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College Orientation for the First-Year and Transfer Student Populations: How Can the Needs of Both Groups Be Simultaneously Met During Orientation and Beyond?

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Introduction

Each autumn, millions of new students enter colleges and universities across the country. For many of these students, college orientation is a short program in the summer; for others, orientation begins the week before the fall semester, and still for others; orientation is nonexistent as a formal program. Regardless of its form, orientation is an institution's main opportunity to introduce and integrate new students into the campus community and culture, form class and institutional identity and prepare students to begin classes. Though the majority of new students are first-years, a significant number of participants in orientation are transfer students who have previously attended other two- or four-year colleges or universities. During orientation, transfer students are in a unique position; not yet integrated into their college community, they are often considered equal to first-years, though they have previous college experience. Creating and executing successful orientation programming for transfers and first-years simultaneously is difficult but essential to achieve; it can be argued that orientation is the most important contributor to the social and academic integration of new students.

This research will focus on the traditional orientation structure for small liberal arts colleges similar to Oberlin – a two to nine-day program for all new students beginning at move-in day and ending at the start of the fall semester or quarter. In addition, although most research on transfer students focuses on two-year college transfers, conclusions drawn in those studies are applicable to understanding students who transfer from one four-year college to another (the population I will be focusing on because it is most common at Oberlin). In general, orientation is an outward representation of a college's endeavor to smooth the new student transition. Many (even most) colleges have the same goals for orientation and differ only based on student populations and programming requirements. The benefit derived from focusing on schools akin

to Oberlin will be a greater understanding of how findings from this limited sample can best be applied to enhance Oberlin's orientation and the Oberlin College community.

College orientation, according to Robinson, Debra, Burns & Gaw (1996), helps students "make adjustments to college life and, most importantly, helps them establish the expectations, knowledge and behaviors that can lead to attainment of academic goals" (p. 66). Specifically, orientation most significantly impacts the social, academic and personal integration of new students into the college community, which in turn affects their first-year persistence and/or withdrawal decisions (Tinto, 1988). Though significant findings abound on the integration processes of new college students (Busby, Gammel & Jeffcoat 2002; Christie & Dunham 1991; Korte & Sylvester 1982; Strange 1999; Terezini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg & Jalomo 1993; Zakely, Fox, Morris & Jundt 2003), few focus specifically on how college orientation's activities and structure incorporate new students into the university and the surrounding community. By examining the history and main features of orientation, perspectives on the structure and activities of orientation, as well as orientation's outcomes from both the first-year and transfer student perspective, I aim to provide a clear conceptualization of new student orientation at the college level.

If an institution aims to smooth the transition process for new students, then the conflicting identity of the transfer student during orientation, as a blending of first-year and upperclassman characteristics must be further explored. This conflict stems from the treatment transfer students receive at orientation. Institutions often group transfers together with first-years, without sufficient programming to address their distinctive needs. Like the concept of the interracial mestiza (Anzaldua & Kauffman, 1993), the transfer student is at a crossroads during orientation between first-year and upperclassmen status. Orientation is the most important

catalyst for enabling both their integration into their new college environment and the development of their self-identification along and independent of the first-year-upperclassman continuum. Orientation can either help or hinder transfers' integration processes; by recognizing the conflicting identity of the transfer student, orientation can provide specialized activities and support. On the other hand, if orientation ignores transfers' needs, it can leave them to struggle alone in navigating their identity choice process.

The goal of my research was to understand how transfer students and first-years differently experience the first-year-centric atmosphere on campus during orientation and to provide a complete outline of how orientation can best support all new students without complete separation of both groups, which would strain institutional resources. How can the transfer student population best be served during orientation at Oberlin College?

Literature Review

The Key Elements of Orientation

Orientation's structure and focus has fluctuated greatly throughout recent history, the most recent trends including the conception of orientation as a retention tool and the incorporation of social and community-building activities to achieve a balance between social and academic events (Nadler, Miller & Dyer, 2004). In the 1980's, orientation was focused on communicating the usable skills such as community building and the setting of priorities that students needed to succeed. In the subsequent decade, orientation lacked a central goal, which led to the execution of many activities that were not helpful in integrating students into their new communities (Ward-Roof & Cawthon, 2003). Presently, orientation's success can be clearly measured through the use of specific standards (including the Council for the Advancement of Standards' (CAS) recommendations for new student orientation), which has resulted in more standardized and successful orientation programs at colleges and universities across the country (Nadler et al., 2004; CAS, 1986). College orientation has always been designed to aid new students as they face a tremendous life transition. For the first time, most new students begin to live away from home, interact primarily with peers and enjoy almost complete independence from family and home life, all while being greatly challenged both inside and outside of the classroom. To ease this transition, orientation programs assist students in establishing expectations for their college experience, as well as the knowledge and behavior to fulfill their goals successfully (Robinson et al., 1996).

Many authors have identified the key elements of orientation, among them Robinson et al. (1996), who found the most important elements of college orientation to be: total campus commitment; orientation programming that occurs prior to and through the start of classes;

increased variety in programs and activities; the involvement of students, faculty and staff and constant evaluation and improvement of programming. Although orientation varies greatly from institution to institution, a common thread is the need for collaboration amongst the university community in planning and executing orientation. More specifically, Zakely, Fox, Morris and Jundt (2003) proposed that orientation best serves students by teaching them the tools necessary to balance their academic and social lives. Finally, Zis (2002) recommends that orientation be adapted specifically to accommodate the changing characteristics of today's college student.

College students have changed remarkably from the turn of the nineteenth century to today. At its origin, college was primarily populated by farm boys studying to be ministers and slowly opened up to more individuals by the beginning of the twentieth century primarily because of the increasing industrialization of America (Horowitz, 1987). By the 1920's, college was the primary catalyst for achieving career success for most middle and upper-class youth (Horowitz, 1987). As college attendance increased, standards for admissions became more selective. With the introduction of the G.I. Bill of Rights in 1944, college became an option for veterans and many other individuals because of the increasing demands for competent and skilled workers in society. As a result, college enrollment exponentially increased. In the 1960's and 70's, many social groups began to value college as a means to achieving financial stability, which translated to increased diversity in college enrollment (Horowitz, 1987). Today's typical college student, a member of the millennial generation, enjoys greater parental involvement, most likely works for pay, can easily adapt to change and is characterized as confident, sheltered, pressured and achieving (Zis, 2002). The increasing rate of non-traditional college students (including adults, immigrants, married and working students) who primarily attend community colleges necessitates orientation variance on an institutional basis (Keller, 2001). In fact,

approximately forty-five percent of today's college students attend community colleges across the country (Saunders & Bauer, 1998, p. 12). As a result, the structure of orientation should reflect the overall nature of today's college students, while taking into account the specific students at each institution. Suggested means for creating this specialized orientation include constant revision of orientation from year to year and examination of incoming student demographics and trends each fall. Beyond adapting orientation to fit changing student characteristics, recognizing the unique differences between institutions in planning and executing orientation is important. Because patterns of social and academic integration vary based on institution type and size (Chapman & Pascarella, 1983), orientation recommendations must be tailored to fit the needs and goals of each individual institution.

The Structure and Activities of Orientation – The Orientation Director Perspective

When examining the structure of college orientation, two main perspectives are important: that of the orientation director and that of the student participants. Often, the most influential person in the planning process is the orientation director, who is typically a senior member of the student affairs staff that plans and executes new student orientation once or twice a year. Orientation directors primarily seek to maintain a balance between academically and socially/personally focused events (Zakely et al., 2003); as a result, they employ many strategies that have been proven effective at a variety of colleges across the country.

One such strategy, developed by Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt and Associates (2005) is that of "front-loading," which involves presenting a large amount of information to students through many events at the beginning of a student's college career. Front-loading aims to increase students' independence in the learning process. Orientation is an example of front-loading

because it provides instruction and events for new students prior to the start of the school year and is a catalyst for the socialization of new students into the college environment. Magolda's (1997) participant-observation study on college orientation studied several uncommon orientation strategies used by Miami University in Ohio. The first is intentional socialization, wherein orientation activities are designed to form community amongst new students and simultaneously facilitate their integration into the larger campus community. Incorporated into this strategy is Van Gennep's (1960) conception of the rites of passages that mark individual transitions through the lifecycle. Orientation aids in students' integration processes because it provides rituals that socialize new students. Or, as Magolda quotes, "rites of passage such as orientation not only teach new students what to do, but how to be students" (Van Maanen, 1984, p. 85). The second strategy is the creation of common purpose, while the third, and perhaps the most unique, is the concept of disorientation, which aims to "cause students to pause to examine their personal assumptions" (Magolda, 1997, p. 88). Both prior to and during attendance at orientation, students were challenged academically (by summer reading assignments), socially (by being pushed to understand and value diversity) and personally (by built-in orientation events meant for self-reflection). Miami University's "welcome week" is a unique example of an orientation that attempts to challenge new students while integrating them into their community - a feat that is regarded by most in the student affairs community as difficult to achieve (Magolda, 1997). Magolda (1997) intentionally questions the "maximize support, minimize challenge" philosophy that many orientation directors subscribe to, and, by doing so, creates a valid argument for an alternative approach to college orientation (p. 47).

One of the challenges that orientation directors face in planning and executing orientation is the difficulty of achieving complete campus commitment. The relationship between student

affairs staff and faculty is often strained because both sides lack a full understanding of their colleagues' job responsibilities (Zakely et al., 2003). Because academic integration is a key aspect of orientation, involving faculty through academic advising and event attendance is crucial to new student success. In addition, the orientation director must recognize the diversity of today's college students in their event preparation and planning. Different students derive the greatest benefits from different types of activities. For example, Singer (2003) found that when examining the benefit of the campus visit pre-orientation, students of color found it more useful than their Caucasian counterparts.

