

Adjustment Experiences of Students Who Internally Transfer From a Regional to Flagship Campus

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This study explored the transition experiences of internal transfer students who transfer from a regional to a flagship campus within a large multicampus institution. We conducted focus group interviews with 34 undergraduate internal transfer students to understand the challenges and affordances to successful transition and adjustment. Our findings revealed that these students experienced similar academic and social adjustment challenges to community college transfers while experiencing challenges unique to the regional-to-flagship campus transfer pathway. Successful transition and adjustment to the flagship campus was partly attributed to students' robust social supports.

Transfer students constitute a significant percentage of college students. More than one third of new first-year college students will transfer to a different institution within their first 6 years (Shapiro et al., 2018). Prior scholarship (e.g., Ishitani, 2008) suggests that transfer students experience a multitude of challenges while adjusting to new institutional environments and settings. Adding complexity, transfer pathways are diverse, consisting of vertical, lateral, and reverse transfer, among others. One unique pathway is when students transfer between campuses of a multicampus postsecondary institution, which some scholars refer to as internal transfer (Cepeda et al., 2021; Jaggars et al., 2025). Many institutions, both in the United States and across the globe, are organized around a multicampus system with one flagship campus and several smaller regional or branch campuses (Pinheiro & Berg, 2017). Hence, it is increasingly important to understand students' experiences with the transfer pathways within these contexts.

Internal transfer between campuses of a multicampus institution primarily involves changing enrollment from a regional to the flagship campus, but experiences of these students are not well documented except for a few studies (e.g., Cepeda et al., 2021; Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007). In theory, transferring within an institution may present a simpler transition as a result of familiarity with policies, procedures, and school culture. However, the extent to which the adjustment experiences of regional transfer students are (un)like those of external transfer students or new first-year students coming from high school is not well understood. Without this understanding, institutional practices built around more common transfer pathways (e.g., community college to 4-year institution) may not adequately support regional transfers. Our goal was to better understand the experiences of students who internally transfer from a regional to flagship campus within a multicampus institution.

Transfer Student Adjustment

Much of the transfer literature focuses on vertical transfer from community colleges to 4-year institutions (i.e., vertical transfer; Taylor & Jain, 2017). The challenges and success factors associated with other forms of transfer such as internal transfer, have not received as much attention. Still, findings associated with vertical transfer provide a baseline from which to explore the similarities and dissimilarities for internal transfers. Early conceptualizations of these challenges focused primarily on academic performance outcomes. Transfer shock (Clausen & Wessel, 2015), a period after transfer where students experience a drop in grade point average (GPA), has been documented across multiple postsecondary settings (Dowd et al., 2008; McGuire & Belcheir, 2013). Contemporary conceptualizations of transfer student adjustment have broadened the scope to examine how student- and institutional-level factors might facilitate or hinder students' academic, social, and psychological adjustment (Laanan, 2004, 2007; Young & Litzler, 2013).

Academic Adjustment

Evidence suggests that transfer students often have trouble adjusting to their new academic environment because of differences in class sizes, academic norms, and faculty responsibilities. Students transferring from smaller institutions are accustomed to smaller classes that allow for more individualized attention from instructors, whereas classes at their receiving institution may have much larger enrollments (Bryant, 2001; Crisp & Mina, 2012). There are also differences in academic norms and expectations at receiving institutions; courses may be more academically demanding in both breadth and depth (Elliott & Lakin, 2021). Academically underprepared transfer students may encounter more difficulty with academic adjustment compared with students who have stronger learning and study skills (Chamely-Wiik et al., 2021; Lakin & Elliott, 2016). Finally, faculty responsibilities at receiving institutions may skew toward greater emphasis on research and less on teaching (Townsend & Wilson, 2006), making it more challenging for transfer students to develop meaningful relationships with instructors (Hern et al., 2019).

