Minority Students' Transition Experiences at a Predominantly White Institution

by

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The process of transition to college is complex and has received attention from many scholars (e.g., Baker & Siryk, 1999; Beal & Noel, 1980; Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen, 2000; Gaither, 1999; Paul & Brier, 2001; Tinto, 1993). Transition impacts persistence in college, hence retention rates (Tinto, 1993). As a result, postsecondary institutions have developed models of transition. In one such model, first year students experience transition in four domains: academic, social, personal-emotional, and attachment (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

Past studies have explored transition from the perspective of majority versus minority student experiences (Allen, 1992; Hurtado, Carter, Spuler, 1996; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000) as well as male versus female experiences (American Association of University Women, 1992; Fassinger, 1995; Gablenick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990). The current body of literature fails to adequately represent transition issues for non-majority students, however. For example, additional research is needed to compare experiences among minority groups (e.g., African American v. Hispanic v. Native American). In addition, studies that explore the relationship between retention and transition for minorities and women are needed.

The current study was designed to examine transition experiences of minorities and women attending predominantly White institutions. The study also addressed the link between transition and retention to second semester and the second year of college.

The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) (Baker & Siryk, 1999) measures the transition experiences of students in college. In the current study, the author administered the SACQ to minority students in their first year at a predominantly White institution. The participants’ responses were analyzed to determine if differences existed in transition experiences by race or sex. Follow-up information was collected to explore whether
students who had higher transition levels were more likely to return to college for the second semester and the second year.

Results revealed that minority students made successful transitions during the first year as well as developed a strong attachment to the institution and higher education. However, there were no significant differences in the transition experiences of the participants by race or sex. When examining the relationship between transition and retention, findings show that students who left the institution had high or medium transition levels.
Wow!! I did not ever think the day would come when I would be sitting down to acknowledge on paper those who helped me make it to this point. Those of you who know me will not be surprised to find that I am writing this through a flood tears and emotion. Thank you Lord for allowing me to see this day!!! It is prayer that enabled me to do the hard work that it took to finish.

To the light and joy of my life, my husband and children, thank you for all of your support and sacrifices. Kirstyn and Essam you gave up dance classes, soccer practices, and activities that you did not even mention because I asked you to limit your activities so I could focus on school. Jacques, thank you for jumping into what may have seemed like madness, and continuing on with me and your dad because you know how much this means to both of us. Every time I thought about quitting I knew I had to do this for Essam, Kirstyn, and Jacques. Know by my example that wavering is ok, but quitting is not.

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