Orientation directors must be "not only supervisors, planners and administrators, but also use their skills in ways that educate students through experience and reflection" (Benjamin, Earnest, Gruenewald & Arthur, 2007, p. 23). Orientation directors understand the complexity and distinctiveness of the new college student experience and focus their attention on providing diverse events and incorporating faculty, current students and staff in fulfilling the social, academic and personal needs of new students.

The Structure and Activities of Orientation – The First-Year Perspective

New students' needs are significant; the structure and activities of orientation are designed to begin to fulfill the diverse requirements of the new college student. Few studies have focused specifically on how students' pre- and post-orientation needs differ, which is an important strategy for determining the usefulness of orientation (Daddona and Cooper, 2002). Daddona and Cooper (2002) assessed the utility of orientation by examining the degree to which it integrated new students into the university community. Not surprisingly, they found that the needs of students varied based on demographic characteristics such as sex, race and in-state

status. They specifically found that women have higher personal and emotional needs, African-Americans have higher social and academic needs and out-of-state students have higher needs overall. In general, most needs decreased post-orientation, but the higher needs were consistently academic or career-focused (Daddona and Cooper, 2002 & Moore, 1981). This study is significant when applied to the process of activity selection during orientation; Daddona and Cooper (2002) recommended that social, personal and emotional events should remain in place, while academic events should be emphasized and career-focused events should be added if they do not already exist. In planning orientation, an institution must recognize the individual hierarchical importance of new students' needs because, "no matter how carefully planned and executed, programs that first-years do not consider beneficial are not effective" (Perigo & Upcraft, 1989, p. 301).

Another study in support of this conception of orientation aimed to examine the importance of student need fulfillment and identify the necessary elements of orientation (Kramer and Washburn, 1983). In viewing orientation from the student's perspective, it is important to acknowledge the variety of emotions that new students experience during their transition to college. During orientation and in the months to follow, students shift their values, habits and outlook drastically, which causes stress and anxiety (Feldman and Newcomb, 1970). This study suggests that orientation may function to assuage the needs of new students and decrease their overall stress levels. Kramer and Washburn's findings on students differing orientation needs were similar to Daddona and Cooper's (2002), in that academic and career needs proved to be the most salient and women were found to have higher need levels than men. Kramer and Washburn's emphasized the career needs of new students in line with society's need hierarchy at the time, in which the career was the "organizing center for the lives of most men

and women" (Chickering & Havinghurst, 1981, p. 315). In formulating an overall opinion on student need fulfillment pre-and post-orientation, more weight should be placed on the findings of Daddona and Cooper than that of Kramer and Washburn because of the significant time difference between the two studies.

Soliciting feedback on orientation can be an effective strategy for identifying the student perspective on orientation. Peterson and Borden (1993) conducted many interviews and focus groups with new students post-orientation in order to assess the quality and utility of the orientation program at North Carolina State University. Categories covered included academic advising, registration, peer orientation assistants and the evaluation of specific events. The student perspective on orientation characterized by Peterson and Borden's findings is that of frustration with the lack of personalized support; during orientation, students want to speak with their academic advisor one-on-one, work intimately with a peer mentor and be presented with concise and relatively brief information in a small group setting. In short, the new college student recognizes that "college is an adjustment 'that no information session can fix for you'" (Peterson and Borden, 1993, p.16); approaching orientation on the individual and small group level can positively contribute to the adjustment process.

The specific studies cited in this section do not attempt to summarize the first-year student's perspective on orientation. Instead, by identifying the most important needs and wants of new students, I hope to characterize the new student as having fairly consistent desires - to be prepared for college academics, socially accepted and personally fulfilled. Orientation is primarily a catalyst for the fulfillment of these desires.

<u>The Structure and Activities of Orientation – The Transfer Student Perspective</u>

Overall, four-year college transfer students represent a small proportion of all students entering new colleges each year, so research on their orientation experiences is inherently limited. By examining college, student and theoretical identity management perspectives in previous literature, I aim to define the transfer student in order to explain why they experience identity conflict during orientation. Ward-Roof, Kashner and Hodge (2003) captured the difficulty of the transfer student transition by characterizing the transfer student as "academically well-prepared but unprepared for the psychological aspects of the transfer process" (p. 99). During orientation, new transfers are experiencing their second (or third) transition into college, which translates into heightened anxiety levels compared to other new students because they are perpetually in transition. In addition, transfer students face significant barriers to success at their new colleges, including curricular issues (such as credit transfer), financial aid problems, and policy barriers (including placement tests and late registration). If executed correctly, orientation can function to remove transfers' barriers to entry by orienting them to the college community, decreasing their anxiety and facilitating the formation of a transfer student community (Ward-Roof et al., 2003).

Many individuals have surveyed, interviewed and conducted focus groups with transfer students across the country and have identified key institutional elements that contribute to transfer student success (as measured by their integration into the campus community). Faculty and student mentoring programs serve as principal resources for transfers during their first weeks on campus (Anstett, 1973). Providing plentiful opportunities for academic advising and credit evaluation can help ease the concerns of transfers before they begin classes (Anstett, 1973), and designating a space for transfers to interact in an informal way is also important (Robbins, 1942).

Whenever possible, dividing students into small groups and substituting informal activities for formal ones can provide an individualized orientation experience (Robbins, 1942). In addition, creating unique transfer student environments and incorporating old transfers in the planning and execution of orientation provides the recognition that transfers need during the first-year-centric orientation process (Ward-Roof & Cawthon, 2003). "The orientation program, by aiding the student to discover his abilities, facilitates his task of directing his efforts into the most profitable channels, thus alleviating many stumbling blocks to adjustment;" orientation functions to help new transfers become a part of their institutions (Robbins, 1942, p. 486).

Research focusing on how individuals and groups manage two conflicting identities (which for transfers students is their first-year and upperclassman identities) focuses on how the subject either connects both identities or constructs a separate identity - our approach in conceptualizing the transfer student will be the latter. Cornell's "That's the Story of our Life" (2000), details how narratives facilitate the identity formation process in ethnic groups. Identity goes hand in hand with narrative; narrative is a crucial process that involves selecting events, linking the events together and interpreting them by making claims about their significance to the group. As a marginal group, transfer students are not part of the mainstream first-year culture during orientation. The transfer student narrative is a narrative of multiplicity; it unifies many different students based on the premise that transfers "are the people who do not fit the established categories" (50). This narrative, formed during the struggles of orientation and cemented with friendships based on common bonds, is what sustains the transfer student group identity both during and beyond orientation. Transfer students create their own narrative, which contributes to the formation of a separate class identity.

Gray and Thumma's (1998) characterization of "The Gospel Hour," a weekly event at a

gay bar in Atlanta that combines the gay culture of drag with the Christian culture of gospel in the production of a Sunday service, details how "culturally marginal groups" (such as transfers during orientation) "create new cultural forms and practices through ritual" (p. 81). The gospel hour presents an alternative to combining individuals' contradictory identities because it allows Gay Christians to create a separate space that reconciles this conflict in an innovative way. Transfer students, too, struggle to understand and define their class identity during orientation and can (and will) chose to develop a unique transfer student identity in lieu of defining themselves only by their first-year and upperclassman characteristics. Transfers respond to the tension inherent during their first-year-centric orientation program by forging a transfer student identity that allows them, similarly to the Gay Christian men, to feel comfortable and minimize identity conflict.

Though transfer students are a unique group that is separate from first-years, it is difficult to identify the average transfer student because of the inherent diversity in the transfer student population. Transfer students differ based on many attributes, among them their level of extracurricular involvement (as measured by Ose (1997)). Compared to transfers who were uninvolved, transfer students who were more involved in extracurricular activities were more connected to their institution and more satisfied with their college experience upon graduation (Ose, 1997). Transfers also differ in their level of transfer student self-awareness, although when transfers are made aware of their institution's demands and expectations, they are more successful (Holahan, 1982). Increasing transfers' awareness is important because "this awareness on the part of the student could be constructively used by the university in targeting programs and securing participation of students who have special needs that go beyond those of the average college student" (Holahan, 1982, pp. 501).

One of the main difficulties in supporting the transfer student transition is that transfer students have definitive expectations for their new college experience. Ward-Roof and Cawthon (2003) found that because transfers have preset expectations and ideas about their new college and believe that changing colleges will remedy all of their previous academic and social issues, programming for transfers during orientation should attempt to remove these false expectations. Transfer students also tend to have overwhelmingly positive and somewhat unrealistic expectations for their new college experience (Zultowski & Catron, 1976). In addition, most transfers are aware that they differ from the typical new student; therefore, orientation must walk a fine line between celebrating transfer student uniqueness and alienating the transfer student population. Miville and Sedlacek (1995) found that "transfer students' awareness of themselves as a unique group was important in predicting their expectations of academic success" (150); when transfers form a unique transfer student identity, they more successfully integrate into their new college or university.

Orientation and the Modification of Expectations

Both first-years and transfer students formulate many expectations for college prior to their arrival at new student orientation; the university functions during orientation as a support system which aids students in realistically modifying their expectations to fit in with the values and goals of the institution. New student expectations can be conceptualized as a form of anticipatory socialization, wherein an individual adopts the values, attitudes and lifestyle of a social group in anticipation of their entry into this group (Merton, 1957). Examining the specific changes that new students undergo as a function of their anticipatory socialization can determine orientation's impact on individual's expectations. Orientation affects the anticipatory

socialization of new students by positively impacting their expectations and therefore increasing the likelihood of their integration into campus life. When ideally executed, orientation can successfully facilitate a "student's initial ability to cope with a new set of social challenges in an unfamiliar environment" by preparing them for the college adjustment process (Pascarella, Terezini & Wolfe, 1986, p.170).