Social and Psychological Adjustment

Transfer students often struggle to join or form new social networks because their nontransfer peers already have established social groups (Townsend & Wilson, 2006, 2009). Many transfer students feel they are repeating the social networking process from their first year of college but do not receive similar levels of attention and support because they are viewed as more experienced students by their institution (Townsend, 2008). Social adjustment issues may also indicate psychological adjustment struggles, as some transfer students may experience social isolation and a lack of belonging at their new institution (Blekic et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2015; Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). These factors may contribute to transfer students' lower levels of involvement in extracurricular and social activities on campus, compared with their nontransfer peers (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Wang & Wharton, 2010). Alternatively, transfer students who have robust social networks and support systems are more likely to be successful both before and after the transfer (Del Real Viramontes, 2020).

The Present Study

Although our current understanding of transfer students' experiences has improved, there remains a notable lack of research on transfer between campuses within multicampus institutions. This transfer pathway is distinct from traditional vertical transfer, as it is intrainstitutional; hence it is referred to as internal

transfer by some researchers (e.g., Cepeda et al., 2021). One of the potential benefits of this pathway is a shared administrative system between campuses within a multicampus institution, which might reduce informational and cultural barriers in the transfer process. In addition, a shared institutional identity might facilitate feelings of belonging and community regardless of campus. Given the paucity of research on internal transfer, our goal was to better understand the experiences of students who transferred from a regional to the flagship campus of a multicampus institution regarding how they navigated academic and social adjustment processes after transferring. We had one main research question: What were internal transfer students' experiences as they strived to adjust to the new flagship campus environment?

Method

Context and Setting

Our study took place at MU, the flagship campus of a large public university in the United States. Each year, approximately 1,300 students transition from one of MU's five regional campuses to the flagship campus. These smaller regional campuses are in less populated and/or rural areas, offer a limited number of majors, and are open to all high school graduates. The flagship campus, in contrast, is a large research-intensive university with a selective admissions process that offers a vast array of baccalaureate, graduate, and professional degree programs. All MU campuses use the same student information and records system, and the internal transfer process is streamlined. Students who complete at least 30 credit hours at a regional campus and have a minimum cumulative 2.0 GPA may change their enrollment to the flagship campus. To facilitate the transition between campuses, MU administration and staff use consistent messaging emphasizing that students at all of MU's campuses are members of the same university community.

Participants, Recruitment, and Procedure

Participants were students ($N = 34$) enrolled at the flagship campus after completing at least one term at one of the regional campuses. We partnered with advising office staff in multiple colleges to recruit a purposeful sample (Suri, 2011) of eligible internal transfers. See *Table 1* for participant demographic information. Data collection sessions took place throughout the spring and summer 2022 semesters using a semistructured interview protocol with one to six participants and lasted 60–90 min. The protocol drew on existing literature on transfer experiences as well as institutional reports on internal transfer students. Questions reflected the chronology of students' transfer process, starting with their rationale for attending a regional campus, why they transferred to the flagship campus, their academic and social experiences during and after transfer, and resources and supports they used during this process. One session took place in person, and the audio was recorded; the remaining sessions took place virtually, and both video and audio were recorded. All sessions were transcribed by a research assistant and reviewed for accuracy by the first author. All procedures were approved by the university's institutional review board.

Analysis

We used thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes from qualitative data through interpretation of underlying experiences and perceptions of participants. The first author and a research assistant conducted the thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2022) framework consisting of six phases. First, they established familiarity with the data by reading through interview transcripts, noting initial ideas and documenting their thoughts and impressions.

Next, they generated an initial set of inductive codes based on participants' responses. Third, they constructed overarching themes based on clusters of codes. The fourth phase involved iterative review and revision of themes to achieve fit within the overall story from the data. Fifth, they defined the finalized themes. Finally, they integrated themes into a coherent analytic story.

