Exploring the Challenges and Opportunities of Library Outreach for Transfer Students:
A Cross-Institutional Collaboration

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Introduction

Higher education statistics in 2014 indicate that one-third of all college students will transfer between institutions during their college experience, and this number is on the rise.[1] In order to support this increasing trend in transfer student admissions, community colleges and universities are developing services and programs for this often-overlooked non-traditional student population. Although challenges and strategies for dealing with this transfer student transition is well documented in the literature, there is a paucity of research focusing on how the transfer experience impacts students' ability to conduct library research. Library instruction attended at one institution may not transfer well to a new institution. Identification of this problem resulted in librarians at two institutions, Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) and the University of Utah (UU), to collaborate and explore transfer barriers at their institutions. As the numbers of non-traditional transfer students increase, it will become even more important to address transfer student support challenges at the library level.

The purpose of this paper is to present a community college/university exploratory case study that investigated inter-and intra-institutional connections and studied the transfer student experience as related to library research skills development. The authors will describe strategies used to engage campus transfer support units and present preliminary findings from a transfer student research study.

Overview of the Transfer Student Collaboration Project

With the help of an undergraduate intern, who was also a transfer student, librarians met to discuss common goals and objectives and began investigating the transfer student library research experience. The initial goals related to: connecting with other transfer support units on both campuses, better understanding of the library instruction practices at both institutions, developing opportunities for collaborative information literacy skills, and collecting data about the transfer experience. Some of the activities undertaken involved:

- Creation of a library guide containing transfer student resources from both institutions (http://campusguides.lib.utah.edu/transfer/home)
- Creation of a communication and contact list that was used to set up information gathering meetings
- Relationship building with faculty and administrative departments working with more general transfer issues

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- Library instruction peer-teaching observations at both campus locations
- Librarian introductions at both locations so students get to know the librarians more informally
- Library instruction in special transfer student classes held at SLCC for students transferring to 4-year institutions, and summer course at the UU for transfer students coming into the Writing & Rhetoric program
- A grant funded project for two semesters through the MUSE Scholar Program (https://muse.utah.edu/) that allowed for hire of a transfer student to help the librarians better understand the transfer student perspective and experience. The MUSE scholar also partnered to design the research study design, as well as collect and analysis data.

Literature Review
The Bigger Transfer Picture

On the national level, the idea of better transfer student support is taking hold. There have been several large national studies conducted through organizations such as the American Association of Community Colleges,[2] The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC)[3] and the College Board Advocacy and Policy Center[4] focusing on establishing transfer student pathways from community colleges to 4-year institutions. In addition, state level collaboration progress has been made in designing collaborative policies, and articulation agreements for aligning credits and curriculum.[5] The 2016 NSCRC report also indicates that students over the age of 24 struggle to complete a degree after eight years, and are less likely than those under age 20 to complete their degree when transferring from a two-year public institution to a four-year institution.[6] This indicates that adult transfer learners might benefit from additional support. A survey from 2006 indicates that students feel that transfer expectations are too high, and that they are expected to be successful because they already have college experience under their belt.[7] Another problem facing transfer students is a feeling of anonymity, and a desire for a sense of belonging and community. Members of the higher education community need to recognize that affective components of learning are just as important as cognitive factors.[8]

Another theme emerging from the national literature is that academic and scholarly challenges may not be the only barrier to transfer student success. Institutional organization and support might also be the problem. In one study, there is a top-down emphasis on engaging and reaching out to transfer students to improve diversity of institutions. This has also been shown to have positive impact for those who may feel like outsiders.[9] Other factors contributing to student success highlighted in this article are supportive and approachable tutors, significant adult relationships, and accessing student support in higher education. Risk factors for dropping out include poor academic skills, lack of college support, an unorthodox entry route into higher education, being too self-reliant, and more importantly, an unwillingness to seek support.[10, 11]

The Local Utah Transfer Student Context

Research indicates that the local educational context is an important factor to consider when planning for transfer student success. In our educational case study, 73% of SLCC students transfer to a 4-year institution, and of those students, 54%, or over 900 students, transfer to the UU each year.[12] Cross-institutional partnerships then become imperative to better understand the student transfer experience from both sides of the process. Phillips claims that colleges and universities also need to consider the special needs of transfer students.[13] According to local Utah data collected in the fall of 2017, more than one-third of UU and SLCC students are 25 and older (38% and 35% respectively).[14] Given the large number of students who transfer from SLCC to the UU every year, it's likely that many of those transfer students fall into the 25 and older category. Age data for SLCC to UU

transfer students was not available to the researchers at the time of publication, however anecdotal evidence supports this premise.