The university plays an important role in the adjustment of first-year expectations through the messages it conveys to students during important programming such as orientation. Singer (2003) studied the role of the campus visit and orientation in influencing students' expectations of their college experience on the basis of certain important themes that the program intended to communicate. Through surveying a large number of students both pre- and post-orientation, he found that the university of interest was successful at modifying expectations in the desired way on the majority of the themes, including opinions on academic work, available support, student development and knowledge of the university. Because Singer does not explain how the university's orientation programming was designed, it is difficult to infer how another university can apply these techniques to successfully modify their students' expectations. However, Singer (2003) summarizes succinctly one important conclusion that can be derived from this study; "in order to increase the percentage of students who remain at the college where they began, universities must help students develop clear expectations about the college experience during the pre-matriculation period" (p. 56).

Krallman (1997) examined the differences and similarities between first-year student academic, social and personal expectations both pre- and post-orientation in a sample of three hundred first-years at Miami University in Ohio. Academically, many students expected college to be similar to high school, including a dependence on faculty to aid in the learning process.

However, post-orientation, academic expectations increased, perhaps signifying that orientation can function to communicate the increased difficulty of college academics as compared to high school. On a personal level, students' optimistic pre-orientation expectations of success were modified by orientation in that their self-confidence was lowered (Krallman, 1997, p. 5). In this sample, orientation provided a "reality check" by questioning students' preparedness for college. The last aspect of orientation expectations tested was first-years' social expectations. Post-orientation, more students recognized their changing relationship with family, the influence of peer pressure on their lives and the diversity in everyday interactions with individuals on campus. Therefore, orientation functioned as a catalyst for social integration by initiating the separation process that is the first step in undergoing a rite of passage (Van Gennep, 1960).

Kuh (2004) identifies an important issue involved in understanding students' expectations of college: the gap between expectations and experience. This gap, though manifested in many different ways, can be tackled through the implementation of appropriate orientation programming. Essentially, "what students actually do in their first year of college falls short of what they expected to do" (Kuh, 2004, p. 89). Students expect to take advantage of the academic support offered, develop an influential relationship with faculty and become involved with formal extracurricular activities, but expectations in all of these categories fall short compared to reality. The main cause identified for this gap is the freshman myth; over-excited by the prospect of college, new students tend to overstate the extent to which they will be involved in their campus community. This myth is most evident both academically and socially. In the classroom, though student expectations are high, most end up not doing enough to receive the maximum benefit from college (Kuh, 2004, p. 99). Outside of the classroom, students report less

involvement in extracurricular activities than expected. Orientation can help mend the gap by communicating to students from the beginning of their college careers realistic expectations for academic, social and personal success at school. To best achieve this goal, orientation should be tailored to today's student (as mentioned earlier by Zis, 2002) and be as accessible as possible. Also, orientation directors should not assume that students would use services just because they are designed to help them. Students should be exposed to diversity from the beginning and, perhaps most importantly, orientation should clearly and effectively communicate the university's values and, as will be discussed later, balance and incorporate academic and social activities. The conceptualization of orientation as an intervention can best explain how it affects the expectations of new students; orientation "can serve as an important intervention experience to assist students in developing a realistic view of college experience" (Krallman, 1997, p. 7). Realism is paramount in ensuring new student success because it prevents disillusionment, which can negatively impact integration and persistence patterns.

Orientation Outcomes – Social and Academic Integration

In many of the studies cited, the key transitional markers for new college students include social, academic and personal integration. Zakely's (2003) literature review provides a clear definition of both the social and academic integration of new students during orientation. The main contributors to academic integration during orientation include academic advising, academic preparedness and the tackling of unrealistic expectations and career confusion. Integrating students academically is important because it is the first step towards graduation; however, its prevalence within orientation programs is decreasing in line with increasing emphasis on social integration (Zakely, 2003). The most difficult aspect of integrating students

academically is the weak relationship between student affairs staff and faculty that is caused

by each group lacking an understanding of the job responsibilities of the other group. Bridging

this information gap is important for achieving campus unity during orientation and, in turn,

facilitating the academic integration of new students.

The social integration of new students involves the gaining of autonomy and

independence, the searching for and development of identity and the introduction of intimacy.

An individual's background heavily influences their social integration. Therefore, it is important

for student affairs staff to recognize the variance in college students today by developing

orientation programs that highlight and celebrate student diversity. Common strategies utilized to

socially integrate new students into the campus community include the use of small group

sessions, peers and role-playing to teach students in a lively, truthful way about the campus and

community and provide ample opportunities for socializing. Successful social integration can

only be achieved when students' have realistic expectations; orientation should therefore

function to communicate both what is expected of students and what they should expect during

their first year of college. Other forms of new student integration studied include career

integration (Daddona & Cooper, 2002 & Kramer & Washburn, 1983) and personal/emotional

integration (Robison, Burns & Gaw, 1996 & Korte & Sylvester, 1982). Within the general

framework of orientation, both career and personal integration are not nearly as significant as

social and academic integration. Therefore, this research focuses exclusively on measuring only

the social and academic integration of new students. Orientation provides "learning experiences

that help students understand and make adaptations to change;" this change is clearly divided

among social and academic realms that both affect persistence and withdrawal patterns of new

students (Robinson, 1996, p. 55).

<u>Orientation Outcomes – Persistence and Withdrawal Decisions</u>

One of the measures of the effectiveness of college orientation is its impact on the persistence and withdrawal decisions of college first-years. Though retention rates vary based on institution and year, research has shown that the reasons students leave college in the first year are significantly different than the reasons that contribute to departure in subsequent years (Daubman, Williams, Johnson & Crump, 1985 & Louis and Potter, 1986). Orientation has an explicit goal of integrating students into the university community, which impacts persistence and withdrawal rates of first-year students in a variety of ways.

Tinto (1988) investigated the motivation for first-year student departure within the context of Van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage theory. Rites of passage, as explained by Van Gennep (1960), mark the various transitions individuals experience along the path from birth to death and between social groups. The stages inherent in all rites of passage include separation, transition and incorporation. The first, separation, is marked by a decline in interactions with the members of one's old group, as well as the possible rejection of one's old community. The middle step, transition, occurs when individuals begin interacting within their new group. This step is often the most stressful and isolating point during the process. The final step is incorporation, which includes the "finding and adopting of norms appropriate to the new college setting and establishing competent membership in the social and intellectual communities of college life" (Van Gennep, 1960, p. 446). College orientation is a key component in the incorporation process because it includes formal rituals and ceremonies that are significant in most societal transitions. In addition, orientation is designed to combat student withdrawal by socially, academically and personally integrating new students into college life. However, one of the reasons that orientation can be difficult for students is that transitions are often a time of

loneliness and normlessness, akin to Durkheim's conception of anomie (Tinto, 1988, p. 441). Tinto's recommendations for increasing student persistence rates in the first-year include the incorporation of public rituals into orientation, creating orientation activities that function to incorporate all students into the community, helping students integrate through the formation of bonds with peers and extending orientation to the end of the first semester. College student persistence decisions are complicated at best; to understand why students choose to leave their college, it is best to know that "effective retention and the involvement of individuals in the social and intellectual life of the college are one and the same" (Tinto, 1988, p. 453). When orientation functions as a tool for the social, academic and personal integration of new students, it can help lower withdrawal rates at colleges across the country.

Pascarella et al. (1986) took a directed approach in examining the link between orientation and college persistence by conceptualizing orientation as an intervention designed to increase student persistence rates by facilitating social and academic integration. Utilizing Tinto's (1975) framework, they measured levels of social and academic integration, goal and institutional commitment and persistence decisions in a sample of 763 college first-years. Orientation was found to impact students by facilitating their involvement in extracurricular activities and interaction with faculty. Most importantly, orientation participation had the largest positive and indirect effect on first-year persistence because it increases social integration and institutional commitment (Pascarella et al., 1986, p. 167). Pascarella et al. also found orientation's impact on students to be based more on quality then on quantity of involvement. Perhaps then orientation might best serve new students by providing more limited, high-quality and personalized events that aid in the social integration of new students, which, in turn, can affect their persistence decisions. Because, after all, "the stronger the individual's level of social

and academic integration, the greater his or her subsequent commitment to the institution and to the goal of college graduation" (Tinto, 1975, p. 24).

In order to measure orientation's specific effect on persistence decisions, Busby et al. (2002) longitudinally examined data on orientation attendance, first-semester GPA and graduation rates of incoming new students at one university. In support of their hypotheses, they found that first-years that attended orientation had significantly higher graduation rates and first-semester GPA's than those who did not attend. Though this study was simple in design and not generalizable to other universities (because orientation's structure varies greatly among colleges), it is valuable because it shows a clear correlation between orientation and student success. If it is orientation's goal to "serve as a transition structure between a student's past and future learning experience," Busby et al. identified specific variables that can clearly measure how well this transition is completed (p. 45).

Orientation Outcomes – College Adjustment in the First Year

Though this research is restricted to a definition of orientation that includes only activities that occur in the week prior to the start of a new semester, it is important to acknowledge that orientation is an ongoing process throughout the first semester and beyond; the impact of orientation is extensive. Various scales have been created to measure adjustment to college, including one tested by Baker and Siryk (1984) that measures academic, social and personal adjustment, as well as institutional and goal commitment. Tested over three separate first-year classes, the variables measured include the seeking of psychological services, first-year GPA, election to an academic honors society, social activity attendance, application for dorm positions and persistence decisions at the completion of the freshman year. In general, these

factors were found to be reliable and valid predictors of persistence to the third semester for new students; it seems as if "the general subscale provides an index of the quality of the relationship between the individual student and the institution" (Baker & Siryk, 1984, p. 187). Baker and Siryk's findings support a conception of orientation as a catalyst for social, academic and personal integration.