Table 1
Self-Reported Gender, Age, and Race/Ethnicity of Participants

Demographic Characteristic	<i>n</i>	% of <i>N</i>
Gender		
Man	16	47
Woman	17	50
Unknown	1	3
Age		
19	2	6
20	3	9
21	14	41
22	11	32
23	3	9
24	1	3
Race/Ethnicity		
White	23	68
Asian	7	21
Black/African American	2	6
Hispanic/Latino	1	3
Unkown	1	3

Note. N = 34

Results

Analyses of students' reflections on their internal transfer process produced three major themes as well as some notable subthemes. Findings are organized chronologically to reflect participants' journeys and experiences transitioning from a regional campus to the flagship campus.

Intital Challenges After Transfer

The first theme was that shifting from one campus to another, even within the same institutional system, involved at least three notable challenges reflecting contextual, educational, and psychosocial concerns. Here, we illustrate the range of contextual, educational, and psychosocial challenges through students' descriptions.

Size and Scale of Flagship Campus

One type of challenge expressed by our participants reflected a mix of concerns that might arise for

¹ We refer to our participants as internal transfers to reflect the extant scholarship on transfer students and to align better with how participants typically referred to themselves. However, these students were tagged uniquely in the university's information system and known by advising staff and administrators as campus change students.

any student moving from a smaller geographically isolated institution to a large comprehensive institution within a major metropolitan area. The transition from a regional campus to the flagship campus represented a change in physical and geographic environment. Beyond the change from a smaller to a much larger campus, the geographic location and campus city differed. Hence, an immediate challenge was navigating a layout and facilities that were unfamiliar and more complicated. As one student explained:

The layout of the [regional campus] is very straightforward. It's all in a circle, and there's like six buildings, and so you get to know each one very quickly. So here at [flagship campus], there's a lot of buildings, so it's kind of difficult to plan your way around [campus] at first.

Students also felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of extracurricular opportunities available (e.g., clubs, organizations, events) and the speed and volume at which information about said extracurriculars was presented to them both in person and via email. Although having more information might be seen as beneficial, some internal transfer students felt intimidated. One student voiced their sentiment regarding the difficulty they faced trying to get involved in extracurriculars:

What made it hard was definitely all the new things being thrown at me. I wanted to get involved, I wanted to do this, I wanted to do that, and it was just a lot. And I obviously didn't get to quite a lot of things that I wanted to do.

Thus, although the flagship campus had more resources and provided more opportunities to get involved in the campus community, the increase inundated some internal transfer students, preventing them from making social inroads with other students.

Struggling to Fit In

Internal transfer students shared that they initially felt out of place after coming to the flagship campus. In academic settings, they were not used to the large-enrollment classes at the flagship campus, and in social settings, they struggled to connect with nontransfer peers who were already in established social groups.

One student recounted the difference in class size:

When I came to [flagship campus], it was a big shock to me just because of going from 15 students in your class to 300. The difference in enrollment size also reflected differences in academic norms and expectations in the students' classes.

Another student described the loss of individualization and clarity during class instruction:

With classes [at flagship campus] with 300-plus people in a seminar, I can ask a question and [the professors] probably don't see it because it's going to get drowned by other questions coming in. Or they just won't even read questions because they don't want to have to keep stopping lectures. ... Even sitting in the front, I feel it doesn't really change that much because the professors don't really focus on one person.

One consequence of attending larger classes and adhering to the associated classroom norms was that it was difficult for regional transfer students to develop meaningful connections with faculty and peers. Whereas students were used to coming to their professors directly for help at their regional campus, at the flagship campus that was not the case. One student described the lack of connection with their professors:

I felt like at the [regional campus], I just had more of a stronger connection with my professors. I guess I thought I was going to feel that same way at the [flagship] campus,

but I definitely feel like with the larger class sizes it's just harder to get that one-on-one connection with the professor.

Internal transfer students also found it difficult to join already established social groups at the flagship campus. One student recounted their perceived outsider status and the difficulty of entering a new social circle:

With the transition to a big campus and with all these people that seemingly already know their friends, it just feels so . . . I feel so out of place.

