational credit are accepted by the four-year institution (Ignash & Kotun, 2005). While occupational transfer agreements are a new phenomenon, many states are creating occupational transfer pathways to bachelor degrees, also called management ladder degrees, primarily for specific fields like nursing. Combined together, these approaches help students in occupational programs to pursue higher education with as few barriers as possible, fosters a better educated workforce and opportunities for life-long learning (Ignash & Kotun, 2005).

Townsend (1995) found that community colleges may inadvertently contribute to the phenomenon of transfer shock because of their student centered approach that promotes self-esteem building in students through meaningful interaction with faculty. Transfer students may expect similar treatment by faculty at a four-year institution. Transfer shock may be prevented by faculty at community colleges who promote academic rigor in their courses and make the time to talk with students about the possibility of transfer shock. These techniques may help reduce anxiety in transfer students as they anticipate moving to a new institution.

By following up with students after transfer through informal or formalized questionnaires and interviews, community college faculty can learn what areas the students were prepared for in transferring and what areas that need to be improved upon for future transfer-ready students (Johnson-Benson, et. al, 2001). Thirty-three states require public four-year institutions to report on transfer rates between two- and four-year institutions, and some require that reporting to include measurable performance standards of community college graduates (Boswell, 2004). Some institutions have implemented course-based models of transfer success to show how well students who complete course prerequisites at community colleges perform at the receiving college by comparing the academic performances of transfer students and native students (Kozeracki, 2001). These research practices lead to changes in community college programming which in turn can help reduce the challenges faced by transfer students as they move to the four-year institution.

Four-year Institution Approach

Four-year institutions have conducted studies comparing native students, or students who begin as freshman and stay with the same institution through their baccalaureate graduation, and students who transfer in from a community college or other institution. Hills (1965) found that native students tend to perform better academically than transfer students. Since 1965, studies have continued to indicate transfer students perform at lower academic levels initially over their native counterparts and they experienced higher attrition rates than native students (Cohen & Brawer, 1989).

Four-year institutions with high transfer rates have designed unique programs to ease the challenges faced by transfer students (Helm & Cohen, 2001). Summer scholars institutes,

transfer workshops, minority transfer centers, college transfer days, transfer student orientation programs, and college visits/tours are all approaches four-year institutions take to curb transfer shock for students (Zamani, 2001). Some four-year institutions, such as the University of Central Florida, have implemented offices of transfer services which offer peer mentoring/advising programs, referrals to university services, transfer student advocacy/ombudsman services, and initial contacts with transfer students who have undeclared majors and need advising on degree decisions (Poisel & Stinard, 2005).

According to Ackerman (as cited in Eggleston & Laanan, 2001), summer bridge programs at four-year institutions that are designed specifically for transfer students have several goals to meet as they assist transfer students. These programs:

- (1) facilitate student transitions,
- (2) increase the potential for persistence, retention, and graduation,
- (3) facilitate the development of critical thinking, academic skills, and personal and social responsibility,
- (4) introduce Academic Advancement Program retention services (counseling, tutoring, and learning skills),
- (5) promote appreciation for racial, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity, and
- (6) build and reinforce a positive self-image, inner confidence, and self-direction among program participants. (p. 93)

Four-year institutions are increasingly using technology tools to assist in advising transfer students. The University of Central Florida shows the increased usage of web based technology by transfer students: “During the 2002-2003 academic year, 24,000 constituents made contact with the Office of Transfer Services website, compared to 2,000 contacts and fewer than 10,000 hits to the web site in 1999-2000” (Poisel & Stinard, 2005). Many four-year institutions are offering advising services through emails with students and instant messaging systems.

Four-year institutions and community colleges are utilizing a variety of techniques independently at their institutions to meet the needs of transfer students. Some of the most

successful techniques to ease the path through the educational pipeline have been the result of two- and four-year institutions working together for the benefit of transfer students.

Cooperation and Collaboration: Two- and Four-year Institutions

Community colleges and four-year institutions have come together to ease the transition for transfer students through the educational pipeline. Collaboration between two- and four-year institutions is a vital part of bringing transfer information to counselors, advisors, faculty and students. Three outcomes happen through collaboration: (1) Faculty and staff from two- and four-year institutions develop strong collaborative relationships; (2) Students get information on the transfer process and feedback on their academic preparedness; (3) Students are assured that they are taking the correct prerequisites for their intended major (Poisel & Stinard, 2005). Berger and Balaney (2003) examined how pre-transfer and post-transfer experiences influence the adjustment of transfer students to the four-year institution. They found that those students who were best informed and most actively prepared for transfer were most likely to achieve higher grades and be more satisfied with the transfer process.

Transfer articulation agreements range from legal agreements between two- and four-year institutions, to state system transfer policies, to voluntary arrangements between two and four-year institutions (Cohen, 1988). Articulation agreements coordinate course offerings between institutions, formalize admissions requirements for particular programs of study, and simplify transfer planning for the student (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Twenty-six states have established statewide articulation guides (Boswell, 2004). An example of how the articulation process works has evolved in the state of Indiana since 1999. After three years

of meetings between faculty and administrators of two- and four-year institutions, the Commission for Higher Education in Indiana approved a state-wide transfer policy that includes the Principle of Equal Partners where two- and four-year institutions share responsibility for the first two years of college and the Principle of Collective Responsibility where all institutions are responsible for enhancing transfer between institutions. While Indiana challenges its higher education faculty with ultimate responsibility for transfer decisions, they have implemented a Policy of Constructive Evaluation which is a statewide system to track transfer students to show successful areas and identify areas for improvement in the transfer process (Sauer, Jackson, Hazelgrove, Scott, & Ignash, 2005).

Indiana is not the only state to track transfer students. Many states are starting to document transfer attendance patterns and to provide data on how taking specific courses at one institutions influences success in courses at another institution (Borden, 2004). Ewell, Schild, and Paulson (2003) have even argued that developing a national student tracking system might be the best way to assist student progression through the educational pipeline.

Some institutions are working together under joint admission agreements between community colleges and partnering universities. Entering community college students who indicate a desire for transfer are granted provisional acceptance to the university, assigned a community college advisor that understands transferability of coursework, and if the student achieves a transfer level GPA, the student will transfer seamlessly into the university upon completion at the community college. Joint admission agreements are available in New Jersey, Wyoming, Massachusetts, and Texas (Boswell, 2004).

Eight state higher education systems have developed common course numbering systems and common prerequisites so that students may easily transfer credits within a

seamless system (Boswell, 2004; Cohen, 2005). They have developed common core competencies and curricular content for common general education classes (Boswell, 2004). For students who do not complete all of the general education core requirements, some states such as Kentucky, have implemented transfer “blocks” of credit where a student can complete a categorical block of general education coursework and be assured of transferring the completed block to a four-year institution. Kentucky and other states have also implemented “2+2” agreements where students can transfer general education credit and technical, career, or teacher-preparation coursework into degree programs at four-year institutions (Sauer et. al., 2005).

Successful collaboration between two- and four-year institutions often comes because of faculty-to-faculty communication. The University of Central Florida utilizes faculty-to-faculty workshops with community college faculty throughout the state. These workshops allow for curriculum planning discussions, exchanges of ideas on syllabi, course objectives, and instructional materials, and an opportunity to share the academic successes of students who have transferred to UCF (Poisel & Stinard, 2005). Meeting regularly with representatives from two- and four-year institutions encourages strong working relationships that will make easier the task of assisting transfer students in their transition (Boswell, 2004).

The transfer process doesn't necessarily mean a student must relocate to a new town or a traditional university campus to pursue their educational goals. Many universities are opening university centers on community college campuses where university faculty teach upper-division courses in person or via distance learning. Students can earn baccalaureate or even graduate degrees at the university center. For example, the University Center at Macomb Community College in Michigan offers 26 baccalaureate degrees and 17 Master's

degrees from 10 different universities. Upper level courses at university centers are often offered during evening and weekend hours to accommodate the schedules of working adults (Boswell, 2004).

Some state systems are utilizing technology to communicate with students about what transfer opportunities exist between their two- and four-year institutions. Indiana is currently working toward a statewide transfer website that will be a “one-stop, one-shop” portal of transfer opportunities. Kentucky is currently offering an online external degree audit system that analyzes student coursework against program requirements at its four-year institutions to assist transfer students as they navigate through the educational pipeline. New Jersey is in the developmental stages of an online system that will provide electronic transmission and automated evaluation of transcripts for transfer students. It will also link all the two- and four-year institutions into a single, publicly accessible system which should help future students make a higher education plan (Sauer et al., 2005). California’s ASSIST system, Arizona’s Course Applicability System, and Florida’s Statewide Course Numbering System, are additional examples of web-based systems that allow students to determine how they can utilize multiple institutions to obtain a baccalaureate degree (Borden, 2004).

Along with web-based transfer information sites, students are taking advantage of the growing number of programs and courses available through distance learning. Rather than moving through traditional pathways between institutions, the E-learning phenomenon has students taking courses at hundreds of institutions around the world without leaving their dorm room or home. An example of one program where E-learning is embraced through cooperation is offered at Western Governors University which offers students access to distance learning opportunities from dozens of four-year institutions (Borden, 2004).

Western Governors University has implemented competency based assessments as a method of bridging the variety of distance learning opportunities its students engage in. Competency based credentialing has led to institutions utilizing student electronic portfolio systems. The ePort Consortium is a national consortium of higher education institutions developing technological and procedural mechanisms for individual students to create a repository of their personal learning. These repositories will show how student work completed at one institution meets the competencies and learning outcomes at other institutions, thus facilitating inter-institutional student transfer (Borden, 2004).

Distance learning, student swirl, and the complexity of student attendance patterns are leading some to consider communally agreed-upon, universal learning goals for college students across all high education. Borden (2004) claimed many educational associations and organizations are working collaboratively to develop universal principles, standards and practices for postsecondary education in the United States. The American Academy of Liberal Education and the Association of American Colleges and Universities each have recognized standards, accreditation systems, and initiatives which are being focused upon in the effort to develop universal learning goals.

Collaboration and cooperation between two- and four-year institutions, as well as between the variety of associations representing cross sections of higher education, is leading to clearer pathways for the transfer student to transverse as she moves inter-institutionally. The transfer phenomenon is far from being mastered in higher education and projections show increasing numbers of transfer students navigating the educational pipeline in upcoming years.

Implications of the Phenomenon of Transfer Students

The transfer phenomenon is as increasingly complex as the transfer students causing the phenomenon. Higher education institutions are responding to the needs of transfer students through research, programming, formalized agreements, and collaboration. Borden (2004) pointed out that the most important element in accommodating transfer students is how individual academic units and faculty support students who come into their programs at midpoint. Significant questions Borden posed for future inquiry into transfer students navigating the educational pipeline include:

1. Do academic units know where their students come from and at what point they are in their academic careers?
2. Do academic units orient transfer students to their particular curriculum?
3. Do they assess incoming students for pre-requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities?

Higher education institutions will continue to face the transfer phenomenon and will have to continue to develop creative, collaborative solutions to the multitude of concerns transfer students encounter as they navigate the educational pipeline. Specific disciplines in the academy including the theatre discipline will also be challenged to develop initiatives to meet the needs of their specific student populations and to help transfer students in their discipline understand the unique nature of the discipline as they move between higher education institutions.

The Theatre Discipline

While institutions of higher education are going to have to understand the transfer student phenomenon and all its complexities, Borden (2004) claimed that individual academic units will also have to understand the phenomenon as it relates to their discipline of study. Like any other discipline in higher education, theatre departments in four-year

institutions are experiencing the surge of transfer students who are coming from community colleges. Likewise, community colleges are producing graduates with a desire to continue their education at a four-year institution in the creative discipline of theatre.

Theatre is a discipline in higher education that encourages students to understand the unique history, theory, and practice of theatre and performance. The coursework of the theatre major or performance studies major generally includes the study of acting and directing, the exploration of performance and cultural studies, the interaction of theatrical design and stage technology, along with the business of theatre administration. Because theatre is naturally interdisciplinary, many theatre majors or performance studies majors also have coursework in anthropology, music, English, psychology, and dance (ATHE, 1997).

Theatre and drama, while considered by some to be the same avenue of study, are separate yet highly intertwined aspects of performance studies. Drama is a narrative art form – it's the story told in a specific facility (Atlenbernd & Lewis, 1966). The facility is generally a theatre, although many modern theatre practitioners consider just about any place fair game for a performance (Barranger, 2002). To study theatre means that a student studies all the components that are used to create a performance, including the theatre facility, the dramatic narrative or script, the history of the dramatic narrative including the culture that produced the narrative, as well as the actual performance by actors and the technical elements utilized in the production of the theatrical art form. Dramatic narrative is not created to be read. It does not exist in a book. It is created to be heard and/or seen, and interpreted by an audience. As an audience see, hears, and interprets a live dramatic narrative, they are experiencing what Altenbernd and Lewis (1966) called the “dramatic present” (p. 2).

The dramatic present is the immediacy of the live theatre event. It is a “complex spell cast over the spectators as they unite in seeing and hearing a story which is happening there, on the stage before them” (Altenbernd & Lewis, 1996, p. 2). Historically, this style of dramatic narrative has been presented in every culture since Ancient Greece. The Greek philosopher Aristotle said that a playwright combines six elements in a drama which impact an audience as they witness the event: action, character, thought, language, music and spectacle. “With a theatre, a stage, actors, an audience, and resources of music and spectacle, dance and pantomime, gesture, action, costume, setting, and histrionics to draw upon... the playwright is obviously composing a work of art with more than words” (Altenbernd & Lewis, 1996, p. 5). Brockett (2003) said, “Theatre, one of the oldest and most enduring forms of art, enables us to understand not only the past but the present. Theatre history and dramatic literature are embodiments of the cultural assumptions and values that in each era have made theatre a mirror of society” (p. 15). Theatre is an embodied art form that is a way of seeing men and women in action: what they do and why they do it in daily life. This was explained by Shakespeare when he said “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players...” Live theatre shows the magnitude of human existence and human interaction in a visible, viable art form that is unique with each performance (Barranger, 2002). To study theatre, a student would be choosing to study the human experience.

Theatre in Higher Education

According to the Association of Theatre in Higher Education (1997), theatre programs in higher education encourage “students to understand the unique history, theory and practice of theatre and performance through intellectual and experiential investigation”

(p. 1). By studying and producing artistic productions, students learn about diverse historical eras, communities, styles of production, technologies, and cultures. Learning in a theatre program at a university is not merely theoretical based learning but rather is a practical combination of theory and experience as a theatre major is required to put everything they have learned into practice with every production they are involved in before they graduate (Leptak-Moreau, 2005, n.p.).

Along with theatrical productions, theatre in higher education programs offer coursework in: history and theory of theatre and drama, the study of acting and directing, the exploration of performance and cultural studies, the art of theatrical design and stage technology, the business of theatre administration, as well as interdisciplinary coursework in anthropology, music, English, psychology, and dance (ATHE, 1997). A theatre major will be prepared for a career as a professional artist or performer. Possible career choices for theatre majors include but are not limited to: teacher, actor, director, playwright, critic, dramaturge, designer, administrator, or manager. A graduate from a theatre program in higher education might work in higher education, for a performing arts organization or a non-profit organization, or in the media.

Majoring in Theatre

If a student plans to complete an undergraduate major in theatre, she will be faced with deciding between two primary degree tracks: Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) or the Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.). A few theatre specialties like theatre education, drama therapy, or theatre management may earn a Bachelor of Science degree (Leptak-Moreau, 2005, n.p.). The National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST) accredits 150 degree granting programs

in theatre. Of the 150 accredited programs, 82 percent of them offer the B.A. option and 40 percent of them offer the B.F.A. A few higher education institutions in the United States offer both the B.A. and the B.F.A. options (Leptak-Moreau, 2005, p. 7). While neither degree track is intrinsically better, their purposes are significantly different, and a student will need to decide carefully which is better for her to pursue as she navigates the educational pipeline.

There are 1,342 bachelor's degree granting programs in theatre available in the United States (THEatre SERVICE as cited in Leptak-Moreau, 2005, n.p.). NAST accredits only about 11 percent of these with only 150 programs being accredited in the United States. There have been few two-year colleges and conservatories accredited by NAST. Because the accreditation status is costly and includes high standards for the admission of students, curriculum, faculty, facilities, and support services such as a library, many institutions offering a theatre program with a bachelor's degree choose to follow NAST's accreditation recommendations but do not pursue formal accreditation (Leptak-Moreau, 2005, n.p.).

According to NAST, the B.A. degree is a liberal arts degree with 33 to 49 percent of the coursework based in theatre. The balance of the degree is composed of coursework in arts and humanities, mathematics, social sciences, natural sciences, foreign language, and a variety of elective options. B.A. theatre students will develop basic theatre techniques and get production experience in an environment that "leads to a fuller intellectual grasp of the art" NAST said in its standards for degree-granting institutions.

In the B.A. program, a student will take courses in all aspects of theatre as an undergraduate and then may choose to specialize in a particular avenue of theatre her junior or senior year. If she chooses a B.A. program, she may choose to minor in a field outside the

theatre discipline or even to earn a double major. This may mean that as B.A. candidate, a student may study for between four and six years to earn her degree(s) (Leptak-Moreau, 2005, p. 7).

According to NAST, the B.F.A. degree is composed of at least 65 percent coursework in theatre and the balance is made up of a limited selection of general education requirements. The B.F.A. places “primary emphasis... on the development of skills, concepts, and sensitivities essential to the theatre professional” (Educational Theatre Association). NAST recognized six different theatre B.F.A. concentrations: acting, design and technology, film and video production, theatre for youth, musical theatre with a theatre emphasis, and musical theatre with a music emphasis. B.F.A. programs were described as “extremely rigorous and competitive by design in an effort to inspire excellence and to simulate the challenges than the students will confront as working artists” (Leptak-Moreau, 2005, p.8).

Because of the narrow focus and conservatory feel of a B.F.A. program, a student may not have the option of minoring or double majoring outside the program. Likewise, as a B.F.A. aspirant, a student will probably finish her program in four years because she will progress through the program in a cohort thus eliminating the likelihood of a student pursuing coursework outside the cohort program of study. Not only will a student be required to audition and interview to enter a B.F.A. program but she will be subjected to an annual review process whereby faculty will decide as to whether the student has progressed satisfactorily enough to stay in the program by reviewing her professional portfolio (Educational Theatre Association). At any point, the student may be eliminated from the B.F.A. if she isn't excellent at every step of the process and if she doesn't meet the rigor of

the program (Leptak-Moreau, 2005, p. 8). Some B.F.A. programs admit a large class of students with the direct intention of cutting less successful candidates after the first year. Other B.F.A programs admit small classes of students and work to nurture a positive environment for creativity and growth (Miller, Nov. 2002, n.p.).

If cost or location are issues that impact a student's decision on her degree track, she might consider earning a two-year degree from a community, junior, or technical college and then transferring to a four-year institution. There are 800 two-year institutions typically offering theatre courses leading toward an Associate of Arts (A.A.) or Associate of Science degree in the United States. A select few even offer an Associate of Fine Arts (A.F.A) degree. Leptak-Moreau (2005) said "another advantage of studying theatre in a two-year college is the availability of roles both onstage and backstage for freshmen and sophomores because there are no juniors, seniors, or graduate students" (p. 9). An added advantage to attending a two-year program prior to a four-year institution is that the tuition costs are usually significantly less. Miller (Oct. 2002) cautioned "The important thing to remember is that the amount spent on tuition does not always correspond directly with the quality of education" (n.p.).

If a student chooses to pursue an A.A. or A.F.A., she will want to be certain her coursework will transfer to a B.A. or B.F.A. degree granting institution if she plans to go on to earn a bachelor's degree. According to Kathleen Cleary, chair of theatre at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, OH, "The outlook is changing for transferring from an A.A. into a B.F.A. degree. Ten years ago, that would not have been possible. However, today some program chairs are saying 'if A.A. students can pass the auditions, we'll take them. If

we can't admit them as juniors, we wouldn't want them anyway.” (as cited in Leptak-Moreau, 2005, pp. 9-10).

Following a B.A. or B.F.A. degree, a student may choose to pursue a Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) degree or a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree. A M.F.A. degree usually takes between two to three years to complete while a M.A. takes between one and two years. A M.F.A. is considered a terminal degree in the theatre profession and nearly four times more theatre students choose this path through the educational pipeline than the M.A. degree. If a student chooses the M.A. option, she might even advance to the PhD level in a specialty like theatre education, history, or criticism and theory (Leptak-Moreau, 2005, p. 8).

The Educational Theatre Association (2007) has issued a list of recommendations for theatre students considering which degree option to pursue in college:

- A generation ago, a liberal arts degree with a major in theatre was a well-traveled path toward a life on stage. Today, it's not unheard of, neither is it common for an actor or designer to launch a professional career on the basis of a B.A. theatre degree alone. Most students who decide to continue their pursuit of life in the theatre after earning a liberal arts theatre degree do so by enrolling in an M.F.A. program or conservatory.
- Many B.F.A. programs graduate actors who are indisputably well-trained. An actor who earns a liberal arts degree like a B.A. and then an M.F.A., though, is both well-trained and well-educated, a formidable combination that, all other things being equal, directors will find appealing.

- The B.F.A. is a narrowly focused, highly specialized course of study. B.F.A. students learn a lot about their chosen theatre concentration... and not much about anything else.
- A cautionary note for students who are considering a B.A. theatre major: If you're considering a school that offers both a B.A. and a B.F.A. or M.F.A., ask some hard questions about the B.A. students' performance and production opportunities and exposure to senior faculty. Because B.F.A students and graduate students require so much of the department's resources, liberal arts students sometimes are regulated to second-class citizens.

Along with ETA's recommendations for theatre students navigating the educational pipeline, Miller (Oct. 2002) cautioned that many programs that offer BA, B.F.A. and M.F.A. coursework operate with the understanding that the older, more experienced M.F.A. students will get the primary role and design opportunities, followed by the B.F.A. students, and the B.A. students may be left with the least desirable opportunities for experiences in the program (n.p.).