Before orientation's impact on the first-year student can be fully understood, the contextual factors and individual background characteristics must be examined in turn as key elements in determining the influence of orientation attendance on integration. Martin and Dixon (1989, 1994) completed two studies that investigated the effect of students' locus of control classification on their orientation attendance and subsequent adjustment to college. It was hypothesized that students with an internal locus of control (who attribute responsibility and control for various life events to the individual) would be more adjusted to college at the fifth week than those with an external locus of control and comprise the majority of the students who attended orientation. An individual's locus of control was not found to affect their orientation attendance, and orientation attendance was not found to affect adjustment to college in both studies (Martin & Dixon, 1989, 1994). However, on average, those students who possessed an internal locus of control were more adjusted to college life. When this study was repeated in 1994, locus of control was again found to be an important influence on college adjustment. In this study, orientation attendance was shown to be less significant in the college adjustment process than an individual's overall disposition; examining the contextual factors that affect college transition might help explain this finding.

New students' backgrounds are influential in determining the ease of their transition into college; where and how an individual was raised impacts their overall adjustment to college in

the first year. Terezini et al. (1994) conducted open-ended focus groups with new students in order to determine how their diverse backgrounds impacted their transition to college. They found that for traditional students, college is a continuation of a lifelong process, with the most difficult aspect of the transition being social. However, for nontraditional students (typically of an older age), college represents a deviation from their societal norms, which makes all aspects of the transition trying. All students seek validation – "a series of in- and out-of-class experiences with family, peers, faculty members and staff through which students come to feel accepted in their new community" – however, for traditional students, this is more social and for non-traditional students it is more academic (p. 66). Another main influence on students' transitions is their status as an on- or off-campus resident (Christie & Dinham, 1991). Students living on-campus had more opportunities to form friendships and socialize, which increased their identification as a part of the larger college network. However, students living off-campus were partially or fully preventing from integrating into their college community due to their close ties with family and high school friends. Adjusting and transitioning to college also differs on an individual level; significant influences on this process include personality, individual disposition and student status. Orientation can only impact new students insofar as they attend and benefit from the programs because of their relevance to them as individuals. "A successful transition for any given student is a cooperative activity, involving the individual and the will to succeed and a variety of other people willing to make success for that student possible;" orientation has the potential to be a crucial influence on this transition (Terezini et al., 1994, p. 72).

This literature review does not attempt to summarize the information published about orientation; it instead aims to provide background information on what orientation is, how it has evolved and continues to be adapted to fit specific needs, the populations that are influential in

the study of orientation and the intended outcomes of orientation. The findings in previous

literature were integral in supporting the research completed at Oberlin College regarding the

needs, expectations and outcomes of two differing populations that experience orientation – first-

years and transfer students. Outlining the practice of college orientation in the literature review

supports the examination of how and why these two populations differ and how this difference

can be reconciled in the planning and execution of orientation.

Research Methods

The goal of this project was to provide a complete understanding of how a representative sample of first-year and transfer students at Oberlin College experienced new student orientation in August of 2007. To conduct my research, I interviewed both first-years and transfers from October 2007 to February 2008 on their expectations for Oberlin, orientation experiences and outcomes of orientation. I chose to interview both first-years (students without any college attendance records) and transfers (second- or third-year students who had attended one or more colleges) in order to provide a complete conceptualization of how new students experience orientation. Though there may be new college students at Oberlin who do not fall into one of these categories (i.e. adult, non-traditional students), the significance of these outlying individuals is small in relation to our two main categorizations. Eleven first-years (three male, eight female) and nine transfers (one male, eight female) were interviewed primarily during the eight, ninth and tenth weeks of their first semester on campus. During this time period, new students are fully adjusted and are the most emotionally stable. This is an ideal time to conduct interviews because it provides the best data on students' completed transitions (Pascarella, Terezini & Wolfe, 1986). All names cited are pseudonyms chosen either by the interviewees or the researcher at the time of interview. Specific to transfer students, the significant changes in transfer student orientation programming at Oberlin College within the past year necessitated an examination of only this year's transfer student orientation. According to Tina Zwegat (Oberlin's Director of Orientation), the only specific transfer student events during the past decade were a pizza dinner and a meeting with the registrar. Beginning with orientation in the fall of 2007, a handful of transfer-student-specific social activities were added. Also, new transfers now have the option of living on a transfer-student hall in an on-campus residence.

In addition to interviewing first-years and transfer students, I also conducted nine interviews with orientation directors at colleges and universities across the country in September and October of 2007. The goal of these interviews was to understand the role of the orientation director and the scope of new student orientation at institutions across the country. Ranging from small liberal arts colleges in the South to large private universities in the Midwest, this sample was diverse (except for the fact that each school was characterized as having a highly selective admissions status) and provided a clear picture of the current trends in college orientation programming. Information collected from these interviews can only provide an institutional perspective on orientation. I initially aimed to understand orientation from both the student and institutional perspectives, however, my topic shifted midway through my research process to examining the differences and similarities between the first-year and transfer orientation experience. For this reason, my overall findings from this section are not applicable in light of this new focus and will not be completely explored, only discussed generally regarding their relation to other topics and findings.

First-Year Students

For the first-year component of my research, my initial research methodology was the focus group because I believed that this would provide the best feedback on orientation; however, I quickly realized that interviews were the more appropriate format for conceptualizing how the first-year experiences orientation. According to *Focus Group Practice* (Puchta & Potter, 2004), focus groups are "carefully planned discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (p. 73). I chose to conduct a focus group for two reasons; I hoped that the interviewees would remind each other of their

orientation experiences in case they had forgotten certain parts and that generating discussion about orientation would provide more concrete information. In reality, the focus group format was not successful because it only produced feedback about Oberlin's orientation program; instead of generating theoretical ideas about orientation and how it can be successful at integrating all new students, the focus group conversation degenerated into criticism and praise of Oberlin's orientation. I chose to switch my research format to interviews because I felt that participants would be more honest and thorough in describing their orientation experiences.

Interviews were solicited from first-years in Introductory Sociology classes at Oberlin during October 2007 and a snowball sampling technique was utilized in order to secure more study participants. In total, eleven interviews were conducted and audio recorded at the researcher's house and ranged in length from twenty to thirty minutes. Interview topics included expectations for Oberlin, orientation attendance and satisfaction, need fulfillment and the outcomes of orientation. Students' expectations for Oberlin were measured by their predicted ability to succeed and their reported orientation expectations. Orientation attendance and satisfaction were conceptualized as interviewees' self-reported attendance at different categories of orientation events and the effectiveness of orientation at achieving a variety of items. Finally, participants' needs fulfillment and the outcomes of orientation were measured by their change in knowledge of Oberlin and its resources and orientation's impact on their overall transition to college. The majority of the interview questions were open-ended, though some asked for specific yes or no answers with elaboration

The sample of students included eleven first-years between the ages of eighteen and nineteen, of which three were male, eight were female, two were athletes, all were college students and the majority lived in divided doubles in dorms that housed all four classes.

Geographically, interviewees were originally from eleven different states that were evenly split between the Midwest, East coast and West coast (with one participant from the South). The only influential imbalance in this sample is gender; when analyzing the findings, it is important to acknowledge that this study may not be completely generalizable to the typical, gender-balanced college student population. Though this sample is not gender-balanced, it represents the diversity on college campuses today and is therefore still powerful in providing an understanding of how the first-year experiences and is impacted by orientation.

Transfer Students

In order to ascertain the degree to which transfers experienced tension and managed their conflicted identities during orientation, I chose interviews as my main research methodology. Survey research would not have provided as clear of a picture of each individual's orientation experience. In addition, focus groups, though useful in generating feedback and understanding individuals' perceptions of an area of interest, would not fully characterized the identity management process (Puchta & Potter, 2004). By utilizing an interview format, I hoped to gain in-depth knowledge of how the individual student is influenced by Oberlin's policies concerning transfer student orientation and the relative salience of their "freshman" and "upperclassman" identities during orientation. Interview questions were formatted using an identity management framework that was markedly different than the more general approach in creating the first-year interview questions. This specialized approach was designed to highlight how transfers experience an orientation that is oftentimes inapplicable to their situation as a student that is new to the policies and procedures of Oberlin College but has previous college experience.

Over the course of a week in early November, requests were sent via e-mail to all new

transfers requesting participation in a research project regarding orientation. Overall, nine

students responded and interview times were arranged between November 2007 and February

2008. All interviews were conducted in a similar format to the first-years' interviews, but

differed by focusing on interviewees' pre-Oberlin experiences, expectations for Oberlin, identity

formation and choice, tension and satisfaction with orientation and orientation outcomes.

Beginning with pre-Oberlin experiences and expectations for Oberlin, questions focused on

interviewees' reasons for transferring and how their previous college experience affected their

confidence in their ability to become socially and academically integrated into college. This is

important because understanding students' reasons for transferring provides a conceptualization

of how they form their self-identity at Oberlin in light of their given transfer student status. The

next section of questions asked interviewees the extent to which they agreed with the idea of the

transfer student as experiencing tension between their first-year and upperclassman identities,

and, in turn, the specific ways that orientation affected their self-categorization along and

independent of the spectrum from first-year to upperclassman. Orientation tension and

satisfaction were measured by focusing on interviewees' attendance at general and transfer

events in order to determine the extent to which they chose to assert their identity as a "transfer

student" - unique from first-years. Transfers at Oberlin this year had the opportunity to attend

four separate social and community-oriented events throughout the course of the seven-day

orientation. Understanding the specific reasons students chose to attend and not attend these

events will lead to a conceptualization of the conflict experienced (or not experienced) by these

students during orientation. The final interview questions focused on the salience of their transfer

identity after orientation and the overall outcomes of orientation.