Another student described the social transition as:

Going from being friends with everybody in the class [at regional campus] to barely knowing anybody [at flagship campus].

Feelings of Inadequacy as Regional Transfers

Some internal transfer students noticed—or even held their own—negative views about starting their college career at a regional campus. Many in our study had initially applied to attend the competitive-admissions flagship campus but were deferred to an open-enrollment regional campus. One student shared her awareness of the perceived ability differences between students from the regional and flagship campuses even though she did not fully ascribe to the belief that they were fundamentally different:

I feel like there's a general negative conception about, or a preconceived idea about transfer students from [regional campuses] and what that means. I felt the difference amongst [regional campus transfers] and just a [flagship campus] student, but I wouldn't say personally there's really a difference between the two.

Other students internalized this perception, which negatively contributed to their confidence and self-esteem. One student recalled feeling deep embarrassment over not being accepted to begin their studies at the flagship campus:

All my friends came to main campus, and it was really humiliating that I was rejected because I wanted to go to school with all my friends . . . so after I finished [at regional campus], it was like, I can finally go back and see my friends and I don't have to have this title that I went to [regional campus]. No offense but [regional campus] does have that reputation and it was just very uncomfortable and humiliating in my case.

These negative self-perceptions seemed to fade over time as students became more familiar with the flagship campus and perhaps developed greater confidence in their abilities. One student remarked on the change in their initial self-perceptions:

I think at the beginning, I definitely did feel a little embarrassed going to the [regional campus] but looking back on it now in my fourth year, I really feel like it gave me a strong foundation for my college career.

In summary, internal transfer students experienced significant challenges at the flagship campus. The large size of their new campus coupled with new academic norms in their classes contributed to a lack of connection and belonging with their faculty and peers, which made social inroads with other students more difficult. Certain students' challenges were exacerbated by negative self-perceptions about their academic abilities. That said, internal transfer students' adjustments trended more positively as they became involved in various activities and communities at the flagship campus.

Finding Community and Belonging

A second theme was identified from students' interviews: Their adjustment to a new academic and social life was aided by finding a niche through smaller communities where they were able to develop meaningful connections with peers and faculty. These connections fostered students' belonging and connectedness to the flagship campus environment. Some communities were built into regional transfer students' academic programs, whereas students actively sought out other communities or even came across them by chance. A student in an education major described how their major's cohort model helped foster a sense of community among students:

I'm officially in my major and you have a cohort, so you have a group of people that you take all of your classes with at the same time, the same professor. That really helped me because I grew relationships with the people in my classes since we are all in person and we have three classes on Thursday. ... That really made it nice because in between classes we go get lunch.

This structured cohort system created a persistent student community that helped regional transfers develop stronger connections with their peers.

In addition to in-person interactions, class group chats were a way for students to hold each other accountable and commiserate through shared experiences. One student explained the contributions of technology to community building:

The GroupMes that people make in classes are so helpful because we make sure that we're getting assignments done on time, giving people a heads up, especially when professors don't post everything to [the learning management system]. So they are really nice because it's a "you're all in it together" type of thing.

Participation in these groups, typically open to all students in a class, provided a welcome source of academic and social support. Awareness of one's identity as a regional transfer student had positive aspects when the focus shifted from difference to commonality.

Shared internal transfer experience became a unifying identity that many students rallied around. One student recalled fondly:

It's funny now, going around [flagship campus] and talking to other students then you figure they're a [regional campus] kid too. And there's just an immediate connection.

This shared identity also resulted in an unexpected community. Anticipating a shared transition, some students formed de facto living communities at the flagship campus. One student recalled a coordinated effort by a group of regional transfer students to live together in the same residence hall:

We get similar [housing] lottery numbers when it came to the dorms, so we were able to fill up half of a dorm floor, and then had our friends who are girls live on the floor underneath us. So we were all right next to each other, which was really nice.

Thus, the proactive planning this group of students undertook seemed to have a positive effect on their adjustment; the informal residential community they formed helped ease their transition to the flagship campus.