If a student interested in theatre decides that the A.A., A.F.A., B.A., and the B.F.A. are not for her, she may opt to study at a two-year conservatory or studio program in theatre. These programs tend to focus exclusively on actor training and teach intensively the acting methods of Stella Adler, Uta Hagen, or Lee Strasberg. Acting conservatories have been around for a long time. The oldest and perhaps best known is the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, known as AMDA, which was founded in 1884 in New York, (Educational Theatre Association). A student at a conservatory like AMDA would earn a certificate or diploma from the conservatory rather than a college degree. Unfortunately, the credits

earned from these programs generally cannot be transferred to a college or university if the student should decide to pursue a B.A. or B.F.A. after completing her certificate or diploma at a conservatory.

In “Charting a Course to College” in *Dramatics*, Bruce Miller (2002, Oct.) cautioned that “the purpose (of a conservatory) is not to create educated people ready to face their adult lives with well-rounded perspectives on the world” (n.p.) He said a student should consider that they are paying for training rather than for an education (Nov. 2002, n.p.). Two-year conservatories tend to be privately owned and costly to attend, plus they are usually located in major metropolitan areas thereby increasing the cost of attending the program (Leptak-Moreau, 2005, pp. 7-8). Because conservatory or studio programs are more intensely focused on a particular approach to acting, they are also excellent sources for students who want to continue their actor training after completing other degree options.

A growing movement in the theatre discipline in some overseas universities is a major in “industrial theatre.” This is a specific avenue of theatrical performance that is applied to human resource management and employee training. Other unique theatrical training programs include specifications in drama therapy, children’s and youth theatre, museum theatre, puppetry, storytelling, or senior citizens theatre. In the United States, this type of specialized theatrical training is available in a few, select universities but is primarily available from the education departments of professional theatre companies and independent theatre consultants (Leptak-Moreau, 2006, n.p.) An example of this would be ComedySportz LA, an independent company of theatre professionals that conducts theatre based workshops for corporations like Toyota, McDonalds, Sprint PCS, and Apple on topics like leadership, cooperation, communication, and change. Alan Greenspan, former chairman of the U.S.

Federal Reserve Board, said “The arts develop skills and habits of mind that are important for work in the new economy of ideas” (as cited in Leptak-Moreau, 2006, n.p.).

The Association of Theatre in Higher Education lists the following life skills that a theatre major will have worked to develop as a theatre graduate: thinking in the moment, confident public speaking, clear and concise writing, organizational skills, complex problem solving, creative thinking, and teamwork. These correspond nicely with the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) report, commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor. The report identified the following skills needed for employment in the twenty-first century: speaking, listening, thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, having a sense of individual responsibility, self-esteem, self-management, teamwork, the ability to teach others, lead, negotiate, and work well with culturally diverse people (as cited in Leptak-Moreau, 2006, n.p.).

Theatre and performance studies “creates not only strong theatre artists, articulate theatre educators, but also effective public leaders and compassionate visionaries in all professions” (ATHE, 1997). If a student graduates as a theatre major, she has options for employment in almost every profession utilizing communication: business, government, law, journalism, the natural and social sciences, economics, languages, literature, industry, and of course, the fine arts.

Summary

The transfer student phenomenon in higher education is as increasingly complex as the transfer students causing the phenomenon. Navigation of the educational pipeline has resulted in some transfer students taking on the title role of Darwin in a complex play called

“Survival of the Fittest” as they survived the challenges of being a transfer student. A review of the literature on transfer students showed that higher education institutions are responding to the complex needs of transfer students through research, programming, formalized agreements, and collaboration.

While most of the transfer initiatives being reviewed in the literature focused on institutional level initiatives, the literature also challenged individual departments or disciplines in the academy to develop transfer initiatives for targeted to their specific student population. A review of literature on the theatre discipline revealed the unique nature of the discipline and the choices a student planning to study in theatre may encounter. The literature on transfer students implied that higher education institutions will continue to face the transfer phenomenon in the future and disciplines in the academy including theatre will have to continue to develop creative, collaborative solutions to the multitude of concerns transfer students encounter as they navigate between institutions of higher education.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

When I was a very small girl, my parents took me to see the Broadway musical Annie. I was hooked on the story of a small girl who could sing about surviving life's hardships until tomorrow presented her with a better day. I remember that everything about the theatre drew me in, from the lights to the scenic design to the little orange headed girl with the powerful pipes. While I have developed a passion for all aspects of live performance and a deep appreciation for the art form over my time as a professional in the field, I still hold on to that little girl fascination with the story being presented on the stage. The heart of theatre for me will always be the narratives of the characters as their life stories evolve, change and culminate before the audience.

Stories do not just present themselves on the stage. Stories are composed and received in a context that is interactional, historical, discursive, or institutional (Riessman, 2008). While practitioners in theatre present narratives and events on the stage in a visual and auditory manner, narrative researchers study the stories or descriptions of events using a variety of research methods, strategies and approaches (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Narratives have been greatly utilized to study and understand a wide variety of phenomena. One area that has received much attention is the use of narrative to understand major life transitions. Transferring between institutions of higher education could be a major life transition for a twenty-year-old college theatre student. *Turns in the Road Narrative Studies of Lives in Transition* (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2005) was the first volume in a series of narrative studies on life changing events. Narrative studies on lives in transitions

focus on stories of illness, recovery, addiction, divorce, adolescent identity struggles, crime, setbacks in professional careers, and the move from school to work.

Along with narrative being played out on stage and utilized in research, educators have been using narrative in classrooms as a method of teaching since the beginning of formalized educational systems. Stories are one of the first forms of learning that children encounter in education (Webster, L. & Mertova, P., 2007). Since the early 1990s, educators and educational researchers have increasingly turned to studying the narratives told in and throughout the educational pipeline. It has become common for educators to utilize narrative to understand their own teaching practices, the learning that is happening in their classrooms, and to understand their institutions. Because narratives are intentional, reflective of human actions, as well as socially and contextually situated, educators along with their students or colleagues can use them to interpret and understand the nuances of the educational arena (Lyons & Labowsky, 2002). The study of narratives from education can lead to an increased understanding of the challenges faced by students and professionals in education, can cause the practice of education to change, and be instrumental in helping develop new strategies to meet the challenges facing today's educators.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative based narrative inquiry to collect the narratives of transfer students in theatre as the students navigated the educational pipeline from the community college to the four-year institution. My goal was to understand the transfer process from the viewpoint of those who lived it: transfer students in theatre as they contemplated and completed the transition from community college to four-year institution. To understand a phenomenon, qualitative researchers often collect stories from those they are studying about the phenomenon they are trying to make sense of.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) stated, "...qualitative research involves the studied use of and collection of a variety of empirical materials...that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individual's lives" (p. 2). Narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative research method that embraces the empirical material of story or narrative as both the method and phenomena of study (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience through collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a social context, using social interaction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) noted, "The focus of narrative inquiry is not only a valorizing of individual's experiences but also an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (p. 42). Because I was interested in the student's stories of their transition between community college and four-year institution, as well as the impact of the culture of the theatre discipline and impact of the educational pipeline on the students' transition process, a narrative inquiry made sense to utilize as the qualitative method in this study.

Theoretical Influences

The impetus behind my inquiry was a desire to understand the transition process a theatre student goes through as they transferred from a community college to a four-year institution. What did this "transition" mean to the student? What was the process of transition like? This brought transition theory into play as the theory that influenced my narrative inquiry. Schlossberg et al. (1995) stated, to understand the meaning of a transition for a student, one needs to understand the type of transition the student experiences, the context of the transition situation, and the impact of the transition on the student's daily life.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's transition model (1995) also showed that transition was longitudinal, or something that was experienced by a student over a particular time period.

Transition is a holistic experience with a beginning, middle and end. According to Schlossberg's transition theory (1984), a student moved from a preoccupation with the transition to an integration of the transition on a very personal, individual continuum.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) referred to this process as a series of reactions where a student might be "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" of a particular life changing experience like transferring between educational institutions.

Research Questions

The exploratory questions that guided this inquiry into the transfer student experiences of theatre majors reflected process theory and qualitative methodology. According to Maxwell (2005), process theory focuses on the meaning, context, and the process of a phenomenon being studied which is best illuminated through the use of open-ended, inductive inquiry. Since transferring between institutions of higher education was a process of transition from one institution to another, the research questions I designed were to: (a) illicit narratives about the *meaning* of events and activities to the students involved in the transfer process; (b) illicit narratives about the influence of the physical and social *context*, or the theatre and its unique culture, on the events of the phenomenon under study; and (c) illicit narratives about the *process* by which the events, the activities, and their outcomes occurred (Maxwell, 2005).

Specific research questions designed to illuminate the process of transition for transfer students in theatre included:

1. How do former community college transfer students in theatre describe the transfer process?
2. How does the culture of the theatre discipline impact transfer students in theatre as they transfer between a community college and four-year institution?
3. How do former community college transfer students in theatre describe the assistance they received in the transition from their community colleges and their four-year institutions?
4. How do former community college transfer students in theatre describe the coping and support mechanisms they employed as they transferred between a community college and four-year institution?

Participants

There were two primary types of transfer students in theatre that I learned from in my narrative inquiry into the experiences of transfer between institutions of higher education: (1) students from a single community college that had transferred on to a variety of four-year institutions; and (2) students from a variety of community colleges who had transferred to a single four-year institution. The narratives that resulted from interviews with students from a single community college illuminated the experiences of students who shared a common background of experiences and then moved on to a variety of four-year institutions with a diverse set of transfer experiences. The narratives that resulted from focus group interviews with students from a myriad of community colleges who had transferred from a single institution illuminated the experiences of students from diverse experiences who moved into a single institution with a common set of transfer experiences. When taken in combination,

the resulting narratives showcased the process of transferring in theatre from a cross-section of community colleges and four-year institutions.

At the time of this narrative inquiry into transfer students in theatre, I had been a community college theatre instructor and theatre director for nine years. I worked with a body of students on a daily basis who were preparing for transfer from my institution to other four-year institutions to pursue degrees in theatre. I assisted them in researching theatre programs at four-year institutions to consider as transfer possibilities, helped them prepare audition and portfolio materials for scholarship or admission interviews, and I wrote letters of recommendation for their admission to a variety of theatre or performing arts programs across the nation.

In 2007 I had seven students who graduated with their Associate of Arts degree from my community college and they were transferring into a variety of four-year institutions to pursue degrees in an aspect of theatre. When I had them as a group of students, they shared two years of community college theatrical productions and coursework while earning their Associate of Arts degrees. While they had shared community college theatre experiences, these transfer students also represented a unique cross-section of theatre students with individual life stories, goals, and transfer plans. At the time of this study:

- Jessica was a 21-year-old community college Associate of Arts graduate planning to attend a Midwestern university to major in theatre with an emphasis in costume design. This was going to be Jessica's first time leaving her hometown and family so she did not want to move "too far" away from home.
- Scott was a 21-year-old community college Associate of Arts and Associate of Science graduate planning to attend a Midwestern university to major in theatre with

an emphasis in scenic design and children's theatre. Scott was also employed in the military with a reserve unit preparing to deploy for Iraq so he was looking for a university with an "officer preparation" program.

- Aaron was a 21-year-old community college Associate of Arts graduate planning to attend a Midwestern university to major in theatre with an emphasis in scenic and lighting design. While Aaron was a talented scenic builder, he was concerned about finding a program that would focus on "the electrical engineering components of lighting."
- Ronnie was a 21-year-old community college Associate of Arts graduate planning to attend a Midwestern university to major in theatre with an emphasis in scenic and lighting design. Ronnie was preparing to "come out of the closet" after transferring to the new institution so he desired a university with a "gay friendly" atmosphere.
- Mike was a 21-year-old community college Associate of Arts graduate planning to attend a Southern university to major in theatre with an emphasis in acting. Mike was interested in two things as he prepared for transfer: finding a small program where he would get "lots of stage time" to perform and "getting out of the Midwest."
- Jeremy was a 21-year-old community college Associate of Arts graduate planning to attend a Midwestern university to major in theatre with an emphasis in acting. Because his family was in a "financial crisis" and not particularly supportive of a son earning a theatre degree, Jeremy was looking for "the most cost efficient way" to obtain his bachelor's degree.
- Kelly was a 21-year-old community college Associate of Arts graduate planning to attend a Midwestern university to major in theatre with an emphasis in performance

studies and acting. To save money, Kelly needed to transfer to the college where her sister was already enrolled so they could “share expenses” and she really wanted to attend a college where NONE of her community college friends would be transferring.

While I had been intimately involved as they each prepared for their transition to a four-year institution, I wanted to follow-up with each member of this group as they moved through their individual transitions.

Along with interviewing my alumni who had transferred to a variety of four-year institutions to study theatre, I conducted focus group interviews with ten community college graduates who had transferred from a variety of community colleges to a single Midwestern university. The theatre department at the Midwestern university in this study employed thirteen full time faculty members who served approximately 100 theatre majors annually. They offered a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre. Students chose the 34-hour General Theatre degree or a 46-hour emphasis area in performance, design and production, or theatre for youth. A 24-hour Theatre Minor was also offered by the theatre department at this Midwestern university. The department also contributed to a joint degree in Communication-Theatre Arts Teaching with the department of communication studies. In 2007, of the 100 theatre majors enrolled at this Midwestern university, almost 20% of the theatre majors had transferred to the university from a community college and this percentage had been steadily increasing for the previous four years prior to this study.

The theatre department provided me with a list of ten students to contact that they knew of who had self-identified as transfer students from community colleges and all had completed an associates' degree from a community college. Six of the ten transfer students

on that list agreed to participate in focus groups about their transfer experience with me. At the time of this study:

- Russ was a 20-year-old community college graduate studying theatre with an emphasis in acting at a Midwestern university.
- Leah was a 21-year-old community college graduate studying theatre with a double emphasis in acting and scenic painting at a Midwestern university. She was also interested in the possibility of minoring in philosophy.
- Traci was a 21-year-old community college graduate studying theatre with a double emphasis in acting and costume design at a Midwestern university.
- Britin was a 23-year-old community college graduate studying theatre with an emphasis in scenic design and lighting at a Midwestern university.
- Ben was a 20-year-old community college graduate studying theatre with an emphasis in scenic design at a Midwestern university.
- Kyle was a 21-year-old community college graduate studying theatre with an emphasis in acting at a Midwestern university. He was also double majoring in math.

Along with the focus group of transfer students in theatre from a variety of community colleges and the interviews with my alumni, it is impossible to ignore my own participation and influence in the creation of the narratives in this study. Merely listening to and recording the student's narratives of their experiences was impossible and would have been unsatisfying because of my background in educational theatre. As an educator, my profession is helping students to move through their educational journey and that involves imparting wisdom and advice as they process about their transition through the educational pipeline. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) advocated that researchers needed to tell their

stories too. By sharing stories with participants in a narrative research project, the stories of the researcher and the participants merge to form newly collaborative narratives (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Methods of Data Collection

There were two methods of qualitative data collection utilized in this study of transfer students in theatre: individual interviews with my alumni who were transferring to a variety of four-year institutions and focus groups with students from several community colleges who had transferred to a common Midwestern university. Individual interviews and focus groups were held in the guided conversation style (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) with the participants and I co-creating each interview and focus group. I encouraged each participant in the individual interviews and focus groups to talk on their transfer experience by asking very open-ended questions with follow-up probes as I picked up on the topics and issues the participants initiated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Following the May 2007 commencement ceremony, I contacted each of my community college graduates who had participated in the theatre program at my community college and who had indicated to me that they were planning to transfer to a four-year institution to major in theatre. I inquired via phone if they would be willing to participate in a research project on transfer students in theatre. During the summer following their graduation from our community college, I proceeded to conduct individual, in-depth interviews with each of my alumni to obtain their story of how they prepared for transferring between institutions. After transcribing the first set of interviews, I followed the initial interviews with a second interview approximately half way through the first semester at their

four-year institution. My goal was to learn how the transfer process had proceeded for each of my alumni from a longitudinal perspective and to gain a reflection of how the transfer experience went from the students' perspectives.

Both an individual interview and a focus group interview are qualitative data collecting methods that enable a researcher to direct a discussion or inquiry in semi-structured format (Denzin & Lincon, 1994). While individual interviews allow a researcher one-on-one time with a participant, Merton et al. (1990) proposed that a group interview often yields "a more diversified array of responses" than some other qualitative methods and it allowed for participants to build upon a common discussion topic in an intense, focused manner.

At the beginning of the 2007-8 academic year, I contacted the theatre department at a Midwestern university to gauge their interest in assisting me in the study of transfer students in theatre. The department had welcomed ten new transfer students from four different community colleges which meant that roughly one third of the theatre department's new students were transfer students. The theatre department provided me with a list of the names and addresses of the ten transfer students who entered the theatre department in August of 2007. Each was invited to join a focus group to share their transfer stories with me and each other. A letter of invitation was sent to each potential participant in early September 2007 (Appendix A).

I held the first of two focus group interviews with six theatre students who had transferred from community colleges to a theatre department at a Midwestern university in September 2007. My purpose in the first interview was to collect the narrative experiences of the students following the first month the students had been at the university following

their transfer from their community colleges. To gain more of a longitudinal perspective on the students' experiences in transfer, a second focus group interview was held in late November 2007 to gain a reflection of how the first semester in the theatre department went from the students' perspectives.

Prior to conducting the study, the research design was submitted and approved by the Iowa State University Human Subjects Review Committee in July 2008 and a continuing review extended in July 2009 through July 2010 (Appendix B). While the possible participants in this study were identified by the theatre department at the Midwestern university and through their participation in the theatre program at my community college, participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent document highlighting details of the study (Appendix B). Focus group and individual interviews were loosely structured around a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit the narratives of each student's transfer experience (Appendix C). Because I was interested in the student's transition between institutions and the process by which such a transition occurred, each question I designed reflected a step in Schlossberg's transition theory (1984) and the 4 S's of Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman transition model (1995), as well as a step in Maxwell's process theory (2005). Participants answered as many or as few questions as they chose during the focus groups or individual interviews. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed upon completion of each interview. Key identifiers including the participant's name, hometown, community college attended, four-year institution enrolled in, professor's names, courses enrolled in, and theatrical productions involved with were removed following the transcription process to maintain the participants' anonymity. All names used in this study are pseudonyms chosen by the participants.

It was very important to me that the students in this study felt that the narratives gleaned from their time spent with me in either the individual interviews or the focus groups were valued by me as a researcher. I also wanted to ensure that they had as much opportunity to explain or clarify their story following the transcription process. Because of a desire to authenticate their narratives, I embarked upon member checking following the transcription of each interview or focus group meeting. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) advocated for utilizing member checks in qualitative research as a way to complete “the circle of authentication” with participants by allowing them to provide input into the entire research process. I sent each participant a copy of the narrative transcription for their review. I invited each participant to read, review the transcripts, and verify their narratives. This also allowed each participant to build upon their story or add comments to the other narratives gleaned from the focus group meetings or individual interviews. While some participants chose to elaborate or clarify the narratives in the transcripts, others chose to leave them as they stood in the original transcripts.

Throughout this entire study on transfer students in theatre, I was conscious of my own observations, reactions, and thoughts as a theatre educator and researcher. I maintained a detailed account of my perceptions and field notes in an electronic journal. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) maintained that field notes were an important supplement to other qualitative data collection methods like interviews and focus groups because the meaning and context of an interview or focus group may be captured more completely than simply relying on a transcript. My field notes contained descriptions of my participants, our interactions, and reflections on my time with the participants. I also included reflections on my own past

experiences with students transferring between institutions, my experiences in the theatre field, and my experiences in higher education.

Taken together, the individual interviews with my community college theatre alumni as they transferred to a variety of four-year institutions, the focus groups with students with students from a variety of community colleges who had transferred to a common Midwestern university, and my electronic journal provided a wealth of rich, thick description of the process of navigating the educational pipeline to study theatre. The narratives in this study simultaneously reflected the critical events surrounding a major life changing transition for theatre students moving from the community college level of higher education to a four-year institution and the reflections of a theatre educator with a desire to ease the transition through the educational pipeline for future theatre students.

CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS

The writing of qualitative research, much like the writing of a script for the stage, is ultimately about (re)presenting a set of meanings gained in the research design to an audience. In the case of this research study, my aim was to (re)present the narratives of transfer students in theatre in a way that was meaningful to the reader and allowed the reader to see the transfer experience through the eyes of the theatre students who had lived it as they moved from the community college to their four-year institutions. Because it was my desire to focus on the stories of transfer students in theatre and to learn about the experience through their voices, my voice as the researcher and my observations on the transfer process are rarely present in this analysis of their narratives. I have included commentary on issues that were overtly surprising to me as a theatre practitioner but generally, I chose to keep my observations to a minimum in order for the reader to truly learn about transferring between institutions in higher education from the voices of the theatre students who participated in this study.

Initially, the narratives collected in this research project were transcribed, coded and analyzed for common themes reflecting the nature of the transfer experience for theatre students coming from community colleges to four-year institutions. Qualitative researchers may chose to utilize traditional qualitative inductive analysis techniques like coding for the common themes present in the narratives gleaned from interviews and focus groups of transfer students in theatre because it allows the researcher to analyze the stories for key elements or themes and then (re)present the narratives chronologically to provide causal links and thereby create meaning for the reader (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). While this was

an enlightening process and allowed me to delve into an initial analysis of the narratives of transfer students in theatre, it did not feel like the best way to illuminate the students' experiences as they moved through the transfer process.

When qualitative researchers move away from utilizing this traditional qualitative approach to analyze their research findings, many turn to theory as a method of showcasing the results of their research project. There are increasing numbers of qualitative researchers who are utilizing theory explicitly during data analysis to generate new interpretations and meanings from the narratives acquired in the research process (Leavy, 2009). Looking at narratives through a theoretical lens allows the researcher to go beyond the (re)storying of narratives from a chronological or theme based making of meaning found in traditional qualitative design. Looking at the research findings through a theoretical lens allows for deeper insight and fresh interpretations of narratives in qualitative research (Leavy, 2009). By applying Schlossberg's transition theory (1984) and by using the Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman transition model (1995) to analyze the narratives gleaned in this narrative inquiry I was able to illuminate the transfer process of theatre students as they moved from community colleges to four-year institutions.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

When I help students understand a play in a particular historical context, we talk about the plot structure of the play, the setting or where the play took place, and the characters in the play. I encourage the students to pay particular attention to each character's back story. The back story includes the details of whom each character is, where they came from, where they are going, and how they contribute to plot structure of the play. Each

transfer student who moved from the community college to four-year institutions to study theatre had a back story that impacted their transition between the institutions. Schlossberg's transition theory (1984) helped me to understand the stories of transfer students in theatre transitioning between institutions. Schlossberg believed a student moved from a preoccupation with the transition to an integration of the transition on a very personal, individual continuum.