  Of the nine interviewees, eight were female and one was male and all were between the

ages of nineteen and twenty-one and classified themselves as sophomore or junior transfer students. A third were conservatory students and two-thirds were college students, and, while the majority of interviewees were from the Midwest, one was from Alaska and one was from Virginia. Most interviewees lived in four-class or upperclassman dorms in open or divided double rooms. Though the ratio of two-year college transfer students to four-year college transfer students at Oberlin is unknown, having interacted with the majority of transfers this year, I have found that most (if not all) transfers into Oberlin come from other larger four-year colleges and universities. In line with this trend, six out of the nine interviewees transferred from larger public and private schools and only three transferred from small, private universities. Eight out of nine interviewees considered themselves sophomores and one considered herself a junior, though, for a few, their class status at Oberlin did not necessarily match-up with their true class status determined by their age. This was often because of time spent between leaving their first college and transferring to Oberlin. In addition, though there was a lack of gender balance because most interviewees were female, new transfers this year were almost twice more likely to be female than male. This sample, though small in size and not gender-balanced, is characteristically representative of the typical Oberlin transfer student who transferred from a larger public university and entered Oberlin as a sophomore.

Findings

<u>Orientation Directors</u>

Interviews conducted with orientation directors yielded considerable data on the structure

and activities of orientation at institutions across the country, as well as the institutional

perspective on orientation. Demographically, interviewees have served as their college's

orientation director anywhere from seven months to twenty years, though the median number of

years was three. The institutions sampled ranged from small liberal arts colleges to medium-

sized research universities and the orientation programs ranged from multiple summer sessions

with a fall component to a pre-semester fall orientation program. The most common program

was five days long and occurred prior to the beginning of the fall semester in August or

September.

The reported goals for orientation were: socially and academically integrating students

into the university, acclimating students to the university and local communities and providing

the resources and tools necessary for student success. Subject J, an orientation director at a small

research university, summarized the orientation director's goal for orientation:

> "I think that the most important thing that we're doing here is acclimating new students
> to campus and we're getting them…feeling like they're a member of our campus and that
> they are ready to contribute and to jump right in."

Colleges aim to ease the transition for new students and provide them with a period of time to

adjust to the expectations and demands of college life. The standard programs offered during

orientation include academic advising (both in groups and individually), peer mentoring

programs, pre-orientation programs, social and cultural activities, the explanation of academic

rules and regulations and traditional events such as an opening convocation. Orientation program

offerings differed by the amount of activities in each category, but all institutions reported

providing all seven types of orientation events.

Interviewees reported satisfactory student attendance at both mandatory and optional orientation activities; on average, attendance was very high at mandatory events and relatively high at optional events. Most often, the weakest part of their college's orientation was that it was planned too late in the year or lacked standardization amongst the different colleges and programs within a specific university. Interviewees were frustrated with the constraints placed on them that removed their control over all aspects of orientation or made it impossible to plan orientation as far in advance as they deemed necessary. In contrast, the strongest reported aspects of their orientations were the programming quality, student and campus unity, upperclassman participation and the formation of connections amongst new students. Institutions were proud of their orientation programs because they felt that they were properly designed and executed to serve the specific needs of their students.

The most important components of orientation were found to be the formation of connections amongst students and between students and faculty/staff, as well as the academic integration of new students through advising and registration, the acclimation of new students into the campus community and the communication of expectations and values to all in attendance. Helping students form connections was the most important function of orientation because, as Subject C, an orientation director at medium liberal arts college said:

> "We throw out all this information and they may not remember it, but they're going to remember the connection they made with their RA or the connection they made with their orientation ambassador and that's the person that's going to know the answer."

Most interviewees strived to maintain a balance between social and academic activities during orientation, though half believed that academic events should have priority because of the demanding curriculum of their institutions. In terms of the structure of orientation, half of the

interviewees believed that a balance of highly structured and more informal events was ideal for their institutions, while the other half subscribed to a more highly structured approach in planning orientation. When asked to describe the ideal orientation for their institution, the majority of interviewees initially reported complete satisfaction with their program. However, when given time to reflect, they stated that, in addition to a budget increase, they would like to change the structure of their orientation program and increase faculty and staff commitment to orientation. The diversity in institutions of higher education is reflected in the diversity of orientation programming; findings in this section show that there are central concepts that an orientation must address, but there is also significant room for changes that reflect an institution's culture and needs.

First-Year Students

Expectations

For the students interviewed, expectations for orientation were either specific (learning information about the college, including Oberlin's expectations for its students) or generally positive; before entering Oberlin, new first-year students expected to be taught the necessary tools and apply them to achieve social and academic success in college. Rose, a student from Virginia, represented most interviewees by saying: "I don't know if I went in with any set expectations. I did have the hope of meeting people and of learning what was what [laughs]." Interviewees defined social success as satisfaction with friendships, as well as the ability to rely on and be comfortable with one's friends. Academic success was overwhelmingly conceptualized as accomplishment measured by grade point average. A minority of students acknowledged that enjoyment of courses and self-fulfillment were important, though less

valuable, measures of academic success.

Orientation Attendance and Satisfaction

First-year interviewees were generally very satisfied with orientation, though, as expected, a minority of students expressed dissatisfaction with orientation primarily due to their conceptualization of orientation as unimportant to their transition to college. Tim, a student from Georgia who had deferred enrolment in Oberlin for one year, expressed his neutral opinion of orientation: "I wouldn't say if I was satisfied or dissatisfied – it was what I was expected and it was necessary." Though opinions on orientation varied, attendance at mandatory orientation activities was uniformly high and attendance at optional orientation activities was uniformly average. Students attended mandatory events because they believed that they were required to or had no attractive alternatives, but only attended those optional activities that they perceived to be useful, enjoyable or appealing to their established group of friends.

Opinions were mixed regarding the ways in which and degree to which orientation's academic and social components were constructive to students' transitions. Academically, interviewees rated orientation as helpful in preparing them for classes, but ineffective at providing specific academic information, which induced stress. Jennifer, a student from New York, found orientation to be nerve-racking academically because "no one's really going to hold your hand the way they will in high school;" though registration and advising may have been taxing, overall, orientation was viewed as a success from the academic standpoint. Socially, orientation was deemed useful because it helped interviewees meet new people and form a first-year class identity (defined as a cohesive connection to the overall first-year class). For a minority of interviewees, orientation did not facilitate interaction, primarily because of a lack of

structure during social events. An interesting trend observed was that many interviewees met friends outside of planned social activities, often after such events as Many Voices (a panel discussion of Oberlin students who share their viewpoints on issues of interest for Oberlin first-years) or The OC (a play about relationships and college life) (Oberlin College, 2007). In fact, most interviewees rated informally spending time with their new friends as the best part of their orientation experience. Jeszet, a first-year student from Michigan, described this trend:

> "I feel like people met each other informally and then would go to scheduled activities with people they met outside of them. You couldn't really meet people at scheduled activities because you'd be going into them with people you already knew."

It seems that orientation facilitated new students' social integration, but not necessarily through scheduled activities and events.

The orientation events were viewed as balanced between social and academic components, although a minority of students did not observe any difference or thought there was an imbalance in both directions. Many interviewees, like Michelle, a student from Kansas, knew that Oberlin has "a lot of things they have to beat into our heads before [classes start]" and were tolerant of the less exciting academic and informational events. The ideal balance for orientation was difficult to conceptualize for many subjects, though the majority of students wanted more social than academic events. This inability to define an ideal balance stems mainly from the gray area between academic and social events. Interviewees did not divide orientation events along social and academic lines, because to them, the two types of events served similar functions. Also, many events did not fall under one category or the other; as Millie, a first-year student from Indiana, said: "a lot of it seemed to be neither here nor there." Students also met friends at academic events and learned information at social events, which made the distinction between social and academic somewhat unimportant. Though a clear recommendation for orientation

cannot be derived from this section of interview data, the fact that interviewees did not readily point out an imbalance between social and academic events may indicate that Oberlin's orientation is successful at simultaneously providing this balance while being able to, as Subject H, an orientation director at a small liberal arts college stated, "be flexible and ebb and flow with the needs, wants and desires of the student population."

Interviewees positively rated orientation's ability to communicate Oberlin's expectations for its students and uniformly interpreted these expectations to be primarily academic. All but one subject thought that orientation was able to effectively teach first-years what the college expected of them as students. When questioned about Oberlin's expectations for its students, interviewees most commonly cited academic success and self-initiative. "As a student, I think they expect success more than anything," stated Alex, a first-year student from Ohio; it is logical to assume that students who know that they are expected to succeed academically will be more likely to value academic achievement as a marker of their overall college success.

 In examining the emotional aspect of students' transitions, interviewees' orientation experiences were emotionally stable, characterized by emotional highs and lows in line with the quality and quantity of friendships formed at certain points during the week. Most interviewees experienced emotional low points due to loneliness and corresponding high points upon realizing that they had a group of friends they belonged to at Oberlin. Often, these high points, which were difficult to describe, occurred while interviewees were informally socializing with their new friends. Michelle put it best by stating that being with her friends during orientation was a great experience because "it was a time [she] felt like [she] belonged a little bit." Some interviewees reported emotional highs and lows that revolved around specific activities (like the stress of registration or the enjoyable social activity they participated in), though this response pattern was

less common. The most frequent words used to describe subjects' emotional states during orientation included: content, happy, excited, and in some cases unhappy and overwhelmed. The most common emotional state during orientation was general contentedness; most students reported having stable emotional conditions throughout the week. In addition, enthusiasm was common because, as Jennifer said, "all that excitement just builds up and then you're finally here and just want to do everything and meet everyone."