Some chance encounters became opportunities for internal transfers to connect with their nontransfer peers and become involved with the campus community. A student described how they became involved in one of their first activities at the flagship campus:

I knew some people around [the flagship campus] and they just threw me on their sand

volleyball team. ... They just asked me to play so I just did it. That's kind of how I joined all the activities.

Thus, a welcoming campus environment along with acquaintances from high school or their regional campus were affordances that made it easier for regional transfer students to develop their social networks, which in turn facilitated their social adjustment. Importantly, for the students in this study, their initial struggles and concerns with integrating into the academic and social sides of the flagship campus subsided over time as they became involved in activities and organizations on campus; these communities contributed a much-needed sense of belonging to the regional transfer experience.

Adjustment Facilitated by Campus Supports

The third theme involved the way that different supports and resources at the flagship campus further helped internal transfer students' adjustment. These support systems consisted of both formal university-affiliated services and informal networks of family and friends. Regardless of the type of support or resource, internal transfer students described these resources as bolstering their success at the flagship campus. We also distinguish these resources from the communities described in the previous theme, which fostered students' belonging and connection to the campus community; the social groups and individuals in this theme are a valuable source of support for students.

Formal Supports and Resources

Internal transfer students used a range of resources available from university personnel and administered through various programs, offices, or departments on campus. These students consistently mentioned individual relationships with staff that helped them navigate challenges and difficult situations. One student expressed appreciation for their academic advisor:

I just wanted him to look at what I had planned out for the rest of my academic career here. He was really helpful. ... And he recommended me for scholarship and other things that I wasn't aware of, so that was really, really helpful.

Another student who worked as a resident advisor (RA) during their first year at the flagship campus discussed their initial struggles balancing responsibilities of the job and their academics. Their supervisor, the hall director, became an invaluable source of support and encouragement:

First semester [at flagship campus] I didn't do so well. Towards the end of the semester, I started talking to my hall director. We have one-on-ones every week and she checks up on me, how I'm doing mentally, spiritually. She tells me I'm a person first, a student second, and an RA third, and those are my priorities. ... She helped me make a schedule, just for my life, not even just school.

Students often cited university services such as academic tutoring, supplemental instruction, and career services in helping ease the transition to the flagship campus. However, genuine connections with university personnel who addressed their concerns and invested in their success were major contributors to their successful adjustment.

Informal Supports and Resources

Students also relied on informal resources, often to a greater extent than formal university-affiliated ones. Friends, classmates, and family were key to helping students navigate challenges at the flagship

campus, discover opportunities, and overcome academic and social challenges, particularly during the initial period after changing campuses. Students saw their peers and classmates as an accessible and relatable resource for academic help. Taking classes with friends was one strategy for finding academic support. As one student recalled,

I would go to my friends and people in my classes. One of my best friends is also in all of my classes. I feel like me and her were a major support system for each other throughout the whole year.

Another student described how her sorority provided her with access to academic support:

I go to my peers if I know they've taken a class, especially my sorority because we have study groups. I'm very, very fortunate to have that because they're almost weekly and so you have people in all sorts of different majors so you can meet someone in a class that you're in.

Students also relied on peers to help them navigate procedures and policies. The larger campus had multiple layers of administrative systems, and students who were not familiar found it difficult to find answers or solutions to problems. Fellow students could serve as models and guides. As one student recounted:

I'm trying to talk to a doctor about ADHD and one of my neighbors who I met this year when we moved in, he just went through the same process. So he's been the guy I go to about that and I've been able to talk to him about how he's gone about seeing his doctor and that process is like. It takes out that kind of daunting nature that I felt with going to whatever center it would be for whatever issue and not really knowing what was going on.

Students who knew other students or had family members who had previously gone through the regional to flagship campus change process felt they had a smoother experience because they were told what to expect and how to overcome potential obstacles. One student's transfer journey followed in a sibling's footsteps. The student recalled:

My family knew that it was a good route because my brother had done it before and he was fine with it.