A little over a decade later, Schlossberg et al. (1995) referred to the transition process as a series of reactions where a student might be "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" of a particular life changing experience like transferring between educational institutions. What stood out to me in this research project on transfers students in theatre was just how individual each student's transition between institutions of higher education was and how individual the students reactions were to "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" of the transition. I chose three students' stories to demonstrate the individuality of the theatre students' experiences and showed how individualistic the transition from one institution to another was for each student.

Moving In

During the 2006-7 academic year I had three theatre students at my community college who had shared with me their desire to study further in theatre after their graduation from the community college and they each had a desire to pursue careers in the theatre field. I counseled each student separately in an effort to guide their transition process from our community college to their four-year institution. Each student "moved in" to the transition in a unique individual way.

In 2007, Jessica was a 21-year-old community college Associate of Arts student with plans to attend a Midwestern university to major in theatre with an emphasis in costume design. She was the first one out of the group of seven students to decide on her transfer plan and to begin working toward the transition. In fact, she returned in 2006 from the summer following her freshman year with the decision made as to what her major was going to be and she even had a tentative list of in-state schools to research. She spent her sophomore year at the community college building costumes for productions, heading the costume crews, and diligently building her theatre portfolio so she would be ready for scholarship interviews in the spring semester. As she remarked on moving into the transition, Jessica said *“I had to find a school that was close to home and my family is poor so I really needed a scholarship. That motivated me to decide early what I was going to do. I only chose places that had scholarships in theatre available.”*

From my experience working with transfer students in theatre over the years as a theatre director, Jessica was unique in how early in her sophomore year she “moved in” to her transfer student process and other than a letter of recommendation from me for her scholarship interview, she required little assistance from me as she processed her transition from the community college to four-year institution. Her classmate, Scott, followed what I have found to be a more traditional path as he “moved in” to the transition between institutions.

In 2006, Scott was a 21-year-old community college student who had finished an automotive technology degree and was pursuing his Associate of Arts degree from our community college. He had studied theatre, been cast in a couple of theatre productions, and been on build crews for all the productions we had while he was at the community college.

He seemed to really enjoy his work in community college theatre and I could tell he had a passion for the arts. After the fall production of the academic year, I encouraged my sophomore theatre students to think about what they might want to major in and to start to prepare for scholarship auditions which happen in the spring semester at the public and private institutions in our state.

It was after one of my “graduation will be here before you know it” talks in January of 2007, that Scott came into my office and asked me if I thought he had what it took to major in scenic design. He was also very interested in working with children so he wasn’t sure if there was a way to combine the two together without doing an education degree. To complicate Scott’s situation, he was also employed by the United States military with a reserve unit preparing to deploy for Iraq so he was restricted to choosing an in-state four-year institution as a place to continue his education. Scott also felt that if he could find a university with an “officer preparation” program, that would be an even better choice of school. I remember being perplexed at the time saying to him: *“You want me to help you come up with a school to study theatre at where you can do scenic design AND children’s theatre, plus it needs to have a ROTC program AND it has to be in this state? Oh, my. This could be a real challenge!”*

While there were a lot of layers to Scott’s decision making process as he “moved in” to his transition between institutions, the transition timeline he followed as he processed “moving in” to transferring between institutions was very similar to most of my theatre students who narrow where they are going to go following graduation early in the spring semester of their sophomore year. Once Scott had narrowed his future possibilities to two in-state institutions, he quickly moved on to preparing for scholarship and admission auditions.

Not all students follow what I call “the traditional timeline” of transferring in theatre that Scott followed or the “decisive, independent method” that Jessica followed.

Mike was a 23-year-old community college who had already had a series of transitions through higher educational institutions. He had spent a semester in a community college in an Associate of Arts program before transferring to a state university for a year to study music. That year, as Mike described it, was spent “*partying, getting in trouble, and having a great time but not getting anywhere - basically majored in beer, bars and the alternative music scene.*” After Mike “*washed out at the university*” he had enrolled at a second community college to “*get his life back on track.*” In 2007 he had spent two years performing in theatre productions while he finished his Associate of Arts degree. I knew that he was planning to graduate from the community college but following the spring theatre production, Mike still did not have an idea of where he wanted to go or what he wanted to do after his upcoming graduation.

Spring graduation 2007 came and went. I said my goodbyes to my graduates and I remember telling Mike to stay in touch and to let me know where he ended up. One night that summer in July, I had a knock on my front door and there was Mike on my porch with a big grin on his face. “*Gotta new tattoo – wanna see?*” That was very much the way Mike would start a conversation. Laughing, I invited him in and after showing me the new three inch ink indentifying mark, he said “*I’ve got it figured out – I know what I am going to do.*” Okay, I thought. “*What are you going to do?*” With Mike, I knew this could be ANYTHING so I was not surprised when he said “*I’m moving. I’ve got to get out of here. I need the change. I can’t stay here anymore.*” Okay. “*So, where are you going and what are you going to do?*” He was planning to attend a Southern university to major in theatre with an

emphasis in acting and maybe a minor in music. Mike was interested in two things as he prepared and “moved in” to transferring to a new institution: finding a small program where he would get “*lots of stage time*” to perform and the most important criteria, “*getting out of the Midwest.*” On his own, Mike found a small, private university in the South that was thrilled to have him come for a last minute admission audition and they even offered him a small scholarship when he visited the campus at the end of July.

Jessica, Scott, and Mike each “moved in” to the transfer process following on their own time lines and I would add that each really “moved in” to the transfer process according to their own personalities. The path through the “moving in” step of the transition was as individual as each of them was. The back story of who each of them were impacted not only the “moving in” process of transition, but also how they “moved through” transferring between institutions of higher education.

Moving Through

The “moving in” process of the transition between institutions of higher education for transfer students in theatre involved the initial stages of processing their lives after graduating from the community college. While “moving in” was a very individualistic process for each student involved in researching the possibilities of where to attend school following community college graduation, in preparing for auditions or interviews for admission or scholarships, and in making the final decision about where they were transferring to, “moving through” was equally an individualistic process.

For Jessica, the first aspect of “moving through” the transition process was auditioning for scholarships at her prospective four-year institutions. Because the financial

aspects of going on to further her education were a huge priority for Jessica in her decision making process, the prospect of cutting her tuition obligation through a scholarship was a crucial step for her. Jessica prepared diligently for her audition by practicing her monologues alone and in public. *“I had 2 two-minute monologues – one from the Vagina Monologues which was very funny and a second from Hamlet – it was Ophelia’s big speech. The auditions went well but I was the only junior.”* The realization that she was competing primarily with freshman at the scholarship auditions was part of “moving through” the transition process for Jessica. *“Every meeting and scholarship audition I went to there were all these freshmen with their parents and I was there alone –oh, and I also had to keep explaining to everyone at the audition that I wasn’t coming in as a freshman. I was a junior! That was annoying.”* At one four-year institution, the theatre faculty was not quite sure what to do with her. *“They looked at each other and said ‘she’s a junior.’ I just stood there waiting for them to figure out if I was going to audition or not and they sat there whispering that the scholarships were for freshmen. I didn’t end up going there even though they did offer me a small scholarship.”*

For Jessica, the scholarship auditions and choosing a four-year institution were critical aspects of “moving through” her transition from community college to four-year institution. Other critical steps for Jessica as she “moved through” the transition process were moving into a dormitory after living at home for two years at her community college and earning a student job working in the costume construction studio at her four-year institution. *“I needed that job! I was up against two other people – one who had been there for two years and a freshman – but I got it because of my portfolio. I had worked on it and it paid off.”* For Jessica, the “moving through” process was an exciting time full of promising

new experiences that were helping build her future in theatre through both education and work experience.

Scott's "moving through" experience was deeply tied to what the military was going to require of him. With the second Iraq war in full swing and military reserve units being called up on all sides in 2007, Scott was starting as a junior at a four-year institution with a great chance that he might not finish his degree before he was called to active duty. *"I didn't know when or even if I was going to be called up but I knew the chance was pretty good that I'd be going to play in the sandbox and I didn't know what that was going to do to my degree."*

As it turned out, a month after arriving at his four-year institution, Scott was notified his military reserve unit was *"being called to active duty sometime in the next nine months."* While he was "moving through" auditions for the fall theatrical season at his four-year institution, Scott was attending specialized training on living in an environment full of snipers. While he was getting outfitted for the tan and gray khaki uniform for his life in Iraq, he was learning how to sew buttons on jackets in his first costuming course. The "moving through" process of transition to a four-year institution for Scott became a simultaneous "moving through" process of transitioning to a life of active military existence.

Like Jessica and Scott's experiences, Mike's "moving through" process was unique to his life choices. While Jessica and Scott had focused on adjusting to life at large in-state, four-year institutions, Mike not only changed states but an entire region of the country when he moved from the community college to a small four-year private institution located in a town that was smaller than anywhere he had ever lived. *"It felt like I had landed on a different planet and the school was REALLY small. I couldn't believe how small it was –*

smaller than my community college!” While Jessica and Scott were adjusting to meeting large numbers of new people in their new theatre programs, Mike was one of fifteen students studying theatre and he quickly learned that the four-year institution really did not want him to major in theatre. *“Oh, they wanted me – but, they wanted me to sing not act. They needed males in their choir. I figured that out on like day one and what they offered for theatre was not ANYTHING like what I had expected from their website or my campus visit.”* The environment was so small, that after two months in his new environment, Mike was unable to secure employment. *“They just wouldn’t hire outsiders. Everybody knew everybody else and I was nobody.”* For Mike, “moving through” his transition from community college to four-year institution was as much an environmental transition as a disappointment.

Jessica, Scott, and Mike all focused on entirely different experiences as they recounted their middle phase of transferring institutions or “moving through” the transition between community college and four-year institution to study theatre. From earning a highly coveted part-time job in theatre which would help pay for tuition and provide on-the-job experience, to having a part time job possibly take away the potential to earn a theatre degree, to having zero chance for employment or the ability to study a chosen art form, these three theatre students had unique experiences “moving through” their transfer experience.

Moving Out

“Moving in” and “moving through” the transition from community college to four-year institution to study theatre are very much individual processes for transfer students. Each transfer student in theatre processed the transition differently and each lived through a unique set of circumstances that both defined and impacted their transfer experience.

“Moving out” of the transition was the final phase of adjustment in Schlossberg’s transition theory (1984).

Much like Jessica “moved in” to the transition from community college to four-year institution before Scott and Mike did, she also “moved out” of the transition before them. By the middle of her first semester at her four-year institution, Jessica was fully transitioned into life at the university. She returned for alumni night during the fall show at our community college when she excitedly told me that she was finishing the work on her second theatrical production, had earned the spot of costume head for an upcoming production, was building her theatrical portfolio, and was actively preparing for her first final week. While we looked at her new portfolio, she said *“I am so excited. Guess what? I am going to spend the upcoming summer overseas. They have an exchange program here and I am going to study there to study theatre. I’m going to do an internship in costuming for 6 weeks.”* Just six months after graduating from community college, Jessica had moved beyond her community college experience and had “moved out” of her transition between institutions. I remember that it struck me at the time that, Jessica was already starting to move beyond her four-year institution experience as well.

Six months after graduating from community college, Scott was struggling at his four-year institution. He was struggling with how big the institution was, the courses he was enrolled in, and of course, the upcoming duty in Iraq. *“It’s okay here but I feel like I’ve got so much on my platter right now that I don’t know what to focus on. I have so much going on with this Iraq thing that I can’t focus on my classes. I mean I don’t even know if I’ll have a degree to finish – they might get rid of the children’s theatre emphasis – and I don’t even know if I’ll want to major in theatre when I come back.”* Scott had “moved out” of his

transition from community college to four-year institution but had “moved in” to a new life transition.

While Jessica and Scott remained at their four-year institution studying theatre six months following their community college graduation, Mike had “moved out” of his transition in a way that was very true to Mike’s back story and personality. Mike arrived on my doorstep much like he had a month following his graduation from community college. *“I am back,”* he said with his big grin. Mike shared that he had dropped out of all his theatre courses and had decided that the small private college was not the environment he wanted to study in. He had spent three weeks at his four-year institution before he decided to return to his home state. *“I just couldn’t get into that place. It was so weird there and I figured out that they didn’t want me for my acting talent – they just wanted me to sing. The only good thing about the experience was that I got involved with an awesome church group and I am thinking maybe I want to combine theatre and the ministry somehow.”* Mike had moved back home from his four-year institution of choice and while he had “moved out” of his transition from community college to a four-year institution, it was evident that like Scott, Mike was already “moving in” to other life transitions.

Schlossberg’s transition theory (1984) provided one theoretical lens to illuminate the experiences of transfer students in theatre as they transitioned from community college to four-year institution. Transfer students in theatre “moved in,” “moved through,” and “moved out” of the transition in individual ways and they each processed the transition in ways that were as unique as their individual career goals, life experiences, or personalities.

Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman's Transition Model

Schlossberg et al. (1995) stated that to understand the meaning of a transition for a student, one needs to understand the type of transition the student experiences, the context of the transition situation, and the impact of the transition on the student's daily life.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's transition model (1995) also showed that transition was longitudinal, or something that was experienced by a student over a particular time period.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) expanded Schlossberg's transition theory (1984) from "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" into the Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's transition model. The transition model highlighted what they referred to as the "4 S's" of a life transition like transferring between institutions: situations, self, support mechanisms, and strategies for coping. (Re)coding the narratives from this study on transfer students in theatre using the "4 S's" of the transition model, the "4 S's" helped me illuminate 1) the *situations* relating to transfer that the students' encountered, 2) the individual nature of the *self* story each student shared, 3) the *support mechanisms* the students' used in their transition from community college to four-year institution, and 4) the *strategies* the students used *for coping* with the transfer between institutions.

Theatre students who have transferred from community colleges to four-year institutions moved through and adjusted to a set of common situations involving transitioning from one environment to another. While the students were each individuals with their own unique perspective on the transitions, they used similar support and coping mechanisms to navigate their way through the educational pipeline between their community college and their new university.

Situations

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's transition model (1995) highlighted the importance of understanding the *situations* relating to transfer that a student encountered as they moved from their community college to their four-year institution. The situations that transfer students in theatre encountered as they entered the four-year institution included a new environment, orientation, registering for theatre courses, opportunities for involvement in the competitive environment of the theatre discipline, the audition process for theatrical productions in their four-year institution, a new theatre faculty to work with, and special events unique to their four-year institution to adapt to.

Most of the students involved in this inquiry were from communities much smaller than the population of the area where the four-year institution they transferred into was housed and each student had attended a community college in either their home community or within a thirty minute drive of their home community. Most theatre students in this study indicated that the perceived “*vastness of the university*” and its surrounding community were “*a bit intimidating at first*” as they anticipated their transition from community college to university life. Aaron remarked on his transition to the new situation:

I come from a smaller town. My hometown is much smaller than where I pretty much grew up and I'm not a big city person so I like transitioning from a small town to a little bit bigger so going to a community college and then stepping up to the only medium sized university in my state – I do believe it is a stepping stone to where I'd like to go.

While the larger community of the university was a “stepping stone” into living in a larger population for one transfer student, it was the difference between the community college environment and the university environment, and their corresponding populations that stood out as significant to Jeremy.

You see, back at community college, and as much as I loved community college and I loved the people there, when I went to have a conversation it was usually in the smoke shack at my dorm and it usually involved either 'bitches' or 'beer.' And, just the other week, I had a ridiculously elaborate long conversation with a table full of people in regard to the theory of relativity, time travel possibilities, black holes... it wasn't an incredibly serious conversation because every once in a while we had to break out into jokes but the fact that I can discuss God, philosophy and black holes at the dinner table here, I love that here. I love that. Talking about diesel fuel at the community college wasn't really my thing. And, I haven't seen a single person here with chewing tobacco!

Part of the key to understanding transfer students and the situations that led them to the institution they transferred to was discovering why they chose to come to the four-year institution they enrolled in. Each situation that brought them to the four-year institution was as unique as each individual sitting in that focus group. For Ronnie, his decision to attend his four-year institution was because of how close the university was located to his home community and for another, Kelly's institution was the choice because the university was located just far enough away from her home community to make visiting home often an impossibility and this provided her with a chance to really "spread her wings" for the first time. For every situation presented by transfer students about why they chose their four-year institution, an opposite situation was also posed as the student's rationale for choosing this institution over another institution with comparable features.

There were only two consistencies that attracted transfer students in theatre to one institution over other institutions that they had considered as transfer possibilities: (a) In-state tuition: The threat of increased tuition dollars and tight monetary constraints were consistent factors among all participants in this study when they considered their transfer choices. Several of the students in this study were natives of the state they had attended community college in so they qualified for in-state tuition rates which would save them

considerable tuition dollars over choosing an out of state institution or a private college; and (b) some of the four-year institutions the students chose did not offer a graduate program.

Russ explained his decision making situation this way:

My university doesn't have a grad program so it makes it easier to get stage time, design time, whatever... you're not competing with that upper level that you would at another school or something like that. I didn't look at other programs for that reason. I knew that they didn't have a grad program here so I stuck with it for that. And, since it was in-state I didn't want to go further than that.

According to Schlossberg's transition theory (1984), a student moves from a pre-occupation with the transition to an integration of the transition on a very personal, individual continuum. While some students researched several institutions for transfer possibility and visited several campuses, others thought one institution over another was a "no-brainer," or the obvious choice from the start of their transition process. Schlossberg et al. (1995) referred to this process as a series of reactions where a student might be "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" of a particular life changing experience like transferring between educational institutions.

After spending two or even three years attending a community college like the students in this study had done, it might be assumed that a student would have a clear idea of the academic path and major they would be embarking on as they transferred to a four-year institution. While some participants in this study were clear on what they were going to major in, others were conflicted by the myriad of choices available to them in the university or college system and they hesitated at "boxing" themselves into only one major career path.

One situation that each student in this study encountered on their journey to their four-year institution was the orientation process. All of their four-year institutions had

developed transfer systems to help recruit and integrate students coming from community colleges into their new lives at the university or private college. A primary component of orientation involved an orientation visit to campus. From the student's description of the orientation situation, the four-year institutions must have assumed that incoming transfer students would have an idea what they were planning on majoring in when they arrived at orientation. While students who had transferred to private four-year institutions often had individualized transfer meetings with faculty or advisors where they could discuss their individual educational plans, most of the students in this study experienced what Scott referred to as "a cattle-call" style of orientation visit. The students in this study who experienced the "cattle call" style of orientation reported that the orientation leaders divided the group of transfer students at orientation into smaller groups based on the students' declared major choices. Leah described her orientation experience like this:

I really liked math in high school. I did it a lot in high school. I was going to do business but then I went to that business orientation meeting and I was like... I go to this meeting and it's like you've gotta be a friggin' genius...and it doesn't look like much fun. You're in this huge group of people and there are all these tables... finance over there and managing.... And they're handing out this huge packet of classes you've got to take Calculus 7 ...and I'm like 'I think I signed up for the wrong major!' She's like 'what do you want your major to be?' 'Let's go theatre.' They take me to this huge room with all these tables for your major at it and there's this little sign at one that says theatre and there's nobody there! There was just this little sign and I said 'I guess this is me!'

While Leah felt incredibly isolated during her orientation process at her four-year institution, Jeremy used the "safety in numbers" approach to the orientation situation and arrived with a group of their fellow community college students for orientation.

The day I visited here the first time I was deer in the headlights all the way. I came up here with a bunch of my friends from community college and we all stayed at the same house the night before 'cause we had to leave like at six in

the morning so no use going to everybody's house before we car pool which was a mistake 'cause nobody slept. I got the most sleep out of all of us and I got about two and half hours. So we drive up here and I hit campus totally lost and sleep deprived and they directed us to our majors. I remember that I wanted to do something with theatre or teaching or both like maybe teach theatre or straight theatre but I knew it was going to be theatre and possibly teaching. And a lot of my friends wanted teaching so they ask what major and they all go teaching, teaching, teaching... I said theatre, possibly teaching, and before I could finish my sentence this woman grabs me by the shoulders and throws me over here away from my group, sends me into this room... it was the 'undecided room.' I'm like, 'what's going on?' And there's two people in this room... two people who look completely anti-social who never said a word, just stared down at their hands while somebody lectured about being undecided for like an hour and a half while I just sat there with my eyes falling out of my head and my brain melting out my ears and that was my first experience at this school. That entire trip was just well, trippy.

While there may have been a perceived “safety in numbers” approach to the orientation situation for Jeremy upon his arrival to the university campus, the realization of what an individual process orientation and transferring between institutions was became quickly apparent to Jeremy as he was moved away from his safety net of friends. While discussing orientation choices and individual choices of majors during the orientation process, Kyle felt both isolated and intimidated by his initial decision to do a combined major in math and theatre because of his experience with the orientation situation:

They put the math majors with like the computer programmers. It was like an Arab guy and an Indian guy and a couple of other people and they are talking in all these computer terms and who-hooo! You know I may be on academic scholarship, but I'm going to walk away from this one! So I was just like... well, I'll just do something fun. I could just see myself beating my head against a wall going what are they talkin' about? I was used to being the smart one in class but next to those guys... I'll just be in theatre and help everyone else with their homework! I'm sittin' there and this business book is this thick (gestures with fingers to about 5 inches thick) and it's all classes you have to take yet. I was like 'I just wanna play....'