Transfer Students, Information Literacy and Libraries

Even though academic libraries have long partnered with students, staff, and faculty to help create positive outcomes for academic success and are well positioned to contribute to initiatives and partnerships for transfer transitions; transfer students often miss the initial university library instruction opportunities provided for incoming freshman. A recent survey completed by academic librarians throughout Colorado found that academic librarians could do more to learn about their transfer students that they develop services for.[15] For example, when University North Carolina at Wilmington, found that transfer students had specific needs that were not wholly met by existing campus services, the Library began working with campus partners to develop a plan, and develop a transfer-specific librarian position.[16] These efforts increased awareness inside and outside the library for transfer student needs and the challenges and helped to build library-campus partnerships. Library-campus partnerships are critical for transfer student success.[17] Flaga's research[18] has identified five dimensions of transition that contribute to academic success: learning resources; connecting; familiarity; negotiating; and integrating. These transition dimensions are often associated with library instruction goals and outcomes and could serve as framework for designing library instruction for transfer students.

Similar to other students coming into a new higher education context, transfer students often face what is defined in the literature as library shock.[19] In addition, library anxiety, a psychological barrier to conducting effective library research. This anxiety stems from a lack of library experience, an overwhelming anxiety about the amount of resources at an academic library and how to use those resources, as well as, a reluctance to seek help from library staff.[20] An inventory, The Library Anxiety Scale, has been developed to help identify aspects of library anxiety.[21] While Jiao et al. suggest freshmen library instruction as a good intervention for library anxiety, transfer students who enter the university with advanced credit status, often miss out on this possible solution to decreasing library anxiety.[22] In addition, the Project Information Literacy (PIL) project, has reported that 80% of students don't ask librarians questions, and only 30% utilize librarian help when doing research.[23] Gross and Latham confirm the PIL findings and also claim that it is the combination of library skills, self-estimation of skills, and library anxiety that can have a negative impact on information literacy competency.[24] At the administrative level, overconfidence about the ability of transfer students to swiftly adapt to the large research university academic settings can result in transfer student services being mis-aligned with student needs.[25]

Understanding transfer students needs and thinking of them as 'adult learners' is one approach articulated in the literature to address the needs of this unique student population.[26] For many years, librarians have shown interest in improving library services for this user group.[27, 28] Patricia Cross first brought to light the importance of focusing on adult learners in higher education decades ago.[29] Although a diverse population, adult learners characteristics include: taking a non-traditional path to higher education; bringing valuable experiences to the classroom; having multiple roles and responsibilities beyond being a student; expecting respect in the classroom; and exhibiting strong internal motivation and self-direction. Veal describes how librarians can better assist adult learners who use their local public library rather than their academic library by keeping reference interviews brief and providing efficient, practical information that could be used immediately.[30] Focus groups and questionnaires completed by adult learners at a large university indicated similar requests for library interactions to be immediate, efficient, and respectful.[31] This concept of andragogy by Malcolm Knowles,[32] can be combined with library instruction methods to provide self-directed learning opportunities for adult transfer students that build a safe environment for cooperative learning, and create transparent, practical, hands-on activities and as-

signments.[33] Roberts found that using motivational design and problem-based learning helped adult learners succeed with various research scenarios.[34] In addition, Dahlen argues that applying adult learning principles to information literacy instruction for all college students, regardless of age, can strengthen the learning experiences for everyone in the classroom and help develop and exhibit more internal motivation for lifelong learning.[35]

While the challenges facing transfer students have been documented for many years, there is a new interest in higher education in transfer student needs. Support from national, state, and institutional initiatives to foster stronger support systems for transfer students is encouraging. Collaborative library-campus partnerships, understanding the needs of this unique population of students, and further research in how the library can contribute to a more engaged transfer student experience are all opportunities to explore. Librarians have a huge opportunity to take advantage of their partnership-building expertise and student-centered values to position themselves as leaders in higher education initiatives for transfer students' success.

Research Methodology

In addition to conducting an environmental scan of current transfer student support and a plan for a better transition from SLCC to UU, a pilot mixed methods research study was designed to help identify transfer student needs and implement collaborative interventions. Transfer students were invited to participate in a survey and follow-up interviews about their transfer experience, library experiences, and experiences about conducting academic library research. The survey included Likert-scale questions focusing on five different library anxiety factors already identified in the literature.[36-38] The survey also included demographic data such as gender, year, major, and self-reported open-ended questions on their comfort level with doing library research activities. After taking the survey, the students could then opt to participate in an interview.