Another student credited their cousins with making them aware that such a transfer was even possible:

If my cousins never went to [regional campus] I wouldn't even know that I could switch to main campus. ... I wouldn't know what I needed to do. I'm lucky that I had people who went through it before me to help me look for that information. I don't know how some people who don't have that kind of guidance would do well or find information or even knowing it exists, to be honest.

Overall, support from friends and family enhanced students' ability to navigate the academic, social, and procedural transitions of changing campuses, which, in turn, contributed to their adjustment at the flagship campus.

Discussion

This study extends the literature on transfer students by focusing on the experiences of those who transferred from a smaller regional campus to the larger flagship campus within the same multicampus institution. We found that internal transfer students experienced adjustment challenges and affordances that were aligned substantially with extant research on transfer students (e.g., Ishitani, 2008; Townsend &

Wilson, 2009). Despite these initial posttransfer challenges, participants successfully adjusted to the flagship campus, a process facilitated by a sense of belonging they cultivated through interactions and engagement with peers and aided by social capital accumulated through prior relationships with family and friends as well as new relationships with university staff.

Posttransfer Adjustment Struggles

The students we interviewed reported many challenges, both academic and social, after transferring to the flagship MU campus. These challenges included the adjustment to the large scale of the flagship campus, larger classes where interactions with peers and faculty were limited and had different academic norms and culture, and lack of social networks because the students were new to the flagship campus. These factors, consistent with research on community college transfer students, contributed to regional transfer students' feeling that they might not fit in with the flagship campus community (McCormick et al., 2009; Townsend & Wilson, 2006, 2009). At the heart of these issues appears to be a fundamental difference between attending a physically and bureaucratically small campus with fewer students and a more intimate academic and social environment and attending a campus that is much larger, more populous, more impersonal, and more organizationally complex. Our findings indicate that internal transfer students who do not fully anticipate this change can feel overwhelmed by the scale of the flagship campus.

Another factor that certain students cited as a barrier to successful adjustment was the feeling of not being academically qualified, derived from initially attending a less academically rigorous regional campus. The logistical benefits of transferring within an integrated multicampus institution such as MU, as claimed by university administration, do not appear to outweigh the embarrassment or shame about starting college at a regional campus that is frequently perceived as academically inferior. Negative stigma about transfer and its impact on student outcomes has been documented in prior work (Bahr et al., 2013; Berger & Malaney, 2003; Laanan et al., 2010; Shaw et al., 2019), though overall, the complex and nuanced psychological adjustment process that transfer students must navigate (Laanan et al., 2010; Young & Litzler, 2013) has not received as much attention in the literature compared with academic and social adjustment. Our findings provide additional insight into this adjustment process. In the case of MU, the university's messaging and language around the internal transfer process, to advertise the logistical ease, highlights how students at all campuses are part of the same institution and community, which in theory would facilitate a smoother transition. In practice, however, participants felt that the communities and environments at the flagship and their regional campus were much different from one another, which contributed to the challenges they faced after transferring.

Transfer Students' Construction of a Sense of Belonging

Many students cited another consistent challenge: finding or establishing community with other students after initially transferring to the flagship campus. Only after an initial period of struggling did they find community or connect with other students. These connections were supported by formal structures of MU as well as through informal social groups that students sought out or encountered by chance. The connections and relationships afforded by engagement with these groups, over time, helped students feel more connected to the flagship campus and its community.

These findings provide interesting insights into how internal transfers, and perhaps transfer students more broadly, construct and develop a sense of belonging. Belonging in higher education research and practice is conceptualized as a basic human need that varies across students and contexts that individuals

seek to fulfil until the need is met (Strayhorn, 2018). From this perspective, internal transfers students' need to belong was hindered by these social challenges. These students' stories of overcoming these challenges also lend support to more recent scholarship suggesting that transfer students and their nontransfer peers may define and construct belonging in different ways (Boeck et al., 2022; Torres & Boeck, 2022). Transfer students may place greater emphasis on relationships with peers and faculty as well as on receiving appropriate institutional support, including structured opportunities to build connections with peers and faculty (Hern et al., 2019; Jefferson et al., 2013; Lakin & Elliot, 2016).