Once students were integrated into the orientation situation in the “cattle call” style and were divided into their chosen majors, the students usually met individually with an

academic advisor to determine what credits the university would accept as transfer credits and what courses they would need to register for to complete their desired major. This was very similar to the experiences the students who had transferred to private four-year institutions had experienced. Traci described the process of transferring her credits from the community college to her university like this:

They're in cohorts. If you get your associate of arts from community college and you come to the university, they have to accept every credit up to 65 so I knew that was good coming in. Whereas if someone were to come in from another community college they aren't legally required to accept every credit up to 65 if they choose. They can be like 'Hey, we don't like that community college's math class. We don't think you learned enough. We think you need to take another one while you're here.'

None of the students in this study reported any difficulty transferring their community college credits to four-year institutions in the same state as their community college. Most had entered their four-year institution with either all of their general education coursework completed, an associate's degree, or they found they only were required to register for one or two additional general education courses. Students who had transferred out of state from where their community college had been located experienced more difficulty and were often required to provide additional documentation such as course descriptions or letters from their community college faculty describing the coursework they had completed in order for their community college credits to be accepted into their transfer institution. While the transfer of credits seemed relatively easy for most in this study, the process of registering for their first set of theatre classes was an entirely different situation for some students.

Inside of each major there are a list of required courses and elective options for a student to take. If a student completed all the credit requirements of the courses they were required to take in their academic career at the four-year institution level, the student could

feasibly spread their required courses, elective options and their general education courses over a four or five year time frame. Since the community college students had focused on their general education or liberal arts core requirements for two years and had waited to take their major and elective option courses when they got to the four-year institution for their last two years, there seemed to be much less flexibility in their scheduling options. Britin explained his frustration with scheduling for theatre courses at his transfer institution this way:

That's one of my biggest problems with the new school right now... I am done with my liberal arts. I don't have any more electives to be taking. I am strictly on my majors. I had to have a second major just so I could keep myself full time because I could only get into two classes because the theatre classes are all scheduled at the same time so I can only be taking one (theatre course) at a time. I can't be four places at once to get in everything I need for my majors. Which I found very irritating! Very irritating – and, I'm already afraid it's going to happen next semester and it's already looking like I'm going to have to be here a solid three years if not more because of this scheduling issue.

The first time transfer students in theatre scheduled their courses at their new institution was a trial and error experience for some students because they needed to learn the semesters and times the required theatre courses were offered. Since many theatre courses were aligned with theatrical production schedules or required students to participate in theatrical production duties often called lab hours, transfer students in theatre also had to learn the time requirements of the required courses as those time requirements impacted their course scheduling. Kyle said:

My biggest thing was not knowing what the intro course was. I saw we had lab hours from 5:30-8:30 Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday so a three credit hour class was really nine hours a week instead of three hours a week and I was like holy cow! I'm used to taking 17-18 credits a time so I'm like I can handle this – I'm not a dumb person. No offense to anybody that's taking twelve credits but I was like okay, I'm only signed up for thirteen credits but

really I'm taking 25 hours! I wish I would have been a little more educated on the fact that 'okay, you're not going to meet for this lab until the middle of October.' So I thought this was going to be 5:30-8:30 Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. I didn't realize that my intro class was going to be an easy class... well, it's not really an easy class but it's not something that you take home and read five chapters and take notes... its more like find yourself. It's more in-class stuff and that's why it's a nine hour a week class rather than a three hour a week class. It doesn't have the "for every two hours in, one hour out" rule.

Traci added her frustration with scheduling for a lab course:

The three-hour lab really puts a problem in it because you're really only in lab for what three to four weeks and it's not every night, it's kind of sporadic. So, something else could have been scheduled in there if need be and it would have worked out just fine.

Transfer students usually met with their academic advisor at orientation to plan their academic schedule and to register for their initial semester's courses. When the incoming theatre majors who were transfer students met with their academic advisor for the first time to discuss scheduling issues and registration for classes, the debate on when to put lab courses tied to theatre productions in their academic schedule entered into the discussion. Because the situation for some lab courses required the student to participate in running crews for theatrical productions many times a transfer student could not be on both a running crew and in the cast of a production. At some four-year institutions, it was a departmental policy that if a student was taking a lab course with running crew requirements, they could not audition or be cast in a theatrical production that semester. For a transfer student in theatre that would only be at the four-year institution for two or three years, this eliminated out an entire semester of performances a student could participate in at the four-year institution.

For a theatre student with an emphasis in performance and desiring a career as a professional actor, eliminating out an entire semester of potential performance so they could be enrolled in lab course or a course with running crew requirements was a terrible disappointment to the theatre performance majors in this study. Russ described his conversation with his advisor about a lab course this way:

I got to orientation and my advisor said if you take lab, you can't be in a show and I'm like, 'I wanna be in a show! I want to act – have not done all summer so I need to play.' And, he said it'd be easier to get a part this term rather than next term because of the shows in the spring. So I'm like 'I'm going to take lab next term and bank and hope to God that I'm going to get a part' – luckily I landed a part so I'm going to take lab next semester.

Not only is when to put a lab course or a course with running crew requirements in a student's academic plan an issue of contention, some felt that their academic advisors for theatre were terribly misinformed about the requirement for lab as a core requirement for a theatre major and other departmental courses. Often times, a lab course or a course with running crew requirements served as a prerequisite for a number of required theatre courses and at some four-year institutions it was generally regarded by students as the “intro” course to the theatre department. It was a course where new students to the theatre major learned how the department functioned while it is “in show.” Jessica shared her frustration with the required running crew component of the course:

It's almost like the course is an excuse to get the crew members that they need. They need this many crew people. How are we doing to get this many crew people unless we say introductory course with a one credit hour lab that you have to be in?

Scott was enrolled in a course with running crew requirements had looked to his fellow community college transfer students for an explanation of the purpose of the course. He related his conversation this way:

I've talked with other people – transfers from last year – She said she felt the exact same way when she was going through it but now she can see the point in it but it's still frustrating. I think it's geared for freshman because freshman are taking their liberal arts core and it's kind of assumed that until you're a junior you're not focusing on your majors, you're focusing on your liberal arts. So, this is their way to get you introduced to the department but you don't really have any other connections to the department. In other classes now and again they'll make references to lab and I don't know what those references are because I haven't made it to that part in the course or whatever. As a junior now going through these other classes... one class is mostly sophomores and juniors and the other class is just a mix of everybody. I feel that I fit much better in with the sophomores and juniors than I do in lab with the freshmen because I just don't see the point in lab.

While courses with running crew requirements provoked anxiety for some transfer students in theatre, some felt that there was an importance to the lab-style courses they'd been required to register for. Kyle expressed what he viewed as the importance of his lab course:

There's a lot of things they learn in lab about how this theatre works that I didn't know. People would say blah, biddy, blah, blah, blah and I'd say, what? And, they'd look at me like I was dumb. They'd say, okay. There were little costuming things that would come up ... I did something like I didn't hang my costume up right. I got a little reprimand for it and I was really confused and a girl in the cast was like he hasn't take lab yet, he wasn't in lab, don't worry about it you weren't in lab – that's where you learn it. But it's a really huge foundation for things here. I'm afraid that next semester is going to be dry for lab because everybody is supposed to take it when they get here so I'm afraid that not enough people put it off like I did.

From the time the students in this inquiry registered for their first four-year institution courses as theatre majors, they felt the pressure of the looming deadline of graduation. They had each been to a community college for two to three years for their general education core and it was apparent to them that their situation in the four-year system was unique in that they would only be attending their four-year institution for two or three years. It was essential for these students to make the most of their limited time at their four-year institution

to gain as much theatrical experience as they could in a short amount of time. For Kelly, a theatre performance major, the desire for stage time or performance experiences was not meshing with the situation she found at her four-year institution:

When I was at community college looking forward to university, I was thinking there's going to be so many opportunities for shows to perform... all this stage time to be in shows... They didn't come right out and say that you'd get a lot of stage time but you got the impression that there was a lot of stage time available. Not necessarily that you were going to get cast in everything but I felt logically that there should be more stage time at this level if I'm a performance major and now that I'm focused in on my major wouldn't one logically assume that I would be doing more performance? But now I look at my community college and it might have had one small stage but there were also far fewer actors and I think there may be a good chance that I'll come out of here having had more stage time at community college than I've had here.

Aaron, a technical theatre major agreed with the performance major about the lack of potential theatrical experiences at his four-year institution by adding:

I'm thinking I'll be doing all this lighting but that's not the way it is... In the publicity they really did play this up and I mean this is a big thing... this is a full time commitment and I mean it is definitely a full time commitment but there's not that much going on. There's only four plays a year and you can only be cast in two and the same thing is true about designing. You can only work as a technician or design for two. Even if you're here for four years, that's only eight shows. But you really can't be involved in all eight shows either. What you think when you come in is not the way it is.

The transfer students in this study believed upon entering their four-year institution that there would be a wealth of opportunities to practice their craft and hone their art form to prepare them for the challenges of life in the professional theatrical world following graduation from the university. As they discussed the world outside “college” and the unique situations of life in professional theatre they expected to encounter, they compared this to what they had found upon entering their four-year institution. Britin described his feelings in this way:

The professors talk about that in the “real world” you audition like six times a week if you’re lucky and can find the auditions. Or you find an agent and the agent says here are these auditions... you audition 100 times and you may get two call backs and you may get into Joe Blow commercial. There’s this emphasis on good auditions and auditions are important but there’s going to be what --- eight main stage auditions if I audition for both main stage shows each semester I’m here? There’s not that much audition time.

Traci also shared about the lack of audition experiences at her four-year institution but added the following about the lack of general theatrical opportunities being presented to her at the four-year institution:

I wish there was something around here where you can audition for movies or commercials. I want to audition for commercials. There’s nothing like that around here. I’d be ecstatic to be the random guy who pulls up in a car commercial for Joe Blow’s Car Shack – that airs to eight people (she laughs). I mean if there were auditions I’d be at them everyday just to do something you know?

While the students in this study exhibited concern about the perceived lack of theatrical opportunities available to them when they entered their four-year institution, for most of them, their tune had changed as they progressed through their first semester and encountered new situations in the theatre department. This was especially true when they described their participation in a variety of opportunities that they had been involved with since their arrival for the fall semester as new transfer students. Russ said “*It’s much bigger up here. It’s hard to get to know everybody and know what they’re good at and everything. Whereas, the community college was smaller and we knew everybody and what everybody was good at, what they were willing to do, and what they knew how to do.*”

With the passage of time from leaving the community college environment and moving through their transition to the environment at their four-year institution, the transfer students discovered that the lack of perceived opportunities for participation in theatrical

productions actually promoted a highly competitive environment reflective of the “real world” of professional theatre. Aaron commented on the competitive environment of the theatrical world he was living in at his four-year institution like this:

When it comes to lighting – yes, it is very, very competitive. There are three or four guys who when it comes to lighting, they are it. I’m not sure that lighting is what I want to do for my emphasis. There is competition... There is REAL competition in tech – I don’t know if it is as fierce as in the acting world. I’m not in it, but in the performance/tech end, the competition is pretty fierce because there are only a limited number of spots. In the scene shop today we had 15-20 people in there – it was a zoo but that’s why it’s so competitive – there’s limited parts.

Several students I interviewed had earned technical positions in fall productions and several had been cast into a production following fall auditions. While they were excited about the chance to perform, the competitive nature of their situation was still at the forefront of their minds. Jeremy said: *I’m looking at this show, like I don’t have a huge role, but this is my shot. We have small parts but we’ve got a chance. This is my chance to prove to them that I’ve got it. The competition is still there now that I’ve got the part – I’ve still got to produce.*

One of the most competitive aspects of the theatrical process is the auditioning process for theatrical productions. For the transfer students in this study, the first round of auditions at their four-year institution was an intimidating and confusing experience that was met with some students having success in achieving roles and disappointment for others when they were not cast in a role after the auditions. Because the auditions happened so early in the fall semester, some four-year institutions notified all declared theatre majors of the audition process through a letter or email and others learned of the audition process during orientation. Leah described receiving her audition information letter this way:

I was surprised – I had no idea that auditions were going to come up so quick because back at community college I’d be in class for a while and hear about

it coming up. Okay, it's time to get ready for auditions. Well, I was sitting at my house about a week before auditions and my mom comes down with some old mail, hands me a letter, I open the letter and I'm like, oh, my God! I have to have all this prepared and ready in a week and I was in summer slump mode. I got my piece memorized but there's a big difference between having it where you can say it and having it where it's part of you.

Unfortunately for some transfer students in theatre, if they weren't declared theatre majors before communications were sent by their four-year institution notifying them of auditions, if the student did not attend a formal orientation to their four-year institution, or the student attended orientation but did not meet with a theatre advisor, the audition experience came as an early fall semester shock.

Many theatre programs at four-year institutions hold auditions the first week of school so if a student transferred into the four-year institution near the start of the fall term, they might not have been aware of the audition dates until they attended their first theatre classes. Traci described her experience with learning about auditions in her class:

I was in the class and they were like 'Are you going to the audition tonight?' And, I was like, 'I guess!' I said 'should I?' And they said 'yeah' so I showed up like this. I'd never done an audition before and pretty much everyone was dressed up and I was dressed like this... in sweats and a t-shirt. Work out stuff, you know. I was like wow... They just gave you a script and said read. I didn't know how it worked – if they called you if you got a part or what. Then I was sitting in my house and I got a call on my cell phone and it was another student and he said, 'what are you doing?' And I said 'nothing.' And he said 'well you're supposed to be here – its call backs and you're up in like 10 minutes.' So then I came to call backs again and I'm dressed like this(indicates her work-out wear) – everybody is all dressed up.

While Traci felt that she had not understood the audition process or what was expected of her for an audition at her four-year institution, several of the transfer students felt that audition workshops or information meetings held by their four-year institution had helped them to be better prepared for their first audition following transfer from their community college.

Many theatre departments host an audition workshops or informational meetings to prepare theatre students for auditioning for theatrical productions at their institution. Russ attended an audition workshop and described it like this:

I went to it. I had forgot that I had been there because it was so much like one of my courses and it was in the same room! It was a lot of good advice... but by then it was the night before auditions so the guy says 'by now you've either prepared for this audition or you haven't.' All the advice he could give was little stuff like asking the auditors is you could use them as a focal point – little things like that. You feel a little better knowing what to expect but I still felt like I was winging it because I didn't even know where it was! I was used to being in the same building for two years at community college! I was surprised – I had no idea that auditions were going to come up so quick because back at community college, I'd be in class for a while and hear about it coming up.

It did not matter whether the transfer students in this study had learned about the audition process through a letter from their four-year institution, through the course of attending a theatre class, or by attending the audition workshop/information meeting sponsored by their four-year institution, every one of the transfer students who had participated in the audition process described the fear of auditioning for a performance role before their four-year institution faculty. Leah said:

I got there and I blanked on the last paragraph of the monologue that I'd memorized. It just fell out of my head completely. I biffed that. I was scared shitless. I heard after that all of the professors were pissed off because of how unprepared people were. I found out after I got there that they were allowing people who hadn't prepared anything to cold read. I didn't even know that was an option. I don't know if it was supposed to be an option but it became one once they learned how unprepared people were. So I wasn't sure what was going on – I felt like the whole audition process was just thrown together. I didn't know if I should do the piece I'd prepared or if I should cold read. People expect you have this thing done, put together and I'd thrown this thing together. In the end I came out with a part but it was a nerve wracking experience.

Despite their fears and confusion at the audition situation at their four-year institution, some of the transfer students in this study who had participated in their first audition met with success in the audition process.

Success to the theatre performance majors in this study involved surviving auditions, call-backs, and ultimately, earning a role in a production. By earning a role in a theatrical production, the student achieved the status of “cast member” and was directed in the production by four-year institution theatre faculty. For the transfer student in theatre who had participated in theatre at the community college, part of adjusting to their role in the cast involved interactions with their director(s). Jeremy described the difference between acting for the community college director and the university director(s):

I think that the biggest challenge... um back at community college, I had pretty much two opinions that mattered – mine and the director. Here, we have a director, a dramaturg, a guy who specialized in movement and I felt very pulled in different directions as to where my performance should go. I'd have the director saying speed it up and I'd have the dramaturg saying slow it down, take it moment by moment. I was leaning toward slowing it down but the director was the guy in charge of the show so I figured that while I may want it slow for that individual moment it may not contribute to the overall pacing of the show as needed and that is the way I justified it.

While some of the transfer students in theatre in this study had participated in community college theatre under the direction of one or two theatre directors, others had attended community colleges with no theatre offerings.

For transfer students who had received no theatrical experience in the community college, learning from the faculty at their four-year institution was rewarding as the students adjusted to theatrical life in their new institution. Russ said:

I've learned the most from my theatre courses and not just how to act. It has been great because we've had so many performance pieces, but also about how the business works. The whole experience has taught me a lot but has

also made my current knowledge base seem infinitely tiny. It's like the more I learn, it's like this horrible exponential radiant at which I'm getting dumber. There is so much progress that I have to make.

The situations that transfer students in theatre encountered as they entered their four-year institution included a new environment, orientation, registering for theatre courses, opportunities for involvement in the competitive environment of theatre at a four-year institution, the audition process for theatrical productions at a four-year institution, and new theatre faculty to work with at a four-year institution. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's transition model (1995) highlighted the importance of understanding the *situations* relating to transfer that a student encountered as they moved from their community college to their four-year institution. Understanding the situations a transfer student encountered, may assist four-year institutions in implementing new strategies to assist future transfer students adjust to the new situations they face upon entering the four-year institution environment from the community college. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's transition model (1995) highlighted the importance of understanding the *situations* relating to transfer that a student encountered as they moved from their community college to their four-year institution.

Self

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's transition model (1995) highlighted the importance of understanding the individual nature of the *self* story each student shared. Each individual's story relating to transfer as they moved from community college to their four-year institution provided an understanding of the day-to-day concerns transfer students in theatre faced. When the transfer students in theatre in this study discussed their transfer experiences, it was quickly apparent how individual their experiences and concerns were

about their present situation at the four-year institution and their future career in theatre.

They were each candid in their descriptions of their personal comforts, stresses, excitements, fears, thoughts on their treatment as transfer students into the theatre program at the four-year institution, and their future goals. They had each come to the four-year institution for their first semester out of community college with their own life experiences that influenced their experience in transferring to a four-year institution.

Some transfer students in theatre knew exactly which four-year institution they were planning on transferring to after their freshman year or sophomore year of community college. For some, the decision was a “no brainer” decision. It was obvious they were going to their four-year institution choice from almost their entry into the community college. For Ben, his four-year institution was the comfortable choice because of its close location in relationship to his family:

I knew I wanted to be a theatre major from my experience at community college. As for staying close to home, I knew that I wanted to stay close to home but not too close to home but I did want to go home to visit my family if per chance I wished it. And, my university was the exact right distance. I also looked at another university in a nearby state and I ended up liking this one better and I just kind of landed here.

Yet, for Aaron, it was the close vicinity of family plus his friends at the four-year institution who served as a comfort as he made his decision to attend his four-year institution. He said:

I had heard a lot about the program. I had friends in the program. Friends going into the program. Friends who had gone through the program. After going to my community college, after being so close to home... I lived at home my second semester my freshman year. I lived here at the university my first semester freshman year which got me a little introduced to it. I was ready for my next step away... getting away from my parents and that was what was pushing me away from here but then my parents moved away so I got to stay close to my friends and family from home but I got my parents away so that was good. That was a big attraction but a lot of it was that I knew the program, I knew the people in it. I didn't have to meet 100 people on the first

day. I had to meet like 60. I knew that with the people I knew that I could get the jump start 'cause I knew that as a transfer student I'd be kind of held back.

For other transfer students, it was difficult for them to make a clear decision about where they should transfer to after finishing community college. Several of them described the decision making process to attend their four-year institution as one that was uncomfortable to make. Kyle described his transition in this fashion:

I'm a kind of a go where the wind blows you kind of guy. I was actually playing a sport out of state for another university two weeks before classes began here. I'd gotten a scholarship there from my j-co (junior college), I just wasn't happy. I didn't like it. I'm just that kind of guy... If I don't like it, I'm not going to do it, you know what I mean? I don't mind going to other places. I'm not intimidated by doing new things. So I was like applying to several places and I know quite a few friends who go up here so it was about five days before classes so I was like sure, I'll send my stuff in. Got accepted the day before the last orientation. Came up and so here I am.

For each transfer student in theatre, the decision path of which four-year institution to transfer into was as much a personal experience as each student's rationale for pursuing a theatre degree. Each student in the study had their own rationale for choosing to spend their life in the theatrical world. For some, it was "the creative aspect" of the theatrical world and the desire to "always be creative" which was leading them to a career in theatre. Others wanted to turn their hobby into their career, or their passion into their lifestyle. None of the students, however, believed that "making it" or achieving success in their future life was a sure thing in theatre. Not one of the transfer students in this study was disillusioned about the risk of entering a career field full of competition. For one Russ, the perceived risk of a career in theatre paled in comparison to his childhood story:

I've already been through so much shit you know... I was raised by a single parent... Dad's been in prison for five years of my life so it's always been hard for me. I have a job, I pay rent, I eat. I do my school work and the

theatre on the side. It's either - theater and work. It's not strenuous to me compared to other things I've dealt with.

For each transfer student in theatre, their personal background played a huge role in their personal adjustment to their theatre program at the four-year institution as well as the four-year year institution in general, and their goal of working in professional theatre.

Theatre students in this study were like any other college student I have encountered in that they struggled to balance their family background with their university life. For many college students, the financial hardships of their family impact heavily on the student's college experience. For Jeremy, the monetary aspects of his family situation were the most daunting obstacle to his obtaining a degree in theatre. He described his financial situation and its impact on his college career like this:

My parents are a bit freaked out by my decision to be a theatre major. I mean God knows, if money wasn't an object, they'd be totally supportive of it. You go be our little superstar... but, unfortunately, money is an object. I got up here and we paid for the main core... classes, dorm... that kind of stuff and then all the additives – that's what my parents were going to help out with. They'd gone to financial counselors who basically said "you're screwed." So, they go, 'we're going to pay this much, right? So, you take this zero interest credit card'... cause one of the things this financial counselor told them was that if you can pay off it in time, a lot of credit cards, its zero interest for the first seven months and then it goes up to 89 billion percent interest. But if you put it on and use it for the first seven months and then cut the card... so to use it effectively, basically the plan was to use this card to send the bill for books and stuff to my mom. Well, I get up here and use it for my books and the God damn hospital... hospitals are trying to take away unions for nurses by declaring every nurse as a supervisor and hospitals don't allow supervisors to have unions. So my mom's hospital brings in this huge union busting lawyer and they take away their union. So my mom, right when I'm starting school here and all these bills are coming her way, has to go on strike. So, I've got the financial end to worry about big time.