Interviewees rated orientation fairly positively because they were satisfied and attended the events and thought that it was balanced between social and academic components and effectively communicated student expectations. In addition, the overall emotional stability of interviewees may somewhat indicate orientation's success of integration new students into campus life. The handful of students that expressed dissatisfaction with orientation consistently had more negative answers to all questions in this section. It is unclear whether this indicates orientation's failure to reach a certain subset of first-years or that some students will not enjoy orientation regardless of programming diversity. Carol, a first-year student from Utah, summed up most interviewees' opinions of orientation: "I met lots of really nice people and I understood how Oberlin worked a lot better." Thee sample of first-years interviewed found orientation to be an overall success.

Orientation's Fulfillment of Needs

The main measures of orientation's ability to satisfy interviewees' needs were the degree to which they understood and valued the role of the upperclassman peer leader on campus, knew the support available to them at Oberlin and believed that their social needs were met. Upperclassman peer helpers, including RA's, academic ambassadors and members of student

groups or athletic teams, were specifically there to aid in the first-year transition. Interviewees generally thought that the upperclassmen peer leaders were helpful, but they could have played a larger role. Upperclassmen peer leaders support new students' transitions by providing a personal and realistic perspective on Oberlin student life. They simplify the integration process of new students because their point of view is that "this is what they expect of you," as John, a first-year student from California said, "but this is how you accomplish that." Students had a clear conception of the role of the upperclassman during orientation, valued their support and often wanted them to play a larger role in their orientation experience. This indicates Oberlin's success at providing a balanced portrayal of Oberlin student life during orientation by employing students in addition to administration and faculty.

By the end of orientation, interviewees were very aware of the on-campus support network in place for students (including Student Health, the Counseling Center and the Office of Residential Education), though half of the subjects were informed beforehand. All but one interviewee were satisfied with their social integration into Oberlin, most reporting that they were very satisfied with the quantity and quality of friends they had made by the end of the orientation week. A quarter of subjects were only somewhat satisfied with their quantity of friends because they understood that making quality friends takes longer than a week, while another quarter of subjects were only satisfied with their quality of friends because they believed it was always better to make more friends. "You always want to have better, closer friends," said Jeszet, "but I'm happy with the people I've met." Jeszet's positive sentiment was echoed by most interviewees, who reported that orientation fulfilled most, if not all, of their needs.

Orientation Outcomes

Orientation greatly impacted new students' social and academic integration into Oberlin College, primarily by aiding in the formation of friendship circles, providing a period of time in which to transition to college life and increasing students' comfort with the college, its' campus, rules and procedures. The majority of interviewees met most of their friends during orientation week. When interviewed approximately eight to ten weeks into their first semester, seven out of eleven subjects' friendship circles were composed primarily of individuals met during orientation. This statistic is powerful, given that orientation satisfaction was so mixed; regardless of the variance in orientation satisfaction, students formed friendships during orientation that extended into the first semester and perhaps beyond.

For interviewees, the best parts of Oberlin's orientation were the high level of first-year unity on campus, the newness of the college experience and the helpfulness of the upperclassmen. Not surprisingly, interviewees found the most difficult aspect of orientation to be the process of acclimation and adjustment to college life. Rose succinctly described the paradox of experiencing orientation:

> "You're starting brand new and that's really nice. And I think the most difficult thing was exactly the same – it was hard starting over again, and it was hard being away from home. The good things were the bad things."

Orientation played an important role in interviewee's transitions to Oberlin because it gave them a chance to adjust to college without the added pressure of simultaneously attending classes. For first-years, the most important aspects of this adjustment were social and academic. Socially, they wanted to make friends that they could become comfortable. Academically, they wanted to learn what was expected of them and how they could meet and surpass these expectations. Katie, a student from Arizona, acknowledged orientation's impact on her social integration in that "it

allowed [her] to develop, to start meeting people and making friends…which makes a transition to anyplace easier because then you have people to talk to about your experience." For a few interviewees, orientation's impact was limited; Carol thought that "some of the information was useful, but it wasn't really necessary" because she "could have gotten a lot of the information from other sources." It is unclear whether Carol's opinion of orientation reflects her more independent, self-sufficient nature or if orientation failed to present information in an enjoyable and engaging format. However, it is probable that individuals like Carol are unlikely to enjoy any form of organized orientation because they do not expect to benefit from a structured program such as orientation.

For interviewees, the ideal college orientation would have less structure, increased diversity in programming and be shorter than the orientation program last fall. A need for balance – between structure and informality or between academic and social events– was common for most interviewees. Many also thought that the social programming should be diversified, though opinions were split on whether orientation should have more or less social events. It was easier for interviewees to critique Oberlin's orientation than provide a conceptualization of an ideal orientation for themselves, let alone an entire student body.

Orientation at Oberlin (and at most institutions) is focused on meeting the needs of incoming first-year students; by outlining the ways in which Oberlin's first-years experience orientation and are influenced by its structure and programming, this research attempts to characterize the control group of college orientation. These findings provide an understanding of orientation from the perspective of its' main customer – the first-year student. In order to present a complete (or nearly complete) depiction of how different students experience orientation, the transfer student population must be examined.

Transfer Students

Pre-Oberlin Experiences and Expectations

Before the findings are discussed, it is important to define interviewees' conception of the typical transfer student in order to provide a framework within which to view and understand the experience of the transfer student during orientation. Interviewees' described the typical transfer as dissatisfied with their previous college or desiring a change in atmosphere; transfers were also viewed as atypical college students because of their lack of success at their previous institution, in addition to their more ambiguous class status. Though the phrase "typical transfer student" is a bit of an oxymoron because, as Katie, a conservatory transfer student from Ohio said, "everyone has a really personal journey that they go through in order to transfer," transfer students are individuals who chose to seek out a better environment in transferring to Oberlin.

For all interviewees, the decision to leave their previous college was due to a lack of fit, either socially with their peers or academically with the curriculum or their professors; upon deciding to transfer to Oberlin, they felt confident that they would both fit in better and be able to academically and socially succeed. Transfer students pick Oberlin for a reason; as Katie stated: "Oberlin is very *very* unique, so transferring into Oberlin says something about your personality and how you want to be around people who are a little bit different from the norm." Expectations for orientation ranged widely, though interviewees were more likely to lack overall expectations or have specific positive or negative expectations. Katie captured the difficulty that many interviewees felt in preparing to enter Oberlin for orientation: "I thought it would be a little bit challenging to go into that [orientation] with the expectations of how I thought college should be, even though I knew that this environment would be completely different from what I was exposed to." She thought that orientation would be difficult because of her transfer student

status, but did not believe that this would have a great impact on her transition process. When asked about their expected orientation tension, subjects cited the first-year-centric atmosphere on campus as the main contributor to tension. Because their transfer student status is oftentimes in conflict with programs and support that focus on fulfilling first-year's needs, transfers expected to experience tension because they did not fit in. However, unexpectedly, many of the interviewees did not expect to feel tension because they were aware of the transfer-student-specific activities planned during orientation week. It seems that acknowledging the transfer student population from the beginning of the orientation process onwards can function to reassure new transfers of their importance during orientation and alleviate negative expectations.

Students overwhelmingly thought that they would succeed both socially and academically at Oberlin, but lacked any specific expectations for orientation; one reason for this disconnect may be their negative experience at their previous school. Transfers expected to personally succeed at Oberlin, but rather than setting their expectations too high, they chose to enter Oberlin with an open mind. They spent considerable time and effort in deciding to transfer to Oberlin, and though they believed they would succeed here, they feared that by expecting too much, they might be disappointed again. Also, having experienced the orientation process at least once before, they are more likely to understand that integrating into the campus community is a process that extends far past orientation. As Eva, a college transfer student from Virginia said:

> "I was just hoping to get oriented and wasn't sure what was going to come about it because I knew that Oberlin was going to be so drastically different from [university name withheld] that I shouldn't really hold any big expectations."

Eva's lack of concrete expectations represented the overall response from all interviewees; they transferred to Oberlin because it was different from their previous institution and were reluctant

before orientation to expect anything specific from this new experience.

Identity Formation During Orientation

The relative importance of subjects' transfer student identities varied both from individual to individual and from orientation week until the middle of the fall semester; transfers' identity salience was not stable. The majority of transfers were more likely to assert their transfer student identity during orientation (by introducing themselves as transfer students) than midway through the semester, perhaps because by outwardly displaying their dissimilarity with those around them, they hoped to be viewed and treated differently than the average first-year. In addition, after orientation, the assertion of their transfer identity also prevented others from assuming that they were fulfilling the typical upperclassman role. For example, Nina, a college transfer student from Pennsylvania, mentioned that she often brings up her transfer student status in conversation because she feels that, "by just saying that you're a junior, people presume that you've been here for two years so you have a solid group of friends and you know what you're doing." Even though transfers may acknowledge their transfer student status, they still can find it difficult to define their class status; when asked about her class status, Katie replied: "well, it's a little up in the air now. I feel like it's hard to describe who I am to people who are here." Ambiguity is inherent in the transfer student transition process.

In forming their Oberlin identities during orientation, new transfers adopted either "primary" or "secondary" transfer identities and identification with each group was split evenly amongst the subjects. "Primary" transfer students actively acknowledged their transfer student status in conversations and viewed it as an important part of their identity, while "secondary" transfers only viewed their transfer student status as important in that it influenced their outcomes at Oberlin. Those who identified as "primary" transfers tended to feel older during

orientation than mid-way through the fall semester, while the class status of "secondary" transfers' remained constant throughout orientation and the fall semester. In addition, "primary" transfers were only somewhat satisfied with orientation because they felt that forming quality friendships takes time, but "secondary" transfers were very satisfied with orientation and its affect on their friendship formation. Most importantly, "primary" transfers were more likely than "secondary" transfers to view orientation as a less important contributor to the quality of their college experience.