Formal and Informal Support

Many of the internal transfer students cited both formal and informal supports that helped them adjust and acclimate to the flagship campus. University staff such as academic advisors as well as family, relatives, and friends made outside of school provided students with valuable information and assistance in navigating the flagship campus' policies and procedures. Family, relatives, and friends made outside of school act as emotional or academic support, or just as guides to help regional transfers navigate new and often complex policies and procedures at the flagship campus. The role of staff and family support in helping transfer students succeed has been documented in prior work (Del Real Viramontes, 2021; Hayes et al., 2020; Jabbar et al., 2019). Importantly, our findings reinforce the value of having family and friends who are familiar with the internal transfer pathway and how to navigate and adjust to the flagship campus posttransfer (Cepeda et al., 2021). In addition, staff were seen as an important source of cultural and social capital by many students in our study. The support and resources provided by these individuals, when viewed through a transfer student capital lens (Laanan et al., 2010; Starobin et al., 2016) suggest that the knowledge, skills, and experiences that students acquire to help them transfer to a new institution (i.e., their capital) continue to help them after transferring.

Implications for Practice

Our findings have several implications for multicampus institutions. As with other types of transfer students, internal transfer students may benefit from formal institutional supports to help them acclimate to the flagship campus (Jefferson et al., 2013). These supports could include orientation programming tailored to transfer student needs (Clausen & Wessel, 2015; Hern et al., 2019; Lane et al., 2015). Such onboarding programs should be designed with a good understanding of the characteristics of transfer students' prior institutions so they can help faculty and staff better tailor support and resources to students' specific needs (Townsend, 2008). Structured opportunities to interact and connect with peers and faculty, both inside and outside the classroom, can help ease the social adjustment process for regional transfers (Hern et al., 2019; Lakin & Elliot, 2016). For instance, academic departments at universities can hold welcome events for incoming transfer students with faculty and other students in attendance to create a more intimate experience. Finally, given the social capital that many internal transfers have via friends and family at the MU flagship campus, institutions can strengthen their regional-to-flagship transfer pathway by leveraging these relationships. For example, a peer mentoring program for new regional transfers with peer mentors who previously transferred from a regional campus can capitalize on mentors' familiarity with regional campus students (Beras, 2018; Yomtov et al., 2017).

Limitations and Future Directions

Findings must be understood within the context of several limitations. First, our sample included only

internal transfer students who remained at the flagship campus. Additional work that more directly compares the experiences of internal, external, and less successful transfer would provide a richer understanding of the similarities and differences among these groups. Second, our protocol did not directly probe how students' identities or other individual differences may have affected their adjustment experiences. Given the demonstrated importance of students' social identities in understanding their transfer experiences, future work should examine in greater depth the role of these factors for those coming from a regional campus. Third, the institutional context of MU is unique and other multi-campus institutional systems may have different policies and procedures regarding transfer between campuses. Our findings, therefore, may not generalize to all institutions with multi-campus structures.

Conclusion

Our findings show that internal transfer students appear to have transition and adjustment experiences that are substantially similar to other transfer pathways (Hartman, 2022). Internal transfer students navigated and overcame academic, social, and psychological adjustment challenges by taking advantage of institutional support structures and leveraging support from friends and families. Our study is significant because it highlights two unique aspects of the internal transfer pathway. The first aspect is students' self-stigma about their academic abilities and the academic rigor of the regional campus from which they transferred. The second is the way that some of these students benefited from having family or friends who previously internally transferred to help with their transition and adjustment. Efforts to promote regional transfer students' success must acknowledge the unique circumstances of this transfer pathway and the challenges they may pose.

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