Each student in this study had an individual financial story to share about their family's financial impact upon them attending the university. While Jeremy was hit with a

big, long term financial impact when his mom was forced to strike to save her job and the strike reduced the family's ability to financially support their college student, Scott had the opposite effect when he found his parents to be incredibly helpful when it came to short term financial support.

In all honesty, this is my first semester being away from my parents... I did move out for three weeks once about two years ago but that wasn't anything because my parents were in the same town and they bought me food all the time. But here, my parents don't pay for anything. They've come up and gave me money when I've needed it 'cause sometimes my job is a little lazy about their pay. And I pay them back when I get paid...

Kelly was also concerned with finance but her take was more from a cost/benefit ratio perspective. She was concerned about investing financially in a degree that might lead her to a future career that was unpredictable at best. She put it in these terms:

I'd rather die knowing I tried. But since I got up here, I've got these financial responsibilities so while I'm learning things that might be useful for going out to Los Angeles an auditioning... I am picking up skills that will be useful... but I'm also picking up a financial debt that is going to hinder me if I go out there to the point that I don't know if the skills are going to outweigh that debt. I'm starting to think my friend had the right idea...go to LA first.

For Kelly, there were no guarantees that the investment in a degree in theatre was going to pay off in the long run. It was to the point by November of her first semester that she was questioning why she'd come to the university in the first place. When she was challenged with concept that, “*Money isn't everything!*” by her classmates in theatre as she verbalized her concern over the costs versus the benefits of a theatre education, she reiterated her position with, “*Yeah, I know that... I wouldn't be taking acting classes if it was everything.*”

The high cost of obtaining a degree in theatre versus the possibility of success in theatre was a relevant concern for many of the transfer students in theatre in this study.

While many had received scholarships from their community college for the first two years

of college or from their four-year institution to attend their four-year institution and major in theatre, every student in the group had taken out some form of financial loan to attend the university. Monetary concerns were expressed by every participant in this study. It denoted that this subject was one they were all familiar with, but what differed for each student was the depth of fear about their personal financial future as it related to a career in theatre and their incurring student loan debt. It was an internal struggle that they each faced but from different magnitudes. Jeremy said this about his fear:

It is such a gamble. I'm doing a leap of faith. I'm betting my life on ME. If I graduate and suck as a performer and come back here and have to get a job in a factory, or go back to school, I waste \$50,000 that I can't pay back because I'm not making any money. Seriously, I don't think I'd be scared at all if it weren't for that huge debt that day to day, it's like more money on my back. There's part of me that thinks I should have gone out to LA before I had that huge animal on me going "GRRRRR" pay money. It makes it so much harder.

While the long term cost-benefit ratio was a financial concern for every member of this study, the daily living expenses of life at a four-year institution were also difficult for the transfer students to adjust to. There were unexpected fees and cost burdens that a couple of transfer students felt were personally difficult to afford. For Aaron, it was the high cost of dorm life that was his financial concern:

That's where it really hits ya. The dorms. Living in the dorms is just as much as going to school. This semester it was like \$3000 to go to school, well it was technically like \$2000 something but all the extra fees they attach like the health... death center... All that it was just as much as the meal plan and staying in the dorms. I found out a week after it was too late to get out of my dorm contract that I could have paid for rent and all my bills out of loan money for half what it would have cost me living in the dorms. And I called them and they wouldn't let me out of it. There was somebody sitting behind a desk cackling and going ka-ching.

While the dorms were the cause of financial concern for that student, Jessica was surprised by the high cost of attending a particular technical theatre course: *In this course there are no textbooks, no lab fees – none. I found out why ... because you spend close to \$200 on art supplies! I've bought paint, graphite pencils, three or four different kinds of paper and the paints alone are \$4-5 a tube.* While the financial burdens of college life and the cost of college versus the potential benefit of using their theatre education to obtain personal success in theatre were concerns for each of the transfer students in this study, the subjectivity of theatre was also a personal concern of transfer students in theatre.

Theatre is a visual art form and with any visual art form, the phrase “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” is significant. Theatrical producers are concerned with how the press reviews a theatre production, the directors are concerned with how the audience perceives the play or musical, and all participants in a theatre production are concerned with how successful a production is. Ultimately, theatre is an incredibly subjective field of work to operate in. For the theatre student, the subjectivity of their field of study was apparent in each of their theatre courses and every time they were involved in a theatrical production, whether it is through the audition process or by taking on a technical role in a production.

Leah really felt the subjectivity of her field of study when she received her midterm grades. She said:

Ironically, I think my most stable grade is in a philosophy course because all of the theatre courses are incredibly subjective. In one of my theatre courses, the professor said I was bouncing around constantly between a D and a B. So I could get any of those grades! But he also said that if I'm going into acting, the grade doesn't matter that much as much as what I draw from the class which is retarded in two ways because the way I started doing better in that class was to stop worrying about my grade and to start doing stuff, and experimenting, and playing which is what he was going for. But unfortunately, that mentality started to leak over to my other classes. And, I

can't separate myself. When I first got here I was so worried about my grades and now I'm not... at all! And, I'm so much more concerned about what I'm getting from the classes. And, I don't know how that's going to affect me. I mean if I go off and act... If I go to LA and audition, I doubt they're going to say she did great but her college transcripts say she got a D in this theatre course. I don't think she's right for this part. So I suppose being able to act is great but I still want to keep my options open... I don't want to fail my classes. It's not a good thing!

For another transfer student in theatre, the subjectivity of his field of study was apparent from his reaction to the first audition of the academic year during the fall semester. Russ was not sure if it was his talent level or a lucky streak that led him to receive a role in a fall theatrical production at his four-year institution.

I just look at the whole experience... I mean an audition is so incredibly subjective. I mean, I blanked on the last third of my monologue and this poor kid was dressed in a t-shirt. I mean we go in there and we wing it and somehow we come out of there with a part. And I feel so freakin' lucky! And there were so many people that prepared and they didn't get anything. That scares me – makes me feel a little bad. What do I have? How much luck do I have and how much do I have before it runs out?

As a transfer student who was planning on studying one of the technical aspects of theatre plus acting, Traci felt that even with hard work and doing her best in her courses through midterm, she was not getting the response to her work she desired. She felt that it had taken a long time for her technical skills to become noticed by the theatre faculty at her four-year institution following her transfer between institutions. Not only was Traci's success level subject to her personal scrutiny, but how her work was viewed by the theatre directors was also subjective. Traci remarked:

Even with showing off my abilities, even two weeks ago, I thought they weren't using me in the right way and I thought I wasn't going to grow any. But then, the director for an upcoming show came up to me and said 'Hey, do you want to design my show?' He'd saw what I'd done in the scenic studio and how, I don't want to say perfectionist, but meticulous I am with details, and he just said 'I want you to design the set for my show.' I'm very task

orientated and he said 'I see that in you.' I really liked that. After that I perked up and I thought you know people are noticing what I've done and they are going to start noticing my potential.

For some theatre students, the amount of subjectivity in obtaining roles and technical experiences created a lot of fear. Several transfer students in theatre expressed their fear when they said "I'm afraid I'm not good enough" or "I'm not going to be able to be good enough." Jeremy analyzed his fears since transferring to his four-year institution in this way:

I don't think I've been really happy with anything I've done because everything, it's like dang it, I could have done this. There's so much to do. You know, when you're in high school, if you can get tears on stage... it doesn't matter, if you got tears on stage, you rocked it. But some girl in my theatre course got tears and the professor stopped her and it was like 'no, you're pushing tears out. Your average person doesn't want to cry. And when the emotion comes up, you fight it back' and he's dead right. When you see someone fighting it back tears it's so much more powerful than when you see fake crying – 'Oh, I'm so sad.' There is just so much to learn and it makes me feel on a day to day basis more scared.

While the subjectivity of their individual theatre experiences caused differing levels of fear for transfer students in theatre, it was listening to the other theatre students at his four-year institution and their experiences that caused fear for another theatre student. Kyle related the experiences he'd had in this manner:

I sit in on almost all the student meetings, the student theatre association. I heard it brought up that there are people who can't seem to get a role in the shows... time after time, they get their call back and then they miss out. And, they're talking about how the students used to do these shows that were right up there with main stage shows... big money shows. But, now we're focusing in on the 10 minute play festival, and improv nights, and Best of Broadway Review – little tiny shows rather than a big show. I know there are three people who are going through plays through the student theatre association just so they can do a show 'cause they're the ones who keep getting ripped off. Having listened to them, I'm getting scared. Am I going to be one of those people here who just keeps missing out?

While the subjectivity of success in theatre promoted fear for some students, it conversely resulted in feelings of excitement and gratitude when success was achieved by a student. After Ronnie had finished his first production at his four-year institution, he described his feelings on getting noticed for his stage work in this manner:

This girl was completely drunk at a recent theatre party and she came running up to me and she spent like forty seconds saying over and over to me how much she loved me in the show. That specifically me, that I had a small part but she said that I went for it – I'd had a small part but that I had dove head first into it. She hadn't seen anybody else do that and yeah, she was drunk. I have no idea what real knowledge she has of acting. But just to have someone take the time to do that... it was the first positive feedback that I started to get and it just kept coming. I had a guy at the grocery store, never seen this guy before in my life ... don't know if he was a student or not. He recognized me after I'd finished the show. He recognized me and stopped me to tell me I'd done a great job. That stuff is jarringly awesome for somebody who is betting their entire life on one little ability.

With limited opportunities for performance and technical roles, transfer students in theatre felt like they were victims of both time and their past experience. They had a limited amount of time to make an impression, to gain experience, and to learn at their new institution. At the same time, they had traveled a different path than the majority of theatre students at their new institution because they had spent two years at a community college. They had a different set of knowledge and experience level than their peers had at their new institution. Traci said:

There are a lot of assumptions in the theatre department. I see people all the time that look at someone and assume that they know something and are baffled when they don't know it. I had theatre experience at my community college and there is still so much I don't know – so many plays that I haven't read. Every once in a while I'll be caught off guard and people will expect me to know something or have heard this line from this play and I'll have never heard it. I can't imagine how lost I'd feel if I didn't know any of this... if I hadn't had the experience at my community college! My high school sure didn't prepare me for any of this.

By November of their freshman year, most of the transfer students in theatre had acclimated to their new university environment and to the challenges of studying theatre at their four-year institution. They were fully ensconced into productions, coursework, friendships, and there were even a few romances budding. Despite their adjustment to the new world of the four-year institution, there were lingering doubts as to whether or not the theatre department at their four-year institution and the four-year institution were the best choice for obtaining a bachelor's degree. Russ said, *"I still don't know if this is where I want to be."* Kyle was dismayed at discovering that his four-year institution did not offer study in the style of acting that he wanted. He voiced his concern:

I wish they had acting for film. That's what I really want. I figure this can't hurt anything – this experience. I want to be in movies so I'm going to maybe have to do something different here 'cause I don't know if it's going to work out at this school if I want movies 'cause they don't have a film (program)... I mean they don't have it and I'm here. I'm just going to get what I can from what they've got but... that's why I wish they had auditions around here for commercials or whatever.

Each transfer student in theatre had his or her own concern about achieving success in their professional life in the wide world of performance after they obtained their bachelor degree. Every one of them questioned why they were going into a field where "making it" or being successful, was going to be so difficult. Leah showed that she just could not look beyond the present to the future when she said *"I think the key has been one day at a time. One week at a time. 'Cause if I sit here and think too hard about the future... where am I going to be in 4 years? It pushes me over the edge."* While Leah had focused on living on day at a time in college, Scott played the age card when asked about what his future in theatre held after graduation.

I don't know. I'll let you know when I figure that out. I'll be 22 in less than a month. I figure at 22 I'm not supposed to know what I'm supposed to do for the rest of my life. I've got what 3 – 3 1/2 years left here? I got time. I'm not in a hurry to find what I'm supposed to do in life because I don't want to be stuck doing something I don't enjoy.

Most of the theatre students in this study had spent a lot of time in self-reflection about their future prospects in their chosen major. Jeremy described the self-questioning process he went through as he contemplated graduating from college with a theatre degree.

What am I going to do with a theatre degree? How much am I going to make with that? How much is this degree going to cost me? More money than it'd cost me to buy a freakin' cheap house! Then I'll have this huge monthly student loan bill and then... maybe now's a good time for me to go apply what I've learned in Los Angeles? If I don't make it big I'm probably going to end up working construction... I mean really! What am I going to do with a theatre degree? This is sort of preparing me to make it, right?

By November of her junior year after transferring from a community college to a university, Kelly had an internal debate going on within herself about what she should do after graduating with a degree in performance and the risk of earning such a degree.

When I got up here I was thinking, I don't know if I should actually risk the acting thing... The odds are so against us... maybe I'll just go teach this... to go the more realistic way. The longer I'm here, the more I'm like, I'm a theatre major, I'm already taking the risky route. Why the hell not just go all the way and try it? 'Cause if any one thing has been consistent with me is that when I get knocked down, you can always recover to some extent. I'm not going to die, so why not try?

Many students in higher education are in college to gain experiences that will lead them to a future career. A business major might be concerned with building a resume that showcases her internships, college coursework, and professional business experience so she might obtain an entry level position in a corporation upon graduation. An elementary education major might be concerned with building a teaching portfolio that highlights his student teaching and educational preparation leading him to land a job in a school district

upon his graduation from the university. Theatre students are as conscious of the factors leading to career success as any other college major. With the highly competitive nature of the theatrical world, it might even be said that theatre students are overly conscious of the risks they are taking in their educational choices. To “*make it*” or to find success in theatre is often dependent upon a student’s ability to present themselves to potential directors and designers through a portfolio highlighting their college and professional experiences.

Many theatre majors begin building their portfolios at the beginning of their freshman year if they have determined their career path before or upon entry to the university or community college. Other theatre majors begin building their portfolios upon the decision to major in theatre. Transfer students coming from the community college into the four-year institution may have begun to build their portfolios at the community college level or they may begin building them when they start into their major coursework at their four-year institution. A transfer student’s portfolio may be dependent upon the student’s experience level at the community college in theatre, the coursework the student mastered at the community college, or even the faculty the student worked with at the community college.

A transfer student in theatre who had limited or no theatrical experience in their community college may have significantly diminished her portfolio building time when compared with theatre students who began as freshmen in a four-year institution theatre program. At the beginning of fall semester after learning that he had not earned a part in a fall main stage production at his four-year institution, Aaron described his concern with building his acting portfolio like this:

I really hope there is a decent amount of shows that we can be involved in besides the main stage shows because I really want to do more than three shows in my time here. Three shows for my portfolio would be good – great

but that's assuming I get in each of them. If I don't get a role in one show next year, that's two shows. My theatre scholarship says that I have to be in shows each semester. I can't be in the main stage show next semester because of my lab course so I have to do something with the student theatre association. I have to hope that there is something that I fit in.

Similar to the portfolio of the theatre acting major, a theatre design major uses her portfolio to showcase her costume, makeup, prop, scenic, or lighting design experiences to potential employers following graduation. Many technical theatre students gain their portfolio building experience by working as interns, work studies, or as student employees with the theatre department at their community college or university. By November of her junior year, Jessica was employed as an intern with the theatre program at her four-year institution described her growing concern with portfolio building possibilities in this manner:

I mean, in the last four weeks I don't have anything for my portfolio because it's all little things. I haven't seen a project from beginning to end. It's all "do this for a little while" and then we shuffle to a new project or that project was started the day before or a couple of hours before when I wasn't there. I don't know if I've seen a project from beginning to end yet. One day I built some flats and I knew where they were going but I never saw where they went to the final product. I don't have anything for my portfolio in four weeks.

Britin was planning to become a scenic designer and expressed his concern about building his portfolio during his internship at his four-year institution with the following explanation:

I mean this is why I'm here. My portfolio. So I'm trying to figure out how to go about talking to my professor. In some respects I understand that it's just a labor thing – they have to have a working set done by Wednesday for one show and Thursday for the other show so he's under a real time constraint right now but never have I seen a project through from beginning to end. I started working with the scenic designer and he was building a lamp post. He had the base all figured out and he had a really good base – he taught me how to take his drawing from scale into real life. I did it and it was 'cause we had an hour and a half while everybody else was gone. So that was good but I got one side of the lamp shade thing done and then I haven't worked on it since. That would have been the perfect thing to use as a portfolio builder because I could have taken it from beginning to end but there hasn't been that opportunity.

When the transfer students in theatre in this study discussed their transfer experiences, it was apparent how individual their experiences and concerns were about their present situation at their four-year institution and their future career in theatre. They were each candid in their descriptions of their personal comforts, stresses, excitements, fears, thoughts on their treatment as transfer students in the program, and their future goals.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's transition model (1995) highlighted the importance of understanding the individual nature of the *self* story each student shared. They each came to the four-year institution for their first semester out of community college with their own life experiences that influenced their experience in transferring to the university. Understanding the *self* story a transfer student in theatre presented, may assist theatre programs at four-year institutions in implementing new strategies to assist future transfer students adjust to the challenges they face upon entering the university environment from the community college, to their life at the four-year institution, to their department, and to their future in the theatre discipline.

Support Mechanisms

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's transition model (1995) highlighted the importance of understanding the *support mechanisms* students used in their transition from community college to four-year institution. Transfer students in theatre coped with many new situations in the transfer process and on top of those situations, they each coped with a myriad of individual stresses and concerns during the transition. To cope with the transition, transfer students in theatre implemented a variety of *support mechanisms* to help them navigate their way through the educational pipeline. Transfer students in theatre depended

upon their friends enrolled at the university, friends from the community college, other transfer students, and study groups for their courses to support them and assist them as they transitioned from the community college to university life. While transfer students in theatre depended heavily on their friends during their transition, they did not identify community college or university faculty or staff as support mechanisms in their transition from community college to university life.

Most of the transfer students in theatre in this study relied heavily on the friends they had who were already attending their four-year institution as they contemplated which university to attend following their time at the community college. Their friends at the four-year institution provided the transfer students with valuable insights into the theatre program at the four-year institution, the faculty, and university environment. Not only did their friends at the four-year institution provide answers to questions that the transfer students had, but they also served as a method to gain acceptance into peer groups at the new institution. Ben described his dependence on his friends as he contemplated attending the four-year institution and through his transition into the new institution:

I had heard a lot about the program. I had friends in the program. Friends going into the program. Friends who had gone through the program. After going to the community college, after being so close to home... I was ready for my next step away... getting away from my parents and that was what was pushing me away from the university, but then my parents moved away so I got to stay close to my friends and family from home but I got my parents away so that was good. That was a big attraction but a lot of it was that I knew the program, I knew the people in it. I didn't have to meet 100 people on the first day. I had to meet like 60. I knew that with the people I knew that I could get the jump start 'cause I knew that as a transfer student I'd be kind of held back. With directors, you know, I'm a junior but directors might not invest as much time in me because I don't have as much time left as you know a freshman would. I didn't have any experience from the last two years at community college so I knew that I had to get in with the kids before I could

get in with the directors which for me was really, really easy because I had the connections.

For some of the transfer students in theatre, it was not friends at the four-year institution who provided support through the transition. It was the friends they had from the community college they had attended who provided the support as they transitioned into life at their four-year institution. Traci described the circle of friends she had developed in theatre at the community college in this manner:

It was very close knit. It's very different than here at the university level. It's still close knit at the university because we're all in the theatre all the time but there's such a massive group even in the theatre group. If you don't like someone, you can have a limited interaction with them. But back at community college we had a core of people varying from five to ten people who were always together. And, after two years of that it was always the same people. It was like a little family.

While some transfer students in theatre transitioned with a circle of friends from the community college to their four-year institution, other transfer students found support from transfer students from other community colleges once they arrived at the four-year institution. Russ described his fellow transfer students in a required theatre course:

There are quite a few transfer people in that class. Quite a few. Maybe half the people are transfer people. And, you want to take it – everybody has to – and you just want to get it out of the way. There are probably 9 or 10 people... I mean every day I hear of somebody else that's a transfer and I'm like wow!

By the end of their first semester at the four-year institution, all of the transfer students in theatre had friends they had made through the course of attending classes, participating in theatre productions, attending a variety of four-year institution sponsored functions, and going to informal gatherings like parties and study groups. Kelly described her growing circle of friends at the four-year institution and how they supported each other:

I've become a lot more social now. I used to be the kind of person who would go home or hang out with one group of friends back home. But here, someone's always having a get together even if it's just to study. I went to a friend of mine's house and we studied for hours. I wrote a paper and we talked and she was reading and wrote a paper.

Ben described his friendships as having grown out of informal study times with classmates:

I would have to say the coolest person I've met while I've been here was because I went to a philosophy study session – randomly. One of the girls in the cast was like 'I can't hang out tonight I have a philosophy test tomorrow' and I was 'Oh, I'm in philosophy too, you must be in the other section' and she was in the other section – same teacher and everything – so I went and studied with her and turns out her best friend was an incredibly cool chick.

For one transfer student, the friends he made through the context of his coursework were the most valuable support mechanisms he had. Kyle relayed an experience where he was challenged to success by a classmate. The friend pushed his personal boundaries and supported him so that Kyle found personal success in an acting piece that was an assignment for a theatre course he was enrolled in:

My piece is with a female and we're doing the first scene from this show. I was having a really tough time getting angry because I'm just not an angry person. I get frustrated sometimes but I don't ever get angry. And, I don't get angry towards females... there have been a few instances but...I found it tough to get the emotions and intensity that I needed towards my partner so we did this exercise where we used this belt – she had one end of the belt and I had the other end of the belt and the objective was while reciting our lines, get that person to move. We had to get that person to move and my partner is a taller girl and a bit larger. And, that's when I did find my intensity because it did take everything in my being to move her and ever since then, I've been really happy with that piece.