"Primary" transfer students differed from "secondary" transfers in that their conceptualization of their class identity was unstable during their first semester, they were less satisfied with orientation and valued it less. This perhaps led to their adoption of a "primary" transfer student identity because it provided them with a predetermined identity, complete with role expectations that can guide their identity formation process at Oberlin College. "Secondary" transfers, however, were more easily able to categorize themselves and were more satisfied with orientation, indicating that they may not have needed to assert their transfer student identity because they experienced less tension while integrating into Oberlin. Though the distinctions between "primary" and "secondary" transfers are significant, I have chosen not to primarily frame my findings based on these categories because I believe that a more valuable and generalizable approach will be conceptualizing the "typical" transfer student (to the degree to which the transfer student is typical). Where appropriate, I will utilize these categorizations, but only as examples of the diversity of the transfer student population.

Identity Choice: First-Year versus Upperclassman

During orientation, the transfer student forms their unique identity within an environment

that is focused almost exclusively on fulfilling the needs of first-years, many of which they do

not share. To what degree does this mismatch affect their integration into Oberlin and their

assertion of a transfer student identity, removed from the first-year/upperclassman binary? All

interviewees agreed that the transfer student during orientation is both a first-year and an

upperclassman – new to campus, but experienced in the ways of college life. Their class status is

more ambiguous than a first-year's and they tend to fulfill both upperclassman and first-year

social and academic roles; often, as Alice, a college transfer from Indiana described:

> "You're at a new place and you're experiencing everything for the first time, meeting
> new people. It's like you're a freshman in all those ways, but then you've only three
> years left of college…you've had the away from home experience"

Interviewees identified several common characteristics of both first-years and

upperclassmen students, though they tended not to view the two groups as distinct, either due to

their own ambiguous class status or their perceived similarity of both groups. First-years were

characterized as excited and adventurous as an expression of their independence, while

upperclassmen were thought to be more academically focused and comfortable in their

environment. Those who did consider first-years distinct from upperclassmen cited their lowered

maturity level as the main reason for this difference. The transfer students interviewed

subscribed marginally more to the first-year part of their class identity because they were not yet

comfortable at Oberlin and felt the need to explore, both socially by finding new friends at

Oberlin, and academically by determining a concentration. However, many interviewees

expressed that they consciously maintained a balance between their first-year and upperclassman

roles because, as Eva stated, "I feel like I'm halfway doing my freshman year over and halfway

already into academics enough that I have to be making all the same decisions at once." In

addition, a significant minority of interviewees chose to identify outside of the binary because

they viewed their class status as independent of all preexisting classifications. Sam, a conservatory transfer student from Illinois, described how she does not fit in along the spectrum from first-year to upperclassman: "I just try and do my own thing…I'm just kind of this free-floating agent." Essentially, Sam's self-categorization represents an alternative for transfer students; rather than identifying as in between first-years and upperclassmen, they can identify uniquely as transfers.

Orientation contributed to transfers' self-categorization processes through the terminology used and programs offered that both positively and negatively affected their identity formation at Oberlin. Two main patterns were identified in conceptualizing how orientation made transfers either feel younger (first-year status) or older (upperclassman status) during orientation. Interviewees either felt younger at general orientation events and older at transfer student events, or felt younger while socializing with first-years and older because the first-year-centric terminology highlighted their non-first-year status. General orientation events and socialization opportunities were found to be belittling because they ignored transfer student uniqueness. Britt, a conservatory transfer student from Alaska, thought, "that a lot of the people who run orientation assume everyone is a freshman, or maybe that was just my take on it" and that "they would always use the phrase 'first-year' and, to me, that's not what I am." Transfer student events made interviewees feel older in a positive way because they increased their comfort level and, as Katie stated, allowed her to "talk about [her] own experiences and be with people who already experienced their first year in college." However, the use of first-year-centric speech (such as referring to the new students assembled as only the "Class of 2011") made interviewees feel older *only* because it highlighted their non-first-year status.

Though interviewees did not truly identify as upperclassman or first-year during

orientation, the characteristics of the typical upperclassman were more appealing than the characteristics of a typical first-year. And, because they associated feeling more "upperclassman" as being more comfortable in their environment and being with other transfers was found to provide comfort, it can be concluded that that one of the most positive contributions to transfers' identify formation processes during orientation were the transfer student-specific events. In addition, the first-year-centric atmosphere also contributed to transfers' identity formation by providing an environment in which transfers forged their own path, independent from the first-years. By functioning as a safe space for transfer students, transfer student-specific activities and the first-year-centric atmosphere on campus during orientation provided the basis for transfers' construction of a transfer student identity.

Orientation Tension and Satisfaction

Throughout orientation, transfer students' emotional states were stable; interviewees were satisfied with orientation and experienced general contentedness throughout the weeklong program. This stability was primarily a function of the transfer student activities that provided a space wherein a transfer student community flourished and transfer student identities were formed. The only tension reported was either provoked by general orientation problems such as registration or caused by separation from home or feelings of inferiority. Excitement and anticipation abounded for most interviewees during orientation, though some reported feeling overwhelmed. As Britt stated, "it seemed like the transfer students had more genuine enthusiasm for being here at last and finally getting down to business and being able to accomplish what we wanted to be in college for." The majority of interviewees reported that the most positive aspect of orientation were the transfer events. They were found to alleviate identity conflict by

providing an atmosphere wherein individuals who share a common past and present can bond over their non-first-year status.

Overall, all interviewees were fairly satisfied with orientation because it communicated Oberlin's expectations and "covered all the bases" in terms of the important information that they needed to know. The only complaints expressed were that orientation was too long of a program and was unsuitable for the average transfer student because of its high degree of first-year-centric programming. Not surprisingly, some transfers do not want to participate in activities that do not fulfill their needs. Transfers' emotional states during orientation were more stable and positive than I had predicted before beginning this research. Based on previous literature, I had hypothesized that transfers' negative experiences at their previous colleges would create lowered personal expectations for success, which would produce an unstable emotional state during orientation. In fact, I found that transfers were confident in their choice of Oberlin, which made them certain that they would succeed here. This, along with the creation of a separate, transfer-centric atmosphere on campus during orientation, was translated into an enjoyable, though not harmonious orientation experience for transfer students.

Orientation Outcomes

To measure the real influence that orientation has on the formation of new transfer students' transfer identities, it is necessary to understand how they constructed their transfer student identity during the orientation process. Orientation acclimated transfer students to campus, helped them form friendships, increased their comfort level and provided them with information. However, its impact was limited in comparison to the quality of their anticipated Oberlin experience. For most, the formation of their Oberlin social circles was affected by

orientation only because it helped them meet other transfers in their dorms or during transfer student events, which led to the formation of valuable friendships. Midway through their first semester, interviewees' social circles were composed primarily of a mix of students from all different classes. In addition, a small minority of subjects were friends with primarily transfer students. Because transfers tend to have a more long-term approach for forming friendships (as mentioned earlier), it was no surprise that a third of the interviewees acknowledged that orientation's impact on friendship formation was inherently limited because of its short length. At the end of orientation, students were either fairly or somewhat satisfied with the friendships they had made because they understood that making quality friends takes time. Most of the interviewees had close transfer and non-transfer upperclassmen friends, though Nina acknowledged that her upperclassman non-transfers friendships took the longest to form. Interviewees often found it easiest to befriend other transfers. Eva best explained the sense of transfer student unity she feels as a result of her negative previous college experience:

> " It's a very unifying, I think, with people, to be a transfer student because you've gone through hell and back and you've made it through and you've made it to where you want to be. Whatever it was that was difficult for you, you're here now, it's safe and you're all right. I jokingly call us the refugees because we've made it out and we're all together now, breathing this deep breath of Oberlin air [laughs]."

Whether or not they chose to embrace this sense of unity, transfer students share a common past, which can be the basis for forming valuable friendships at Oberlin.

Analysis – Comparing First-Years and Transfer students

As the two main groups who transition into Oberlin College each year, first-years and transfer students share a lack of knowledge about Oberlin, its students, rules and expectations and a need to be integrated into campus life, although their similarities often do not extend past this point. Transfer students are seasoned college attendees who understand the role of the college student, while first-years have expectations for college life, but do not understand the reality of college. Almost all transfer students enter Oberlin after a negative experience at their previous institution, which cannot be said for most first-years. Besides these main differences, transfers are often older and less naïve than first-years and enter orientation wary of first-year-centric programming. In comparing findings for both populations, it is important to acknowledge that though both groups were sampled using interviews, interview questions for transfer students were rooted in an identity management perspective, while interview questions for first-years did not adopt any specific ideology. Though this difference is important in understanding the differences and similarities in how first-years and transfer students differently experience orientation, it does not devalue the research findings because the specialized ideology utilized in interviewing transfer students was necessary to capture their orientation experience. First-years and transfer students are dissimilar populations; by understanding the nuanced differences in how these groups experience orientation, colleges and universities can effectively create and execute orientation programs that accommodate to both groups.

Prior to entering Oberlin, first-years had larger expectations for orientation; compared to transfer students (who most often lacked expectations for orientation), first-years thought that orientation would communicate a clear picture of life at Oberlin. Surprisingly, the majority of

first-year and transfer student subjects lacked specific expectations for orientation. Transfers were reluctant to expect too much from orientation because they had most often already failed to fully integrate into their previous campus community, while first-years did not know what to expect because they had never before attended college. First-years and transfer students enter Oberlin with an open mind, prepared to absorb the vast information that orientation communicates to its participants.