The library anxiety survey design by Bostick[39] consisted of 43 5-point Likert-format items divided into five subcategories: barriers with staff, affective barriers, comfort with the library space, knowledge of the library, and mechanical barriers. Our transfer student survey that was built upon that survey, drew 17 questions from this survey for our pilot study; 3 questions for each of the five subcategories of questions and 2 agreement testing questions. Students responded to the 17 questions on a scale of 1-5; 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. A mix of negative and positive questions were used and 2 questions had similar negative and positive versions to look at agreement of responses. The transfer student MUSE Scholar selected the questions used in our survey based on her own transfer student experience.

Sample/Subject Selection

The participants for this study were purposively selected. Community college and university campus transfer organizations and services such as the UU Transfer Center, and a Communications Transfer Information Group, a writing course taught at SLCC by a UU instructor, UU transfer student cohort courses, and faculty from other library instruction courses helped with the identification and recruitment of study participants. Transfer students taking library instruction courses, as well as those not involved in library instruction course invited to take the survey participate in interviews. The survey was distributed both in paper and electronic form. Students taking transfer-focused courses took paper surveys in class, and students recruited through the campus support centers took an electronic online version of the same survey. The survey was taken by 32 transfer students. Three follow-up interviews were conducted with transfer students in three different majors.

Data Collection Process and Data Analysis

In the fall of 2017 through fall 2018, transfer students were surveyed and interviewed. Data collection is still on-

going. Survey Likert-score means were calculated. Before conducting the mean analysis of the responses, negative questions were reversed scored. Follow-up interviews were then conducted one-on-one, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Then the open-ended questions from the survey and the interview transcripts were analyzed using qualitative research methodologies.

The MUSE Scholar transfer student completed CITI training (IRB requirement) and received training in using NVivo to conduct qualitative data analysis. One of the UU librarians and the transfer student collaborated on the instrument design, the data collection, and the data analysis. Each researcher coded data separately and then collaborated to consolidate and validate the main study themes. A constant comparison method of qualitative analysis was used to code, categorize, and analyze the open-ended responses in the survey and interview data.[40] The inductive coding process involved three stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding as recommended by Corbin and Strauss. Themes were identified from the interview transcripts and the open-ended survey comments.

Results
Survey Results (Quantitative Scores)

Sixty-six percent of survey respondents were female; 31% were male; and 3% reported as other. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents were age 21 and above with 31.2% reporting they were age 26 or above. When reporting where they transferred from 68.8% reported they transferred from SLCC; 12.5% from Utah State University; 9.4% were from out of state; 6.3% from Dixie State, and 3% from BYU with over 90% of all the study participants being in-state transfers. Eight students reported they had a double major with the two top majors being Humanities (54.2%) and a Social & Behavioral Science major such as Psychology (17.2%). Other majors reported were

TABLE 1	
Mean Score of the Transfer Student Library Survey	
Survey Likert-Score Question	**Likert-Scale Score (1-5)**
1. The library is a comfortable place to study	4.3
2. I want to learn to do my own research	4.2
3. The library is an important part of my university	4.2
4. I feel comfortable in the library	3.9
5. I enjoy learning new things about the library	3.8
6. The reference librarians are friendly and helpful	3.8
7. I can get help in the library at the times I need it.	3.7
8. The reference librarians do have the time to help me.	3.7
9. The people at the knowledge commons desk are helpful	3.6
10. The computer printers are usually not out of paper	3.6
11. I don't feel like I'm bothering the reference librarian if I ask a question	3.5
12. The computers and printers are always in working order	3.4
13. I can find my way around the library	3.0
14. I feel comfortable finding a book I need on the shelf	3.0
15. I am sure about how to begin my research	2.9
16. I know what resources are available in the library	2.7
17. I know how to use the free scanners	2.5

Science, Business, Health Sciences, Education, Architecture & Planning, Mines and Earth Sciences. The open responses to the three open ended questions in the survey asking about their library research challenges and past experience are analyzed with the interview data.