While the vast majority of transfer students in theatre depended heavily on their friends to support them through their transition from community college to life in the four-year institution, they did not depend on faculty or staff from either the community college or four-year institution to support them or assist them with the transition. Britin described his

interaction with the activity director from his community college when he inquired about establishing a theatre program at the community college to prepare him for transfer to the university:

The director of activities at community college – the student activities director – is from my hometown. His whole family is very sports oriented. His brother is a wrestling coach. He was a wrestler. All his nephews are in wrestling, football. His brother was my elementary school P.E. teacher. His other brother owns a gym. So to me, theatre was nowhere on his list. ‘Hey why don’t we get a theatre program going here?’ ‘I never thought about that! Would it go over here?’ Nah. Because he’s not into it that just makes everyone else just say ‘if they want to go to theatre, they should just go straight to the university.’ At \$600 a credit hour I wasn’t going to the university right away.

Leah described her interaction with a faculty member and director at her four-year institution following her first production at the four-year institution:

I spent 15 to 30 hours a week in rehearsal with my director – the entire run of the show. Now that the show is over, he doesn’t even say hi to me. I even said hi to him as he passed me and he had to turn around to give me some weird acknowledgement. I think he doesn’t like me but I don’t know what I did.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman’s transition model (1995) highlighted the importance of understanding the *support mechanisms* students used in their transition from community college to four-year institution. To cope with the transition, transfer students in theatre implemented a variety of *support mechanisms* to help them navigate their way through the educational pipeline. Understanding the *support mechanisms* transfer students in theatre utilized, may assist four-year institutions in implementing new *support mechanisms* to assist future transfer students adjust to the challenges they face upon entering the four-year institution environment from the community college, to their life at the four-year institution, to their department, and to their future in the theatre discipline.

Strategies for Coping

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's transition model (1995) highlighted the importance of understanding the *strategies* the students used *for coping* with the transfer between institutions. As the transfer students in this study moved from their respective community colleges to their four year institutions, they implemented numerous strategies for coping with the transition from one institution to another in their pursuit of a degree in theatre. To cope with the transition and to acclimate to their new environment, transfer students in theatre made friends with students involved in theatre at their four-year institution, showcased their talents for faculty and directors at their four-year institution, created mock families to eat with, attended theatre parties, pushed or maintained their personal boundaries, used electronic communication platforms, practiced time management skills, were pro-active with their studies, and sometimes they wore personal masks or were defensive to protect themselves.

The transfer students in theatre in this study came into the four-year institution environment with two years of college accomplished and each transferred into their four-year institution as a junior. During their first days on campus they were inundated with a new world of people to meet and many met the returning four-year institution theatre students during the audition process for the fall productions or in their first courses at their four-year institution. With the individualistic, competitive nature of the theatre discipline, it was essential for the students in this study to get involved or as they said to "*get in*" with the other students at their four-year institution so they would feel part of the group. Jessica described her approach as one of feeling things out in her interactions with other students at her new institution. She said "*I get along well with everybody. I mean I was quiet at first – I*

felt things out first. I'm not intimidated or nothing but I was just, you know, seeing what this was about."

Rather than feeling things out herself, Kelly preferred to use her network of community college friends who had been through the transfer process to help her understand her universities policies and procedures for auditioning for the fall production. As Kelly described her confusion over the audition process she said *"I've talked with other people – transfers from last year – She said she felt the exact same way when she was going through it but now she can see the point in it but it's still frustrating."*

According to the students in this study, a huge part of the social network at four-year institutions are the student organizations whereby students produce their own student-directed theatrical productions. Traci explained the importance of connecting with students in student organizations that produce plays:

I feel like I'm more comfortable with the structure – the classes and professors – than with the students. There are a few people who I get along with – a decent amount – I've met some really cool people. But I don't yet feel like I'm part of the group and I don't know how long – it takes time to be accepted into a social network fully. But time is not something on my side here and that is something that concerns me because if I'm not accepted into the social network until my last term here than a lot of good that's going to do me especially when the theatre department relies on students to provide so much of the stage time experience. There is only four main stage shows that happen during my course here. Everything else is run by the students. So, if I'm not in with the students, I won't get stage time.

Since there are a limited number of theatrical productions at four-year institutions directed by faculty, student directed and designed productions are an important "in" for transfer students as they join and move through the social network at their four-year institution. Student directed productions provide an avenue for transfer students to meet and greet fellow theatre majors and they also provide an avenue for theatre students to gain

valuable directing, acting and design experience. Ronnie described being involved with student directed productions as being important for two reasons: (a) for the social networking between students and (b) as a tool to build their professional experience in theatre while at the four-year institution. To further explain the significance of student directed productions, Ronnie said:

I mean directors may have a bias towards who they're going to cast or designers as to whom they are going to work with but with student directed productions, it's a social thing. They're going to cast the people they know can do it and they aren't going to give the outside person the chance just because they're not sure they can do it or they're not part of that social group.

While some students turned to the new friends, their fellow transfer students, or even student directed productions as coping strategies during their transition into the four-year institution, other students tried to make friends both in and outside the theatrical world of theatre at the four-year institution to cope with their transition. Those who had trouble “getting in” with their fellow theatre students, looked outside the theatre for friendships that would help them cope with their transition until they were able to find their way into the social network of theatre at the four-year institution. For Jeremy, it took until after he’d “earned his stripes” or participated in his first play at the four-year institution for him to feel accepted into the social network.

I've made a lot more friends since the last little session, most of which are not in the theatre department. When I got here, most of the theatre department was pretty cold to me and it really seemed like I was working for a long time to try and make friends in the theatre department. During the course of my first production, I got to know a bunch of people, still doesn't mean they liked me. But something happened since the play ended, since we are no longer forced to be together, it just seems more relaxed to go walking into the theatre department and the people feel a lot more friendly. There's some people from the cast that are now my friends and I've met some really cool people from other departments and I've had a great time.

The social network at a four-year institution for transfer students in theatre was not only composed of students majoring in theatre, it was also composed of faculty who served dual roles as professors of course content and directors or designers of theatrical productions. The transfer students in theatre in this study felt it was as equally important to “*get in*” with the faculty as it was to “*get in*” with their fellow theatre majors. In fact, “*getting in*” with the faculty was often felt as more important than “*getting in*” with theatre students because if a student “*got in*” with the faculty, it was perceived they might have a better shot for gaining valuable experience during their time at the four-year institution. For some transfer students in theatre who were planning to major in performance, the audition played a crucial role in “*getting in*” with the faculty. The performance transfer students in theatre felt they had as good of a chance of getting a role in a play as any returning four-year institution student. But, for the transfer student in theatre wanting to be a theatrical designer of costumes/makeup, scenery, lighting, or sound, “*getting in*” with the faculty often involved hours of proving themselves to individual faculty members. This was in direct contrast to the single audition plus maybe a call-back audition that the performance major endured in their attempt to “*get in*” with the faculty.

Transfer students in theatre planning to major in a design element often felt like they were treated as “*in experienced freshmen*” by four-year institution design faculty and as a result, many felt that their talents and experience were under-utilized and un-recognized by the faculty. Aaron said “*They know that person can do it so that’s who they choose. If I hadn’t already been out there – had my name out there - and walked into a meeting and said I wanted to work lights, they would have laughed. There’s already that kid that’s going to do that – he’s from last year.*” Because of these feelings and experiences, some transfer

students in theatre developed strategies to cope with “getting in” with the four-year institution design faculty.

One transfer student in theatre who planned to major in scenic design used volunteerism as his coping strategy to “get in” with the technical faculty at his four-year institution. It was because of hours and hours of volunteering during the fall of his first semester following transfer that led to Ben’s success in earning a coveted design assignment for a spring production. Ben described his choice to volunteer like this:

I was done working all my (required) theatre hours on that first day – that Saturday. I think it has shown my determination and dedication to getting my work out there and just saying that I am willing to do anything without pay whereas my roommate couldn’t be here tonight because he’s in a rehearsal, he was paid to be there and he was there just as much as I was. But I was there to just be there and to get experience and to well, get my name out there because this is my first semester and not a lot of the instructors know me but now that they’ve kind of seen me and seen my work – seen the dedication - I don’t know what word I want to use, the fact that they’ve seen my efficiency, that I stay on task and then I get on to the next task but still maintain a quality with my work. I think that a lot of the instructors have seen me and are more willing to look to me for a technical position now. They just didn’t know my background with it and the skills I have coming in. And, I do feel like I have a leg up on people here because I’m a more well rounded person as far as the technical skills because I did have the carpentry in high school and I did do the automotive thing (at community college) so I do understand how a lot of stuff works. A lot of the incoming freshmen haven’t had that opportunity – you know, they know how to build a flat or something like that but we were working the hexagons in the play and working with pneumatics. Not a lot of people knew how to do that – I kind of feel fortunate with my background.

While the Ben had found success in the design aspect of his four-year institution and “got in” with the design faculty, Leah had achieved success in the performance realm of her four-year institution by earning a role in a fall production directed by a faculty member. While she felt great that she had “got in” with one faculty member by being cast in the

production, Leah also discovered that she questioned the director's expectations of her performance in the role. Leah said:

After the show, there were a lot of the things I'd been questioning that the director had done. I had people after people saying the same things, the same criticisms – nobody disliked the show, everybody loved it – but the one thing everybody kept saying was that 'I wish everybody hadn't talked so fast' and I was like 'I didn't want to talk fast. The director made me.' It really threw me off and it made me... it made me realize that I can't please everybody. And, so the question in the end is should I be pleasing the director or the audience? Because from an artistic standpoint, I care more about pleasing the audience but from the "I'd like to get in another show" standpoint, I'd like to please the director. And, that really reared its head in the last few days of show and every time I went on to the stage to perform. And the night that I felt I did the best and the night that I had people coming up to me saying 'you were so into it,' 'you took that character and you were so into it,' and 'you ran with it,' and blabbdy, blah, blah. That night that they thought I was the character that was the most in the show, the night that I thought I did the best, but the director thought I was taking it too far over the top. Who do I listen to? I felt like I was in the right place. Everything I did felt completely justified. I didn't feel that I was pushing myself beyond the motivations and feelings of the character at particular moment but the director did.

Along with obtaining crucial theatrical experience at their four-year institutions in performance and design, transfer students in theatre also depended upon faculty for advice and guidance on building their professional portfolios. It was impressed upon the transfer students in theatre from the time they entered four-year institutions that a well-constructed portfolio of theatrical experiences was essential to their success when they graduated from the institution and went to try and obtain work in the theatrical field. Unfortunately, most of the transfer students in theatre had no idea what a professional theatrical portfolio should contain when they transferred into the four-year institution. They felt behind their classmates who had been involved with the four-year institution for the previous one or two years. Aaron described his dependence upon a four-year institution faculty member and another theatre student who had been at the four-year institution for two years for portfolio guidance:

One of the scenic designers brought in his professional portfolio he brought in to get tenure and a student brought in his portfolio that he's working on as he goes through his classes and stuff so it was good to see that kind of thing. I'm looking forward to portfolio review in December because then you can see everybody else's stuff and see how they are doing it and how I can do it differently.

After they had been at their four-year institution for nearly an entire semester, the transfer students in theatre had become acclimated to the new environment, the faculty at the four-year institution, and most had made several friends. With their acclimation, their strategies for coping with life in the university world changed as well. One strategy that the transfer students in theatre used to cope with their life at the four-year institution and adjustment to theatre in the four-year institution was utilizing what students referred to as their “*theatre family*.” They regularly, if not daily, interacted with their “*theatre family*.” Some lived with other theatre students in dormitories or apartments, while others engaged in “*theatre family dinners*” where the theatre students who were living in the same dormitory complex would gather in the dining hall and eat their meals together before heading off to rehearsals, to do homework, or before a theatre party. Kyle described how he utilized the “*family dinners*” in this fashion:

Another thing I really like about my friends here is that we have theatre family dinners at the piazza and we talk about everything. Like yesterday at dinner we sat there and talked about masturbation. That's a good dinner topic. We sit there and we talk about boyfriends, girlfriends, and everything. I do like the fact that we can talk about everything. I guess the one thing I don't like is that we are such a close knit family that everybody knows your business.

Along with creating “*theatre family dinners*” to talk with other theatre students, transfer students in theatre attended “*those freakin' theatre parties*.” The theatre parties the transfer students in theatre were referring to were not formally organized by their four-year institutions, but the majority of attendees were theatre students. The theatre parties were

utilized by transfer students in theatre as a strategy to meet other theatre students and a method of relaxation but, to one transfer student in theatre, they were also a strange extension of the lessons learned in theatre curriculum.

In theatre classes, students are often encouraged to push past their personal boundaries and to take risks to learn more about humanity. They are also encouraged to explore costuming as a method of character development and as a reflection of a character a student may be portraying. The following description of a theatre party by Jeremy demonstrated how a theatre “toga” party was used by theatre students as a place to take risks and push personal boundaries.

Oh, God! Those freakin’ theatre parties...you learn a lot more than just college... it goes much deeper than how to get alcohol and how to sneak it into places... the social situation up here.. all these crazy theatre parties. Theatre has a way of opening people up more than normal people are used to. And, things happen at theatre parties that a lot people aren’t used to and I’m not so certain they should be. That people should be used to it. There’s a lot of morality issues that get called into question in an environment as exotic as this. The last theatre party I went to, I met this really cool girl there. She picked me up in my toga because it was freezing and I was walking to the party in a toga. It was me and two of my friends and she was with one of her friends in a van. She was designated driving for this girl so she picked us up because she could tell we were going to the toga party... it wasn’t a toga party but togas were involved. We got there and I’d had a little to drink but I’d decided that drunkenness was something I was going to make increasingly more sparse in my life due to certain circumstances that involved a 16 year old sitting on my lap at my 21st birthday party. Sixteen year old girls should not be allowed at theatre parties. I made an assumption and she was on my lap... nothing happened but I’ve been toning it down. Anyway, I had wine with me, I drank wine but I wasn’t drunk. We were all dancing in the basement and I started dancing with this girl in the basement that had picked me up. And we were dancing pretty racey... I was irritated because the girl I had been drooling over and clutching my heart over for weeks had pretty much screwed me over and walked away... Bam, so I had this ugliness... ‘I’m going to partiness’ to me. And we were dancing to the point that it was borderline not dancing anymore which at the theatre parties is not at all uncommon. She was goin’ right along with it bouncing from guy to guy and I was thinkin’ I’m not sure she’s a wholesome gal but then the other night she

took us home and I realized that she's not at all like the person she looked like at the party. She auditioned for the fall show and she asked me if I'd help her with her monologue and I did but the next morning I felt really bad about how I acted at the party because I realized that she hadn't gone from guy to guy because she'd wanted all those guys or to tease all those guys. She was doing that because she thought that was what was expected in the theatre scene. But each time it moved just past her comfort level that she had to move to a new guy and start the cycle over and I didn't see that at all when I was down there and neither did any of the other guys. The next morning the first thing I did was apologize to her when I got to our little practice. She was like you were totally right about that but it wasn't your fault – don't worry about it. She felt like a total slut. She didn't do anything but dance but it was totally beyond anything she believes and where she is morally that she cried that morning. I barely knew this girl and I'm sitting in the lobby while she cried in my arms because she felt so bad about what happened at that party. I think that what I'm saying is that the social scene doesn't push you to be like that but that acting, the things we are asked to do, give us a natural inclination towards that behavior. Sometimes...er, often, it kind of gets out of control. I don't think it's anybody's fault. I don't think they're teaching bad things in the school system and it should be changed and I don't think the college should change or that the college students are being incredibly irresponsible. In fact, most of the theatre parties I've gone to, and I think I've gone to every theatre party this year... when things go wrong, they're very mature about handling it. They handle it. But things are going to happen and they're things that people coming into the college don't always anticipate. Things can escalate quicker than people realize.

Other transfer students in theatre shared stories about how the theatre parties they had attended encouraged them to push their personal boundaries in ways they were not experiencing in the theatre classroom. When an actor is required to kiss another actor in the context of a role they are playing and they are not be romantically involved with the actor, the actor has to put aside any personal space and boundary issues they may have to effectively portray a kiss with someone they might not normally be intimate with outside the world of the play. Theatre parties served as a place for theatre students to practice removing their personal boundaries. Kyle said *“The last theatre party I went to I had decided that I was kissing as many people as I can as many times as I can. I kissed close to thirty people*

and some of them were guys.” Kelly described her behavior at a theatre party by saying: “I kissed everybody! I went to kiss one girl on the cheek and she turned so I kissed her on the lips and I woke up the next morning and couldn’t remember who it was!”

Transfer students in theatre used many strategies to push their personal boundaries during their first semester at the four-year institution. Some transfer students choose to take higher personal risks that pushed their personal boundaries than they ever had taken at their community college. One student used a class project to cope with the hard shell he had built around himself when he entered the four-year institution as a transfer student and his project demonstrated that he was really a vulnerable person to his class. Russ said:

In one of my classes, we did this project...I felt the way that when people made their first impression of me I kind of had this hard shell around me. I was really a vulnerable person so I chose to show my vulnerability. I reveal things about me that not a lot of people know well a few more know now. And, while doing that I got naked. And how much more vulnerable can you get than being buck ass naked in front of twenty some people? I really like the maturity level that came with that ‘cause it wasn’t like ‘ewww, he’s naked.’ It was ‘wow, he’s really vulnerable’ and everybody received it well. Even the instructors, they received it well and that said a lot to me about even the difference between a community college and a university.

While it may appear that transfer students in theatre pushed their personal boundaries at theatre parties and during class projects, they were also very adamant that theatre students should only push their boundaries as far as they were individually comfortable with. Leah explained it this way:

I think theatre necessarily needs this openness between people because if you’re performing... great performances happen when you open the channel between yourself and the audience. When that performer can open up and the audience can see it. When it’s no longer just lines being said, there’s a truth to it. That can be awesome. But, it’s very volatile. It’s incredibly unstable because people are so complicated that then you get a bunch of people who open themselves up like that and start pushing boundaries.

Kyle expressed a similar sentiment about the importance of students exercising self-awareness of their personal boundaries while they were at the four-year institution, as well as in the context of theatre courses and parties.

I believe that theatre people who we hang out with... there are a few people in the group who don't drink, they're still virgins and they don't do all that stuff and we praise them for that 'cause they're still able to keep that. When you're performing it's good that you can push your boundaries but...It just depends on a person's will. If you have a stronger will about your morals or values... I'm going to use this as an example... I have been offered for by a few males up here, sexual favors, because they think I'm a cute person or I'm adorable or whatever they want to call me. Even with being at one of the theatre parties dressed as a woman, I still say no because that's my morals, my sexual orientation, how I feel... that's not my thing. But, I'm still very comfortable being around it and being able to accept people who are like that and being around it as people because I feel that what you do in your free time and what you enjoy is you. And, I'm not going to ask you to change for me. It would be stupid of me to try to change you.

Transfer students in theatre in this study felt it was very important to know their individual personal limits when it came to pushing their individual personal boundaries. Unfortunately, several transfer students felt that their individual personal boundaries had been crossed by other theatre students, and several had heard or witnessed instances where their fellow theatre students had been pushed beyond their personal comfort levels. Scott described an experience where he was approached by another theatre student and how he had to set clear boundaries with that student:

What was it yesterday we had auditions? This girl was giving me a massage and I was just a noodle... gagaaaaaa... and this guy comes up to me and this guy is VERY gay and he comes up to me and he straddles me and sat on my pelvis and started running his fingers down my chest towards my crotch'll region. It didn't freak me out. I intercepted those hands and said 'No sir, I'm far too relaxed to fight you off' and I started to gagaaaaaa over the massage again but really, it didn't bother me. You know what you want, you know what you don't want. You just don't do the things that you don't want. In that sense it can be really simple, but where it gets really complicated is when you don't know what you want and you do something that you don't want.

Aaron had witnessed a situation where another theatre student's personal boundaries were crossed by a fellow theatre student:

My boundaries may be a little looser than some. One of the bisexual men in the department came up and grabbed my crotch the other day. That doesn't bother me. But what if the same bisexual man goes up and grabs the girl in front of him in the butt but she's offended but doesn't want to be all weird and say something? 'Cause I watched that happen. Female friend of mine had this happen... this guy, he was straight, then he was gay, then he was straight, and then...it was such a confusing situation in the theatre department that one of the guys said that predicting his sexuality was like predicting the weather.. 'and on Tuesday we've got a 90% chance of gay' ... anyway, this guy comes up behind one of my female friends and grabbed her on the butt and I could tell she was bothered by it and it had happened several times before so I'm like 'you should say something if you're bothered by it' and I could tell that she was really bothered by it and she admitted for a second that she was but then she was like 'no, no it's really not a big deal' and people say it's no big deal but if you don't stop it when it crosses your boundary and it keeps crossing your boundary then it's going to keep crossing your boundary until it crosses way too far and it perpetuates a habit.

These were just two examples of many, many personal boundaries limits being reached that the transfer students in theatre shared. Most of the examples the students shared of recognizing their personal boundaries or witnessing others reaching or surpassing their personal comfort levels involved a form of what could be considered sexual behavior. The stories they shared included examples of “unwanted” touching and massaging in hallways or classrooms, “in appropriate” fondling of sexual organs in front of other students, and a variety of physical advances made by theatre students toward one another. All of the examples the students shared happened within the confines of the facilities at their four-year institution and not at “those freakin’ theatre parties.” Kelly felt it was important to explain the about reaching personal boundary limits when she said:

In this department, if you're uncomfortable with what someone does, all you have to do is say no that first time and it's over. Another friend, doesn't like to have her face touched. I poke people, I don't know it's a weird habit I

have. But she told me she doesn't like to have her face touched so I don't touch her face anymore. Just like I don't like to have my ears touched, at all. If I know it's coming then it's not as bad but I don't like to have my ears played with. I had one person in the department touch my ear and it was unexpected and I did my flip out thing and I explained that you just can't touch my ear. Nobody has. They even had a day when they were doing wet willies and nobody touched my ear. The word is no. It's simple. Unfortunately new people in a new social situation don't want to say it. You want to say 'yes, I'll do it,' 'yes, I'll go to the party,' 'yes, I'll make friends.' And, the situation comes up when you've got to say 'no' and you're afraid to.