Transfer students and first-years differed in their understanding of academic and social success at Oberlin. Transfer students were more likely to value connecting with others as a marker of social success, while first-years understood social success to be satisfaction with one's friendships. In terms of academic success, transfers viewed it as fulfillment and accomplishment (as measured by GPA), while almost all first-years only viewed academic success as accomplishment. First-years had a more limited definition of success in college, which is indicative of their lack of college experience. In addition, transfers' conceptualization of social success in college indicates that they are more concerned with the quality of connections formed during their time at Oberlin then with the quality of their overall experience.

Both first-years and transfers reported high satisfaction with orientation, but transfer students were more likely to be dissatisfied with orientation programming because it did not always apply to their unique situation. Both student samples were satisfied with orientation, but they did experience emotional highs and lows unique to their class status. First-years were more likely to experience emotional high and low points as a result of social situations, while transfer students experienced emotional highs and lows because of any number of reasons. In addition, first-years reported higher levels of emotional stability during orientation. The first-year-centric atmosphere during orientation contributed to the differences in satisfaction and emotional

stability for first-year and transfer students by making first-years more comfortable in their environment. This made first-years less likely to experience tension outside of the typical social difficulties associated with acclimating to college. Transfer students were negatively affected by this atmosphere as evidenced by their lowered emotional stability. Overall, transfer and first-year students reported relatively equal satisfaction levels with orientation. Socially, orientation impacted first-years to a greater degree because it positively affected their social circle formation. Most of the first-years interviewed had met most of their friends during the orientation period, which simply was not the case with the transfer student sample.

In this sample of students, clear differences emerged in terms of the nature of transfer and first-year students, though, overall, the sample of first-years was less diverse in terms of their responses than the transfer student sample. This discrepancy in diversity can be explained by the higher diversity of the transfer student population compared to the first-year student population. Though first-years differ in terms of their reasons for attending Oberlin, transfer students also differ in their reasons for leaving their previous institution, including its' specific academic and social atmosphere. In my interactions with first-years and transfers while completing this research project, I have found that the first-years sampled were more easily grouped together than the transfer student sample, which was harder to understand as a whole entity.

To program for first-years and transfers, the inclusion of specific transfer student-specific activities are crucial in order to counteract the first-year-centric programming and atmosphere on campus during the week of orientation. Transfers need to form connections with other transfers, just as first-years need to meet other first-years. Facilitating the social integration of both populations is important and may require separating both groups during social activities in order for transfer students to meet one another. This sample of students indicates that Oberlin's new

students are likely to enter college with an open mind, which is essential for orientation's success. First-year students at Oberlin are ultimately more concerned with their social rather than their academic integration, while transfer students are more concerned with both social integration and acclimating to campus. Because first-years are more likely to form their social circles during orientation, providing ample large group socialization opportunities is key to programming for first-years. In contrast, these findings indicate that having smaller, more intimate social and informational events is more important for transfer students. The key difference between first-years and transfer students is that transfers have experienced college life; both groups need to be integrated into their new campus community, but transfers' seek acknowledgement of their "different" status in all orientation programming. For first-years, developing a class identity is an inherent focus in orientation programming that aims to bond the first-year class through academic, social and informational events. For transfer students, "getting them integrated with the broader community is really the biggest challenge," said Subject F, an orientation director at a mid-sized research university. In order for orientation to be successful, first-years and transfer students must be treated as separate groups; though they share similar needs, their differences necessitate divided orientation programs to provide the maximum benefit for both populations.

Conclusions

The research conducted over the past eight months aimed to profile college orientation in order to provide a practical understanding of how the minority transfer student population can best be served by programming designed for first-years. In general, transfer students responded to the first-year-centric atmosphere on campus during orientation by doing more than forming their Oberlin class identity out of first-year and upperclassman components. Transfer students choose to consciously assert their transfer status as an effort to form an original transfer student identity. This response was necessitated by the structure of orientation, which provided a space for transfers to enact their non-first-year identities, but was greatly dominated by first-year's orientation needs. The disparity between the first-year- and transfer-centric spaces on campus is great, though they both equally shape the creation of transfers' Oberlin class identities. Orientation is a first-year-centric space; this provokes transfers to take irregular routes in order to integrate into the college community and develop a class identity. Transfer student activities also help construct transfers' identities by providing safe spaces in which the conflict between transfers' first-year and upperclassman identities is minimized during orientation and beyond. The transfer- and first-year-centric aspects of orientation support transfers' identity formation by bringing transfer students together in a comfortable and accepting space.

Transfer students' transfer identities cannot be denied; whether or not it serves a primary or secondary function, their transfer student status will always be salient because it is the only reason that they are attending Oberlin. Transfer students have a great deal of choice in how and why they choose to bring their transfer student status to the forefront (or, inversely, hide it). In addition, the diversity of the transfer population makes generalizing about transfer students in the present and future a difficult task. Findings from this research have shown that the assertion of

one's transfer status during orientation and beyond is perhaps the best way to reconcile the conflict between first-year and upperclassman class identities. Though the source of identity conflict shifts after orientation from the first-year-centric atmosphere to their ambiguous class status, transfers best benefit by acknowledging their transfer student status as contributing to their uniqueness as Oberlin students. Nina captured this point succinctly by stating that she needed to assert her transfer student identity "because that's part of [her] identity" and positioned her "at a different place, being a transfer student than [she was] being a freshman;" by molding a pronounced transfer student identity, transfers actively avoid the conflict inherent in remaining within a grey area between first-year and upperclassman status, and contribute to their own success at Oberlin and beyond.

The main limitations of this research are that it focused on a small subset of all college orientation program types, there is a dearth of literature specific to transfer student orientation, and the research conducted had small sample sizes and was not gender-balanced. Choosing such a narrow sample of college orientation programs makes it difficult to generalize findings from this research to the average American college or university; therefore, these conclusions are most valid when applied to colleges similar to Oberlin. In researching college orientation, there were significant gaps in the literature concerning transfer student-specific orientation programming. The majority of students entering new colleges and universities each year are first-years and the majority of orientation research is focused on the first-year population. In addition, because of the nature of higher education today, most transfer students exit two-year colleges to enter four-year colleges (Saunders and Bauer, 1998); therefore, most research focuses on this type of transfer student. These two facts contribute to the shortage of research on the typical Oberlin transfer student and made it difficult in completing this research to fully understand the nature of

the transfer student during orientation and the issues that institutions face in programming for transfers. This research was also limited by its small sample size and lack of gender balance, both of which were caused by the chosen research methodology and lack of potential interviewees. The interviews took a significant amount of time to conduct and transcribe, which made it advantageous to complete less than a dozen interviews for each population. In addition, it was difficult to find interviewees in each population (especially in the transfer student population), either due to small population size or lack of interest in the study. The unbalanced male to female ratio of first-years and transfer student interviewees is important to note. However, although females outnumbered males in this study, it was not so extreme as to devalue the research findings.

This research was designed to characterize a sample of first-years and transfer students and because of the small sample size, cannot completely represent the experiences of all first-years and transfer students at Oberlin. However, it is possible to apply these results to characterize the typical Oberlin transfer and first-year student because of the comprehensive quality of the research. The findings from this study can also be applied in advancing Oberlin College's understanding of its' student population, and, in turn, improving orientation programming for both first-years and transfer students. Historically, Oberlin's transfer student orientation programming was limited to one social event; beginning this past fall, orientation will now offer four transfer student-specific activities, as well as the option to live on a transfer student hall in a residence hall. By continuing in this direction, Oberlin will be able to support transfer students' transitions and their formation of a class identity, while simultaneously providing for first-years' needs. One of the most important conclusions that can be drawn from this research is that institutions can support the transfer student transition by nurturing the

development of a transfer student identity in all transfer students during orientation through transfer student-specific spaces and programming. Oberlin has taken the first step in creating this identity, which can only be improved upon with additional transfer student programming, the incorporation of former transfers into orientation events and the continuation of the transfer student hall living option.

In the future, because of the limited research on transfer student orientation programming, larger studies should be conducted that focus on how the four-year transfer student experiences orientation and is integrated into the campus community. The contribution of these findings to this field is limited by the small sample size; therefore, studies that take a similar approach in characterizing the transfer student and providing an overview of orientation programming but draw a larger, more diverse sample would add greatly to the research on transfer students and orientation. In addition, utilizing similar theoretical frameworks for both sets of interviews may be useful to more easily comparing the two populations. Choosing samples that reflect the given racial and ethnic diversity of the overall college student population or a specific institution's student population will provide a greater understanding of the diversity in the new student population beyond the differences between freshmen and transfer students. Also, examining other non-traditional populations such as first-generation college students may help highlight the lack of homogeneity in the new student population. The diversity between and within the freshmen and transfer student populations is just one of many indicators of the variability of the new student population. Understanding the differences and similarities between these two populations is a significant step towards providing effective and enjoyable programming for all new students.

There is no ideal orientation at Oberlin or at any other institution; transfer students and

first-years are dissimilar populations and orientation will always remain first-year-centric as long as first-years outnumber transfer students. The solution in programming for transfers and first-years simultaneously during orientation is to acknowledge their differences by providing as great of a separation in programming as financially possible and by planning and executing programs that cater to the typical student at each institution. Orientation has the potential to provide new transfer students with the tools necessary for success and the community to support them as they face the uphill battle of transitioning to college. Though this transition extends far beyond orientation, a successful transfer student orientation program provides the foundation for transfer students' social, academic and personal integration into college and, most importantly, their transfer student identity formation and assertion at Oberlin.

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