In the Likert-scale questions, the three top statements students agreed with were: 1) The library is a comfortable place to study—mean of 4.3; 2) I want to learn to do my own research—a mean of 4.2; and 3) The library is an important part of my university—a mean of 4.2. The three statements with the lowest means (depicting the least confidence) were: I am sure about how to begin my research—mean of 2.9 ; I know what resources are available in the library—mean of 2.7; and I know how to use the free scanners—mean of 2.5. See the mean scores from each of the 17 questions in Table 1.

Interview and Open-Ended Question Themes (Qualitative)

Although the quantitative data does provide some insight into the transfer student experience as related to the library and developing information literacy skills, the qualitative comments and interview data provided a richer description of the transfer student experience. Six themes were identified: *making connections, building confidence from anxiety, discovering and exploring opportunities, challenges of the non-traditional transfer transition, changing unfamiliar to familiar*, and *paths forward*. Table 2 demonstrates the distribution of the frequency numbers of the coding for each of the six themes.

TABLE 2 Code Frequency Numbers by Themes	
Themes	Code Frequency # per Theme
Making connections	106
Building confidence from anxiety	68
Discovering and exploring opportunities	44
Challenges of the non-traditional transfer transition	20
Changing unfamiliar to familiar	19
Paths forward	11

Discussion

In this study, it was discovered that the research cultures at a community college and a research university can be very different.[41] Tools are different, expectations are different, and the structure of library support can also be different. Helping students develop confidence in building library research skills before, during, and after transferring to a 4-year college, with a focus on continuous and transparent transition processes, will help alleviate library research anxiety and reduce the transition shock transfer students often encountered during their first transfer year at the university.

The data from this small pilot study align to the information literacy and library research literature themes that claim that students coming into a higher education context do not have the skill sets and knowledge that faculty and librarians often assume students have acquired in high school and the community college.[42] Although students have developed some knowledge and skills, they lose confidence and become more anxious when the context changes, and then what they thought they knew (databases, policies and practices, facilities and resources) are no longer the same. Students reported they needed to "learn new ways to conduct research, learn new tools, and work at a different academic level."[43] The value of making a personal connection with students, and

the role that the library could play in helping students make those connections is extremely important. Transfer students discussed how "finding that one person they could talk to and trust and refer them to other people on campus" made all the difference in the world to changing their frustrating transfer experience into a more manageable one. Students spoke about their interest in learning more about becoming more effective at research and enumerated how familiar and unfamiliar they were with specific resources, tools, and strategies. The interviews turned into a 'teaching moment' as a conversation developed between the interviewee and the librarian about how the librarian could help them get the support and tools they needed, instead of just a one-way interview conversation about their needs and challenges. This change in dynamic of the conversation resulted in change in how the researcher approached the interviews. Students' unfamiliarity with the 'new' library environment and experience after transferring is not confined to the library. Students discussed how they "felt like they had gone backwards: and were "surprised to find they felt like a freshman again."[44] This shock sensation also applies to library anxiety where students thought they knew how to do research, and then when coming to a new library, there were different tools and new policies. Students who move from a community college context to a high research-focused institution feel this disorienting dilemma even more.[45]

The top three statements that students agreed with about *feeling comfortable studying in the library*, about *wanting to do their own research*, and *how the library is an important part of the university*, are all very reassuring findings. One of the most interesting findings in the survey data was related to the high agreement of the statement, that *they wanted to learn to do my own research*. This finding aligns to the characteristics of adult learners found in the library literature.[46] Our data indicate that our transfer students did have attributes of adult learners and wanted to become more self-directed learners. The agreement with the *statement the library is a comfortable place to study* also indicates that even though they feel anxious about the library or library research, and the transfer process in general, they could still find the library as a comfortable place for studying. This is the first step for getting students comfortable with other library services and programs.

Conclusion

Both community college and university libraries with information literacy and library instruction programs could utilize the findings and recommendations from this research. Scanning their own institutional context for transfer student could identify stumbling blocks, barriers, and anxieties about doing library research and could help both types of institutions (community college and universities) be better prepared to scaffold and support transition efforts. By creating guidelines and models for better connections, communication channels, and collaboration opportunities between the Salt Lake Community College and the University of Utah library, this case study project could be used a guide for other institutions trying to establish better connections between community college and university libraries. By identifying student research and information literacy needs, this project could serve as an example to help other institutions develop research agendas and partnerships that could benefit all community college students, not just those transitioning to a 4-year college. Improving information literacy competencies and research skills development programs not only helps students enrolled in college courses, but it can benefit students in the workplace, in their real life, and help them develop skills for lifelong learning.

Acknowledgement

Notes

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