It was evident after listening to their stories of establishing their personal limits and pushing their personal boundaries that transfer students in theatre utilized a variety of verbal and physical strategies to cope with the interpersonal situations they encountered after transferring to the four-year institution from their respective community colleges. Along with verbal and physical strategies of coping with the transfer from community college to university, transfer students in theatre implemented technological strategies to cope with their transition.

There were technological elements that every transfer student in theatre utilized to cope with their transition from community college to the four-year institution. The first two technological tools the students utilized were revealed to me by the transfer students in theatre through their narratives in the course of the focus group meetings and the third technological tool was based on observations I made of the group members during the focus group meetings. The technological tools the students utilized as strategies to cope with their transition were the social networks of Facebook and My Space, and the last was the use of cellular phones. Each of these technological tools were vital strategies that the transfer students in theatre utilized in their transition from community college to life in their four-year institution.

The social networks of Facebook and My Space are computer programs that facilitate interaction between individuals and between groups of individuals. Mike said *“I have found out that Facebook is God because everybody communicates through Facebook.”* There was universal agreement by the transfer students that Facebook had a God like presence on campus. Russ demonstrated its significance by adding *“Facebook is one of my home pages. It comes up with my internet browser.”*

For transfer students in theatre, Facebook served many important social functions. Transfer students in theatre that moved from their community colleges to life at the four-year institution, often felt inundated with names of the new students and staff they were meeting. Connecting with other theatre students through Facebook was a strategy for putting names to faces for the transfer students in theatre. Kyle described how he used Facebook to connect with other theatre students: *“I’ve noticed that those who I don’t have on Facebook, I don’t talk to. Because I’m horrible with names and with Facebook, I just met somebody and I don’t remember who they are so I’ll look through my friend list and I’ll go oh, there they are – that was such and such.”* Ben explained how he connected to others by saying *“Yep, I’m bad with names too and if I forget who someone is but I know they are friends with someone else, I’ll go browse through that person’s friends and then it’s like Oh! That’s who that is.”* Russ agreed and explained how he built up his collection of Facebook theatre friends:

That’s how I did the majority of theatre friends that I have... I went to this senior’s page, who I think I’m going to be like and be here for forever... He’s a super senior. He’s been here since Jesus Christ was born. I went to his list of friends and I went, I know that person, I know that person, I know that person... add it.

On top of serving as a social connection between new theatre friends, Facebook was a strategy for communicating important information among theatre students. Leah listed the types of information the transfer students in theatre learned through Facebook:

Where are we getting drunk and when's the next show, work calls, little side projects for shows that are going on, calls for help, theatre parties, general parties, and then there's random Facebook groups to join like 'Quotes to Live By'... this guy in the theatre department is an interesting person who I don't think is there all the time but he's fun to hang out with --- just some of the things he says are off the wall but, yet again, as so true to life.

Along with putting names to faces and exchanging critical theatre information, Facebook served as a platform for staying in the social loop for transfer students in theatre. For Jessica, Facebook was her strategy with staying on top of the gossip of her theatre department:

Because everybody communicates through Facebook. I've learned so much... back at community college, I was never in the loop as to how anything was going with anybody but Facebook... everybody is so up with keeping it up. For me, I know it's a horrible thing for me not finding out things face to face, but I find out that Romeo and Juliet broke up for the seventh time or something like that. And, I find that really helpful.

Along with being a strategy for students to keep up with the social goings on of the theatre department at their four-year institution, Facebook was also utilized as a strategy for learning about the relationship status of potential romantic interests. Scott said:

When you go to a party and you meet a really cool chick, it's a good way to find out if she's single! I check name, relationship status and then...continue down. Two things that you look at... name, relationship status and birth date... And you look at your little news feed everyday for this little heart – if it is broken or whole and that tells you if people are breaking up or getting back together and now that my phone is wine-logged I use it all the time. I don't know anybody that doesn't use Facebook. Everybody has Facebook and we all check it. We all check it like twenty times a day.

By the end of their first semester at their four-year institution, the transfer students in theatre were very engrossed into Facebook and their life at the four-year institution. But, when they had first arrived from their community college, many felt alone and disconnected from life in their four-year institution, their new theatre department, their families, their communities, and their community college. Facebook was one strategy that the transfer students in theatre utilized to communicate with new friends, old friends, and family members. In one case, Facebook provided a way for two roommates in the same dorm room to bond. Aaron told the following story:

My roommate and I make fun of each other. The first two weeks we were up here we didn't have any friends up here so we were like 'get them on Facebook' and then you can keep in contact with them and it was a good way to make friends and we'd check our Facebook every five minutes like all day long while we'd sit in the dorm. And he'd get up and go sit at his computer and I'd say 'checkin' Facebook?' 'Nahhhhh!' 'Yeah, you are – you're so gay.' And then five minutes later I'd be doing it. We actually had a Facebook conversation with each other – we were ten feet away from each other but it was like three hours of a conversation and we'd said nothing to each other! That's kind of creepy but it's funny – just that we have that technology.

The transfer students in theatre in this study all appeared to be quite comfortable with using technology to communicate with one another and to meet new people. Most had been using the social network of My Space for several years and had discovered Facebook when they were in college. Ronnie explained to me the difference between My Space and Facebook:

My Space used to be a lot bigger for me 'cause I got it in high school so when I got Facebook I had like 100 friends on My Space and three on Facebook. I've got 260 some on Facebook and a lot of them are from the university. My Space is like for high schoolers... you know, I can add this song to my My Space and change the back ground and stuff... Facebook is much more college level... it's more professional... you still have really cool applications like pirates vs. ninjas where you can still play around on it.

Ben explained that even though he was at his university and using Facebook almost exclusively, My Space was still important to him *“because it’s a good way to keep in contact with those people that don’t have Facebook.”* Despite being a good way to maintain contact with those not on Facebook, My Space usage had seriously diminished for this group of transfer students over the course of their time at the four-year institution. Traci said *“I check my My Space like once a week just in case someone from my community college tries to contact me and they don’t have me on Facebook yet.”* Kelly agreed by saying, *“I check my My Space like once every week and a half and I mainly check it when my email says hey, you’ve got a new message on My Space.”*

Once transfer students in theatre had become part of the social network of their four-year institution, their theatre department, and Facebook, they discovered that Facebook was a wonderful platform to utilize as they completed assignments for their theatre courses. Britin said *“we’ve got a costuming project which we have plenty of time to do and that’s our final. We’re actually partners for that. Him and me started a Facebook space so we can exchange ideas on it... script notes and such.”* In one theatre course, the students had been required to participate in a thespian festival for high school students. Scott described how he used Facebook to maintain contact with the high school students he’d met at the festival:

A lot of people adding me from the Thespian Festival that we went to and I said to a workshop we did, ‘Hey, I’m on Facebook all the time so don’t hesitate to Facebook me if you have any questions about life, college, the university.’ I gave a lot of really good information about being a stage manager and being a techie.

Along with using Facebook as a strategy for completing their theatre course assignments, transfer students in theatre also used Facebook as a method of exchanging pictures for their theatre portfolios. Each theatre student was required to construct a

professional portfolio of their experiences in theatre to showcase their talents to potential internship employers or professional companies they would be applying to for employment.

Ben described his dependence on Facebook for constructing his theatre portfolio:

You can take photos – evidence of your work and put it all together. I need to start putting together a portfolio. I've got such a random assortment of pictures. Most of the records that I have of the shows I did at my community college – like I lost a bunch of my pictures. I have been searching people's Facebooks – pulling pictures from the shows.

Along with utilizing Facebook and My Space as strategies for meeting and maintaining relationships and completing assigned coursework, the transfer students in theatre utilized one other crucial piece of technology to survive at their four-year institution. During the course of our focus group meetings, they all utilized cellular phones for text messaging. While I did not question who, what, or why they were text messaging during our meetings, it was readily apparent from their body language that their cellular phones were as much of a strategy of coping as Facebook or My Space. When a cellular phone would vibrate indicating that a message was received, the transfer student owning the phone would immediately pick it up and most would quickly respond to the message with quick a thumbed response. His or her thumbs would fly over the minute key boards on his phone and his face would indicate the nature of the message received and sent. There were even instances when I was sure that the messages were being forwarded to the other phones on the table because there would be an almost universal “checking of the phone” and then eye contact and smiles exchanged between the recipients and senders of the messages. With every student in each focus group carrying a cellular phone, it was apparent that cellular phone technology was a method the students utilized to be involved with happenings in life at their four-year institution.

Becoming involved in life at the four-year institution was one strategy that some transfer students in theatre utilized to cope with the transition from community college to four-year institution. For one transfer student this meant that she volunteered to do things that were not required for her theatre coursework. Traci said:

And the reason I got offered a paid position was because when I came in this year, I was too late to apply for a paid position, but I went in and said hey, I'd like to volunteer and still get the experience. And, I did. I came in for Saturday work calls and I came in as much during the week randomly to help build set, and during Rep Prep week which was a week that we had off from classes... which all my classes are theatre classes... so I had the week off so I could have slacked off and stayed in my dorm but, no, I was at the theatre every morning no later than like 10:00 and I didn't leave until like 7:00 or 8:00 at night just working on scenic, lighting, or costumes.

By getting involved with the theatre department beyond the assigned course required participation in her first semester following transfer, this student found herself landing a coveted paid technical position for her second semester at her four-year institution. She was hoping that this position was going to help her build a professional portfolio that would lead her to future professional opportunities.

While it was important for the transfer students in theatre to become involved with their four-year institution and theatre as a strategy for coping and for gaining professional experience to meet their future goals, it was equally important for the students to focus on the here and now, or to focus on today's issues not tomorrow's issues. Russ illustrated this as he explained his concern over how expensive life at the four-year institution was going to be to pay for when he was done with his bachelor's degree and would be confronted with his student loan debt:

So pretty much if I forget about the "real world" it's all right, but if I put my brain back at home, I've got my parents going insane with this financial thing. I try not to ignore it, but I'm trying to put myself in the state that there are

certain things you can take care of right now and certain things you can't. What can you take care of? What can't you? If you can't take care of it, if there is nothing you can do about it right now, forget about it. Focus on what you can do and that's really hard for me.

Another transfer student in theatre said that it was important for students in theatre to focus on the present when the future and future success seemed so uncertain. Kelly's strategy of coping with the uncertainty was that it was important to "have a fall back" or another plan for the future if she was unsuccessful at theatre. While she thought "maybe I should just teach this," Russ' plan was "There's always construction."

Transfer students in theatre were conscious of focusing on the here and now to cope with the transition from community college to their four-year institution, to cope with accomplishing their assignments, to cope with being involved in theatrical productions, to cope with their family situations "back home," and to cope with an uncertain future. To balance all this, transfer students in theatre utilized the strategy of time management. Kyle described the importance of good time management skills in coping with life in theatre:

I love my character. I love my lines. I love being there and being on stage. So I go to rehearsal and I have all this stuff on my plate... I go to rehearsal and I have a great time when I'm out there and then I come off stage and it's like there again. I'd love to just be out there all the time, on stage. Time is the key up here... you have all of this time that you're in rehearsal and like, I'm not on the entire show.... I on in the first scene and then again at the end so I have lots of lobby time to do homework or read a play script and I'm finding that I have to be diligent about using that time. I was really bad at time management and it's something that I'm starting to work on. I'm still really bad at that but I'm trying to look at it half full... I'm getting better at it!

Time management was a strategy for coping that many of the transfer students in theatre in this study were still learning. Several indicated that time management was a skill "in progress" on their learning curve but others indicated that they had mastered time management as well as their schedules would allow.

Those transfer students in theatre that had mastered time management also talked about the importance of being pro-active with their education. Being pro-active meant that they were active participants in their educational experience and did not rely on the theatre faculty to provide them with the answers to the problems, challenges, or situations they encountered. Aaron described his pro-activeness in this manner:

I'm trying to be pro-active. If I don't know what I'm doing one day in the shop then I feel stupid 'cause he hired me thinking I knew what I was doing. I know that's not what he thinks but that's what I feel. I mean, there was one day that we were working on something I didn't know about and I went home and read about it because I felt like I kind of knew what it was but with all the new names it was confusing... so I guess I'm being proactive so at least it looks like I know what I'm doing! So that I have better odds of having experiences down the road.

Jessica explained that there were often differences between the terminology she'd acquired at her community college and what she was expected to know at the university by the theatre faculty. This knowledge differential necessitated that she be pro-active with her education. For her, being pro-active often meant proving herself to the faculty. Jessica said *"Working in the scene shop, I just try to stay on top of things to prove that I know what I'm doing. I may not know what it is that you're calling it but I do know what to do, so I try to keep ahead of it."*

Along with being pro-active about their education and experience levels, transfer students in theatre were challenged with new coursework that required new skills to be developed and perfected. Traci described a couple of her most challenging courses like this:

At first I thought these were going to be the two worst classes in the world because it was all about drawing and I don't like to draw – that's why I'm not an art major. But in taking both those classes at the same time I've learned that I can draw I just have to take my time, pace myself, and I can't rush.

For Traci, challenging coursework in an area where she felt like her skills were deficient at best, meant that she needed to implement new strategies for coping. By focusing on taking her time and not rushing to accomplish unfamiliar tasks, Traci was able to find success in the challenges she faced.

Transfer students in theatre were confronted by many new challenges, new people and new situations upon entering the four-year institution from their community college. Some felt like it was necessary to put on a mask or an invisible shield to hide behind until they became familiar or comfortable with their surroundings. Mike said *“I’m not going to show people I’ve just met the same extent as someone I’ve known for a long time - that intimacy.”* Kyle believed that it was more the nature of being a theatre student and their subject matter that led to students existing in *“disguises”* than whether or not a student came from a community college. When asked how many theatre students wore a mask, shield or disguise to hide their true selves as they went about their normal existence, Kyle responded: *There are a lot! I think it’s more than people will let on because I think that they’ve gotten used to performing in everyday life and they’ve created inconspicuous characters... at least half a dozen who I could list right now.*

Whether putting on a mask as a personal shield was a strategy for coping with the challenges of being a transfer student in theatre, or it was a strategy for coping with life as a theatre major, it may have been a strategy for coping that was a direct result of studying a subject matter that is dependent upon becoming somebody else.

For all of the transfer students in theatre in this study, theatre was a living, breathing entity in their world. It was described as: a lifestyle, a choice, a passion, a way of being, and their focus. Many felt that this was the only place they were accepted and where they truly

belonged. Yet, theatre was also a place of contention for them. They were continually faced by challenging family members and friends that asked them “*Why are you going to major in that?*” and “*Do you know how few people make it in that?*” The worst were those who said comments like “*You’ll never make it*” and “*You don’t have the talent for that.*” Jeremy said it well when he said “*Nobody questions you when you say you’re going to be an ed (education) major or a computer major. EVERYBODY questions you when you say you’re going to be a theatre major.*” To cope with these questions, the transfer students in theatre had to develop a bit of a “*thick skin*” to cope with being challenged about their major choice. Jeremy demonstrated his “*thick skin*” with a defensive attitude:

I thoroughly enjoy philosophy and I’m considering minoring that which is ironic because what are the two things that are the stupidest to major in? People say theatre and philosophy because you don’t get paid for either but those are the things I like the most. Screw you world!

As the transfer students in this study moved from their respective community colleges to their four-year institution, they implemented numerous strategies for coping with the transition from one institution to another in their pursuit of a degree in theatre. To cope with the transition and to acclimate to their new environment, transfer students in theatre made friends with students involved in theatre at their four-year institution, showcased their talents for theatre faculty and directors, created mock families to eat with, attended theatre parties sponsored by cast members, pushed or maintained their personal boundaries, used electronic communication platforms, practiced time management skills, were pro-active with their studies, and sometimes they wore personal masks or were defensive to protect themselves. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman’s transition model (1995) highlighted the importance of understanding the *strategies* the students used *for coping* with the transfer between

institutions. Understanding the *strategies* transfer students in theatre utilized *for coping*, may assist four-year institutions in implementing new *support mechanisms* to assist future transfer students adjust to the challenges they face upon entering the environment of the four-year institution from the community college, to their life in the four-year institution, to their theatre department, and to their future in the theatre discipline.

Conclusion

The analysis of the narratives gleaned in this inquiry into transfer students in theatre included coding for common themes as many qualitative research projects include before the narratives were (re)coded according to Schlossberg's transition theory (1984) and the Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman transition model (1995). Using the transition theory and the model provided a foundation for analyzing the transfer narratives and each served as a method of illuminating the results of this narrative inquiry. Taken together, the narratives highlight the process of transferring between institutions of higher education to study theatre by students who move from a community college to a four-year institution.

CHAPTER 5. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With half of all students in higher education beginning to navigate the educational pipeline in community colleges, the numbers of transfer students moving from community colleges to universities will continue to increase (Cohen, 2005). Four-year institutions and community colleges are beginning to take increased responsibility for the transfer function between institutions (Handel, 2007). While most four-year institutions and community colleges have developed transfer programs to assist students as they navigate the educational pipeline between institutions, it is also essential for each academic discipline inside the academy to develop a plan for assisting transfer students moving into their discipline from community colleges (Borden, 2004). Discipline or program level transfer programs will assist transfer students in understanding the nuances of the individual discipline or department including requirements, policies, procedures, and deadlines (Handel, 2007).

Recommendations for Theatre Educators

Transfer students who transferred from community colleges into theatre programs at four year institutions participated in orientation programs which assisted the students in registering for their first semester at their new institution and provided general information about transferring between institutions. While the orientation programs provided some information for transfer students, it did little to prepare transfer students in theatre for the day-to-day challenges they faced as a transfer student into a four-year institution to the study in the theatre discipline. Based upon the information gleaned from the analysis of the narratives of transfer students in theatre in this study, there are several ways beyond

orientation programs that theatre departments at community colleges and four-year institutions could assist transfer students.

Transfer Student Orientation to Theatre Department

A formal transfer student orientation to the theatre department at a four-year institution at the beginning of each academic semester would provide a platform for transfer students in theatre to meet each other and key department members, to ask questions, and to receive critical information about theatre at the four-year institution. Information that could be covered in this orientation includes but is of course not limited in scope to: major emphasis choices like scenic design or acting, requirements to graduate including a discussion of required courses inside the theatre major/minor, work study/student employment hiring practices, the audition process and procedures, building a professional quality theatrical portfolio, student theatre organizations, internships, and events unique to the culture of the theatre department.

Transfer Advisor

Designating one faculty member or administrator as a transfer advisor for the theatre department would give transfer students a common person who they could go to for answers to questions throughout the academic year but particularly until the transfer student has determined which emphasis within the theatre major they wish to pursue. The advisor should have an understanding of the issues unique to transfer students, a knowledge of the community college theatre programs the majority of transfer students are coming from, and in-depth knowledge of the requirements, policies and procedures of the theatre department.

Scheduling of Major Courses

Many transfer students enter a four-year institution with their general education coursework completed. When they register for their required major courses in theatre, many encounter that the required courses are offered simultaneously at the most popular times of the day. This may not pose a problem for the theatre student who spends four to five years at the same institution and can spread the required coursework over that amount of time. Unfortunately, this scheduling practice prevents the transfer student from registering for the courses they need to graduate in a timely manner because the required courses are doubled up on the schedule of course offerings rather than being spread across the course schedule. An analysis of the schedule of required course offerings in theatre may result in a reduction of required courses being offered simultaneously and thus ease the scheduling of required courses for all students in the theatre discipline.

Mandated Labor Requirements

It is common practice in the theatre discipline for introductory theatre general education courses and for required courses for the theatre major to require students to assist or work on the theatrical production(s) as part of the graded assignments in the course. Basically, what results is a course with a mandated theatrical labor requirement for students to complete in order to obtain a grade in the course. Courses with a mandated theatrical labor requirement provided the most confusion for transfer students in theatre. It was often unclear to the students what the purpose of the course was other than to provide labor during a theatrical production. Transfer students were often unclear about the requirements of the course upon registration particularly if they were registering for courses during an orientation

program without the assistance of a theatre advisor. The mandated backstage labor requirement and how this related to what they could or could not register for in the semester they were taking the course was also a point of confusion. An analysis of courses with a mandated theatrical labor requirement along with clear explanations of course labor requirements to students prior to course registration may help each of these courses move away from the perception that this course is something to “just survive.”

Use Facebook

Facebook is being utilized informally by theatre students and increasingly, theatre departments across higher education have been establishing themselves on Facebook as a method of staying in contact with students, alumni, and arts patrons. Transfer students are beginning to use Facebook to check out a theatre department prior to transferring. Much of the information available is about shows, upcoming performance dates and pictures. By creating a Facebook group of current theatrical students and utilizing Facebook in a more formal fashion to exchange information on work calls, show information, deadlines, auditions, performance opportunities, and department announcements may help transfer students feel more connected to the department and will allow all students equal access to the information. Facebook is also a wonderful way for all group members to have access to pictures of productions which they can use to build their theatre portfolios.

Portfolio Building

Several of the transfer students in theatre were employed as a work studies or interns for the theatre department at their four-year institution. While they felt they were gaining valuable professional experience in their assigned positions, some also felt that their

experiences weren't translating into "portfolio building" experiences because they were not allowed to see a particular assignment through from inception to end. It is difficult to balance getting the required tasks accomplished for each production and assigning individual projects to students so they can build their portfolios. An analysis of the work study/internship program at community colleges and four-year institutions may reveal ways that students can be assigned individual and team projects designed to be highlighted in their portfolios.

Other Theatre Opportunities

Transfer students in theatre may only be at a four-year institution for two or three years and they have one universal quest: To gain as much theatrical experience as possible before they graduate. For those who do not get cast in a main stage or student directed production, or obtain a work study/internship at their four-year institution, the amount of theatrical experience they may get is small. Providing students with information on additional opportunities to gain theatrical experience, such as with community theatres, regional theatres, or other educational venues, may assist students in obtaining additional theatrical experience. If this information is exchanged informally with students through bulletin boards or through word of mouth, perhaps Facebook or other social networking platforms would be a method for posting these opportunities to students.

Respecting/Pushing Personal Boundaries

It is the nature of theatre education to encourage a student to push her personal boundaries so that the student will feel comfortable performing in public and perhaps portraying a character with traits that are foreign to the actor's personal life and moral code.

Each transfer student in this study felt their personal boundaries challenged at their four-year institution in a course, a hallway, the green room, or even in a rehearsal in ways that they had not experienced in their time at a community college. No place was this more true than when they attended theatre parties. It was when a student's personal boundary was crossed past that student's comfort zone that feelings of discomfort or even fear occurred. Educational theatre programs should not be held responsible for boundaries being pushed beyond comfort zones at theatre parties that are not sponsored by the department, but it could be said that the theatre curriculum does encourage personal boundaries to be pushed. For a student coming from a community college where there was limited or no theatre curriculum, the immediate push into an environment where personal boundaries are not only expanded or even crossed in some cases, may be one of the most surprising aspects of transitioning between institutions.

In recent years, many elementary schools have implemented programs in Character Education or Six Traits of Character as a platform to address the issues of Respect, Honesty, Integrity, Courage, and Trust in students. By adopting an initiative of "Character Counts" similar to what is happening in elementary schools, theatre programs would be showing students that it is okay to "Push your boundaries but respect other's boundaries." Elementary schools use brightly colored posters and formal curriculum to highlight character traits. Obviously, a university would want to take a more adult approach than an elementary school but establishing an initiative about respecting other's personal boundaries that could appear on each theatre course syllabus, could be talked about in each theatre course, and perhaps could be relayed in some sort of a visual manner on bulletin boards, classrooms, and in official documents, may lead to students enacting on the respect policy in both the

classrooms and theatre facilities, as well as the informal theatre parties. Along with a character initiative, a method to share student concerns about violations of personal boundaries should be established.

Implement Statewide Transfer Initiatives

Transfer students in theatre in this study indicated that neither the faculty/staff at their four-year institution nor their community college faculty/staff were support mechanisms that they relied on in their transition from community college to the university. As a community college theatre faculty member, this disturbed me perhaps more than any other result in this study because I felt that I worked hard to make the transitions for my students as seamless as possible yet that support was not what was indicated by the students in this study. It made me question why students did not feel supported in their transition by their respective institutions and faculty? And, if they did not feel supported, what could I do differently as a community college theatre faculty member to assist my students with transferring between institutions? What could my theatre colleagues at the four-year institutions do to assist transfer students? How could we collaborate to ease the pathway between our institutions for theatre students?

Adapting State Transfer Initiatives in the Theatre Discipline

There are several successful models of in-state transfer initiatives between community colleges and four-year institutions that are showing great promise in easing the transfer path for students between higher education institutions. Perhaps the most notable is the California system which first established a transfer plan in 1960 with the California Master Plan of Higher Education. Because of its demonstrated success, the California model

has been adapted in other state systems. The Universities of Wisconsin-Madison and Virginia have also been instrumental in shaping transfer initiatives across the United States (Handel, 2007). The most successful state transfer initiatives are those that are specifically focused on easing the transfer student's experiences as they navigate the educational pipeline in their state.

The Liaison Advisory Committee on Transfer Students (LACTS) was established in 1972 to foster statewide agreements relating to transfer between Iowa's community colleges and Iowa's Regents institutions. In 2008 the committee established a set of transfer initiatives or methods that are currently in use between institutions in Iowa. They also recommended future initiatives which may assist students as they transfer between institutions at the discipline level. The following LACTS future initiatives may assist theatre faculty/staff at four-year institutions and community college to establish clear transfer paths for students:

Community College Visits

Faculty/staff from four-year institutions visit community college theatre programs to address questions that might be unique to that particular community college campus, discuss trends in that college's transfer majors and patterns, and to review important policies, deadlines, and program updates of the community college theatre program (LACTS, 2008). While faculty from four-year institutions is generally respectful of the work community college faculty do with academically-challenged students and in presenting general education coursework, they are sometimes suspicious of the rigor of community college curriculum particularly when it comes to required theatre courses (Handel, 2007). By seeing the

community college theatre program in action and honest discussions about the theatre curriculum at both community colleges and four-year institutions, collaboration in easing the transfer process may occur.

Community College Update Programs

Community college advisers are invited to the campus of the four-year institution to learn more about advising for theatre students considering that institution. They may meet with university faculty and staff to hear specific advising tips and theatre program facts, tour campus facilities including the theatre facilities, and may receive comprehensive advising materials to take back to their campus to share with their colleagues and students. By seeing the four-year institution theatre department in action and engaging in honest discussions about advising theatre students, collaboration to ease the transfer pathway between institutions may occur (LACTS, 2008).

Program-to-Program Articulation Agreements

The acceptance of courses taken in a specific two-year degree program at a community college count toward meeting course requirements for a bachelor's degree at the four-year institution. Not all theatre courses are taught the same way nor are they taught from the same philosophy or perspective. Likewise, all theatre programs are certainly not the same. To achieve program-to-program or major –to-major articulation agreements involves faculty/staff from community college and four-year institutions sitting down and comparing curriculum on a course by course basis for transferability. Articulation agreements between theatre programs at community college can lead to the establishment of Transfer Plans or

Transfer Guides which ease the pathway between institutions for theatre students (Handel, 2007; LACTS, 2008).

Transfer Plans

A printed outline of courses that students can take at the community college that will transfer directly into the theatre bachelor's degree program at the four-year institution (LACTS, 2008).

Transfer Guides

Transfer advisers or other four-year institution faculty/staff assist students in drawing up an individual transfer "plan" while they are at the community college. In other words, a representative from the theatre program at the four-year institution will work individually with a student to help him/her choose classes at the community college that will transfer and help the student have a smooth transition to the four-year program (LACTS, 2008).

Final Thoughts

The transfer students in theatre who were highlighted in this study were incredibly candid about their experiences in their transfer process between institutions. They utilized many support mechanisms as they transferred between institutions and they developed strategies for coping with their transition, most of which existed outside the formal procedures of their individual four-year institutions and their individual community colleges. Ultimately, transferring between institutions was a very personal journey for each student. Faculty and staff in the theatre discipline at community colleges and four-year institutions need to be equally candid about the issues they see with transferring between institutions inside the theatre discipline.

The nature of how students “do college” is changing on an annual basis with increased numbers of students starting to study theatre first at community colleges rather than starting their theatre degrees at four-year institutions or conservatories. With more and more students seeking economical ways to achieve their degrees, tighter purse strings from home and decreased access to loan money due to our nations fiscal down turn equate to higher student populations in theatre at the more cost-efficient community college. When I started this study in 2007, I had 13 students in my freshman Acting I course which at the time was a record number of students in that course. In Spring 2009 I watched 15 students graduate with the intention of majoring in theatre at four-year institutions and, in Fall 2009, I welcomed a record 19 new freshmen students into Acting I. Our arts faculty has seen this trend across all the arts disciplines in our college including music, fine, and applied arts. The paths students choose to traverse to obtain a theatre degree or a degree in the arts is changing and it is essential for each individual discipline in the arts to adapt and change as well.

Not only do I believe that as a theatre discipline we need to adapt and change to make the transition between institutions easier for our students, I have learned through the course of this narrative inquiry that I also needed to adapt and change as a practitioner, educator, and theatre director/advisor. This study has served as a foundation to inform and create change in my professional practice. The areas that I made changes in directly because of this study are all related to networking across and within the theatre discipline.

Because of this study, I have become a huge user of the social networking platform Facebook. When a group of theatre students looks at you in a focus group and collectively agrees with one student’s comment that “Facebook is God” on their campus, that social

networking aspect bears some exploration. After that meeting, I started my own Facebook page and within two days had been contacted with friend requests by 45 alumni and current students. Two years later my friends list on Facebook is over 250 in number and the majority are composed of alumni, current students, and increasingly from professional contacts in the worlds of theatre and higher education. I utilize the announcement and event features to advertise upcoming auditions, tour productions, and performances by our students. Often I get a quicker response from a current student using Facebook email than I do using our college campus' course management software. I have noticed an increased attendance from alumni at our theatrical events because of using Facebook as an advertising method. Keeping our alumni tied to our college beyond their time as a student is a win for our community college and our current theatre students who can utilize the alumni to make their transition to the four-year institution easier. While I am not sure Facebook will have the status of God in my personal life, professionally it has been a beneficial change as a result of this study.

This study encouraged me to increase my professional networking among my peers in the theatre discipline in higher education about the issues of transfer in our state. I have met with theatre representatives from every major university and private college in my state that offers a theatre program. I have also had several representatives visit the theatre program at our community college to learn about what we are doing. Because of these conversations, I am much better versed in the theatre programs to advise my students to consider as they “move in” to the transfer decision. Likewise, I am also better versed at advising my students on the potential pitfalls of some theatre programs. I have worked on transfer agreements with a couple of the more popular four-year institutions to ease the issue of course

transferability of theatre curriculum between our institutions. In turn, those four-year institutions let me know when scholarship audition days are and offer campus visits designed so my students can come see their theatrical productions, visit with their faculty, and interact with their students. The professional networking has become a win-win situation for my students, our community college theatre program, and the theatre programs at four-year institutions.

The great news is that theatre is by its very nature a collaborative art form so we are already versed in the nature of thinking outside the box to solve problems and in concept of teamwork. We should be able to work together creatively across institutional silos on behalf of our students. It is my hope that by working together, theatre programs at community colleges and theatre programs at four-year institutions will provide a smoother transition for transfer students in theatre. Perhaps by implementing transfer initiatives like those put out by LACTS or establishing transfer initiatives modeled by the California system but at the discipline level rather than the institutional level, we can smooth the educational pipeline transfer students in theatre navigate as they pursue their theatre degree. By being proactive and embracing the changing nature of how students “do” higher education, the theatre discipline will receive rave reviews from students about transferring between institutions to study theatre.

APPENDIX A. LETTER OF INVITATION

DATE

Hello PARTICIPANT,

I am the Theatre Director at Indian Hills Community College and a graduate student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University. Your theatre department has provided your name to me as a transfer student from a community college who is majoring in theatre.

I am hoping that you will consider sharing your experience in transferring from the community college to your university with me as part of an independent research project I am conducting on transfer students in theatre. I am using focus groups at your institution to understand the transfer experience from the point of view of students who have experienced it which is why I am contacting you!

I will be conducting two focus groups on the campus in BUILDING. The first focus group will from 9-10:00 p.m. on DATE in ROOM #.

The focus group experience will let you meet other theatre transfer students and hear from others who may be going through the same or similar transfer experiences as you are. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You will be asked to sign an informed consent document providing you with details of the study and I will be happy to answer any questions about the research project. I will ask a series of open ended designed to guide the conversation about the transfer experience. You may share as much or as little as you like during our time together. The focus groups will be audio recorded, transcribed and your identifying characteristics (name, hometown, community college, etc) will be removed.

While your name and identifying information will be confidential in the study, by sharing the stories of your transfer experiences, you'll be helping future transfer students because your theatre department may be able to adjust their transfer initiatives according to the results of this study. A report of the findings of this study will be made available to theatre administration for review in January 2008. The findings will also be used in a larger study on the transfer experience of theatre students from other four-year institutions which will hopefully be published.

If you have questions, please contact me at jboyenga@indianhills.edu or at 641-777-3649. I look forward to meeting you!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Terry Boyenga

APPENDIX B. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL AND CONSENT FORMS

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

DATE: 3 July 2008
TO: Jennifer Terry Boyenga
 321 N Van Buren, Ottumwa, IA 52501
CC: Larry Ebbers
 N225A Lagomarcino
FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
 Office of Research Assurances
TITLE: Transfer Students in Theatre
IRB ID: 07-324

Institutional Review Board
 Office of Research Assurances
 Vice Provost for Research
 1138 Pearson Hall
 Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
 515 294-4267
 FAX 515 294-4566

Approval Date: 3 July 2008
 Date for Continuing Review: 25 July 2009

The Co-Chair of Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has conducted the annual continuing review of the protocol entitled, "Transfer Student in Theatre." Your study has been approved for a period of one year. The continuing review date for this study is no later than 25 July 2009.

Based on the information you provided in Section 2 of the document submitted for continuing review, we have coded this study in our database as being permanently closed to the enrollment of new subjects, where all subjects have completed all research related activities, and the study remains open only for data analysis. To open enrollment or initiate research related interaction with subjects you must submit a modification and receive IRB approval prior to contacting subjects.

Even though enrollment of subjects has ended, federal regulations require continuing review of ongoing projects.

Please submit the form with sufficient time (i.e. three to four weeks) for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study, prior to the continuing review dates.

Failure to complete and submit the continuing review form will result in expiration of IRB approval on the continuing review date and the file will be administratively closed. As a courtesy to you, we will send a reminder of the approaching review prior to this date.

Any changes in the protocol or consent form should not be implemented without prior IRB review and approval, using the continuing review and/or modification form. These documents are located on the Office of Research Assurances website or available by calling (515) 294-4655, www.compliance.iastate.edu.

You must promptly report any of the following to the IRB: (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office of Research Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

DATE: 22 July 2009
TO: Jennifer Terry Boyenga
 321 N Van Buren, Ottumwa, IA 52501
CC: Larry Ebbers
 N225A Lagomarcino
FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
 Office of Research Assurances

Institutional Review Board
 Office of Research Assurances
 Vice Provost for Research
 1138 Pearson Hall
 Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
 515 294-4267
 FAX 515 294-4566

TITLE: Transfer Students in Theatre
IRB ID: 07-324

Approval Date: 22 July 2009
 Date for Continuing Review: 25 July 2010

The Co-Chair of Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has conducted the annual continuing review of the protocol entitled, "Transfer Student in Theatre." Your study has been approved for a period of one year. The continuing review date for this study is no later than 25 July 2009.

Based on the information you provided in Section 2 of the document submitted for continuing review, we have coded this study in our database as being permanently closed to the enrollment of new subjects, where all subjects have completed all research related activities, and the study remains open only for data analysis. To open enrollment or initiate research related interaction with subjects you must submit a modification and receive IRB approval prior to contacting subjects.

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You must promptly report any of the following to the IRB: (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office of Research Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT – FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Title of Study: Transfer Students in Theater

Investigator: Jennifer Terry Boyenga

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how a student who plans to major in theatre transfers from a community college to a four-year institution. The study is aimed at understanding the theatre student's experience of navigating the educational pipeline between institutions of higher education through the collection and analysis of personal narratives told by student participants to the investigator.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you have attended a community college, transferred to a four-year institution, and declared your intention to major in theatre.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for one semester. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed: You will participate in two focus groups composed of students who have transferred from the community college to the four-year institution. Each focus group will last approximately 90 minutes and the group will be asked a series of open ended questions about the transfer process they have experienced. You may share as much or as little as you like in the focus group. You may skip any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

The focus groups will be digitally recorded for transcription purposes. You may ask at any time during the focus group for the recording device to be turned off. Digital recordings will be stored as password protected computer files during this study and back-up CDs will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Your name and personal identifiers (four-year institution you are enrolled at, community college you attended, specific courses you are taking, hometown, etc) will be coded for confidentiality in the transcription process and will remain confidential in the reporting of the study findings. Recordings, transcripts, and informed consent sheets will be destroyed on or before 12/25/2010 at the completion of the study.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. However, transferring between educational institutions may be an emotional experience for some students and reporting on your experience may be a very personal journey. You may feel discomfort at re-visiting negative experiences of the transfer process (fear, rejection, adjustment issues). You have the option of turning off the recorder at any point in the focus group to reveal a personal story that you don't want included in the final reports of this study. You can also refuse to answer any question(s) that make you uncomfortable.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit future transfer students in theatre by providing valuable first-hand insight into the transfer process between the community college and four-year institution. Community college theater departments will be able to utilize this information to prepare future transfer students for the transition to the four-year institution and theatre departments at four-year institutions will be able to utilize this information to adapt or adjust their transfer initiatives. These

improvements will ease the pathway for future transfer students in theatre as they navigate the educational pipeline between the community college and four-year institution.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

1. You will be given the option to choose a code name for yourself or you will be assigned a unique code name. It will be used on transcripts and research findings reports instead of your name.
2. Digital recordings will be stored as password protected computer files during this study and back-up CDs will be stored in a locked file cabinet.
3. Recordings, transcripts, and informed consent sheets will be destroyed on or before 12/25/2010 at the completion of the study.
4. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

For further information about the study contact Jennnifer Terry Boyenga at 641-683-5122 or jboyenga@indianhills.edu. The faculty member supervising this research is Dr. Larry Ebbers in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department at Iowa State University and you may contact him at 515-294-8067 or lebbers@iastate.edu.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Research Assurances, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011. At the University of Northern Iowa, you may contact contact the office of the IRB Administrator at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

(Participant's Signature)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)

(Date)

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT – INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Title of Study: Transfer Students in Theater

Investigator: Jennifer Terry Boyenga

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how a student that plans to major in theatre transfers from a community college to a four-year institution. The study is aimed at understanding the theatre student's experience of navigating the educational pipeline between institutions of higher education through the collection and analysis of personal narratives told by student participants to the investigator.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you have attended a community college, transferred to a four-year institution, and declared your intention to major in theatre.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for one semester. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed: You will participate in three interviews about your transfer experiences. Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes and you will be asked a series of open ended questions about the transfer process you have experienced. You may share as much or as little as you like in the interview. You may skip any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. You will be emailed a copy of your transcripts to review and make additions or corrections to.

The interviews will be digitally recorded for transcription purposes. You may ask at any time during the interviews for the recording device to be turned off. Digital recordings will be stored as password protected computer files during this study and back-up CDs will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Your name and personal identifiers (four-year institution you are enrolled at, community college you attended, specific courses you are taking, hometown, etc) will be coded for confidentiality in the transcription process and will remain confidential in the reporting of the study findings. Recordings, transcripts, and this informed consent sheet will be destroyed three years following the completion of the study on December 25, 2011.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. However, transferring between educational institutions may be an emotional experience for some students and reporting on your experience may be a very personal journey. You may feel discomfort at re-visiting negative experiences of the transfer process (fear, rejection, adjustment issues). You have the option of turning off the recorder at any point in the interview to reveal a personal story that you don't want included in the final reports of this study. You can also refuse to answer any question(s) that make you uncomfortable.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit future transfer students in theatre by providing valuable first-hand insight into the transfer process between the community college and four-year institution. Community college theater departments will be able to utilize this information to prepare future transfer students for the transition to the four-year institution and theatre departments at four-year

institutions will be able to utilize this information to adapt or adjust their transfer initiatives. These improvements will ease the pathway for future transfer students in theatre as they navigate the educational pipeline between the community college and four-year institution.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled as an Indian Hills Community College graduate. There will be no negative consequences relating to your participation in your study as a former Indian Hills Community College student if you choose to leave the study or you choose not to participate in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

1. You will be given the option to choose a code name for yourself or you will be assigned a unique code name. It will be used on transcripts and research findings reports instead of your name.
2. Digital recordings will be stored as password protected computer files during this study and back-up CDs will be stored in a locked file cabinet.
3. Recordings, transcripts, and informed consent sheet will be destroyed on or before 12/25/2008 at the completion of the study.
4. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Jennnifer Terry Boyenga at 641-683-5122 or jboyenga@indianhills.edu. The faculty member supervising this research is Dr. Larry Ebbers in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department at Iowa State University and you may contact him at 515-294-8067 or lebbers@iastate.edu.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Research Assurances, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

(Participant's Signature)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)

(Date)

APPENDIX C. FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions	Transition Theory	Process Theory	4 S's
First Focus/Interview			
Please describe why you chose to attend a community college.	Moving in	Process/Meaning	Self
What has your experience at the community college been like?	Moving in	Process	Situation
What was theatre at the community college like?	Moving in	Context	Situation
What are you planning on majoring in at the four-year institution?	Moving in	Context	Self
What experiences at the community college led you to choose that plan of study?	Moving in	Context	Support/Situation
What has been the reaction of your family and friends to your choice of major?	Moving through	Context/Meaning	Support
Where are you planning on emphasizing within the major? Any minors?	Moving through	Process	Situation
What anxieties do you have about transferring to the four-year institution?	Moving in	Meaning	Self
What are you excited about in relation to the transfer to a four-year institution?	Moving in	Meaning	Self
What do you expect your program of study will be like?	Moving in	Context	Situation
What challenges do you think you'll encounter in the program of study?	Moving in	Context	Situation
How do you plan on surviving or persevering through these challenges?	Moving through	Process/Context	Strategies
How has the transition to the four-year institution been?	Moving through	Process/Context/ Meaning	Situation/Self

How did your community college prepare you for the transition?	Moving in	Process/Context	Support/Situation
What did the four-year institution do to prepare you or help you with the transition?	Moving in	Process/Context	Support/Situation
Second Focus/Interview Group Questions			
What has happened since our first meeting/conversation?	Moving through	Process/Context	Situation/Self
How has the adjustment to life in a four-year institution been?	Moving through	Meaning	Self/Support
Have there been any frustrating experiences since our last meeting? How have you coped?	Moving through	Context	Self/Situation/Strategy
What exciting things have happened to you?	Moving through	Context	Situation
How are your courses going? Shows? Auditions?	Moving through	Meaning	Situation
What is different between the community college and the four-year institution?	Moving through/out	Context	Situation
What has been the biggest challenge you've faced as a transfer student? How have you coped with it?	Moving through	Meaning/Context	Situation/Strategy
What is the best thing about coming from a community college?	Moving through/out	Meaning	Self
How can the four-year institution help future transfer students?	Moving out	Context	Situation/Support
How can the theatre department help future transfer students?	Moving out	Context	Situation/Support
Would it have been better to have spent all four years in the same institution?	Moving out	Meaning	Self

Final Interview Questions			
What has happened since our last conversation?	Moving through	Process/Context	Situation/Self
Are you still adjusting to the four-year institution?	Moving through/out	Process	Self/Strategy
Have there been any frustrating experiences since our last meeting? How have you coped?	Moving through	Context	Self/Situation/Strategy
What exciting things have happened to you?	Moving through	Context	Situation
How are your courses going? Shows? Auditions?	Moving through	Meaning	Situation
How can the four-year institution help future transfer students?	Moving out	Context	Situation/Support

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