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Transition and Thriving in University: A Grounded Theory of the Transition Experiences and Conceptions of Thriving of a Selection of Undergraduate Students at Western University

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences
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TRANSITION AND THRIVING IN UNIVERSITY: A GROUNDED THEORY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES AND CONCEPTIONS OF THRIVING OF A SELECTION OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT WESTERN UNIVERSITY

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate of Philosophy

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Abstract

The transition from high school to university has been associated with decreases in health and wellbeing for some students. The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the transitional needs and experiences of students leaving high school and entering Western University, to explore how students conceptualize thriving, and to develop a substantive theory of transition and thriving for Western University students.

A total of 42 students and 21 staff members from Western University participated in this study. Data were collected through focus groups and individual interviews. Utilizing grounded theory data analysis methods two conceptual models were developed. The first model outlines students' transition experiences, as well as their conceptualization of thriving at university. The data suggest that students tend to be unprepared for the transition to university. The majority of students reported that their transition to university consisted of mostly negative experiences.

The second model uses the data and the theoretical frameworks that guided the study to explain the transitional experiences described by students and staff. The model shows that when students transition to university, they actually experience multiple transitions within a short period of time. The data included in the model also suggest that there are several person-environment tensions and interactions that affect students' transition experiences and thriving outcomes.

This study elucidates the factors that affect students as they transition from high school to Western University. The substantive theory generated from the data explains that students enter university with inadequate skills, and with inaccurate knowledge and

expectations about university life. As a result of their inadequate preparation students face numerous challenges, the most difficult challenges tend to be time management, making friends, and managing the increased workload. Thriving was conceptualized as achieving academic success, employing effective coping skills, having a positive perspective, engaging in healthy behaviours, gaining connectedness, and occupational participation. This theory is preliminary and further research is needed to validate the theory for generalization to other Canadian universities. The results, however, provide valuable information to guide assessment and further development of potential support services and programs to assist students transitioning to university.

Keywords

Acknowledgments

First I need to thank the 42 brave students who took the time to come and sit with me and discuss their transition experiences. Your decision to share what were at times very personal stories made this work possible.

To all of the staff members who spent their lunch hour with me, I thank you too. Your support for Western University students and your passion to see students thrive was evident in all that you said. Your knowledge added greatly to this work.

To my committee members Dr. Jan Polgar and Dr. Angie Mandich I thank you for your support during this process. Your knowledge and input challenged me to 'think outside the box', and to explore my work from a very creative and analytical perspective. Both of you made this an enlightening, but fun process; I never knew that advisory committee meetings could be so much fun.

To my family who continually supported me; completing graduate studies while being far away from home has at times been challenging, but your continued support and belief in my abilities helped me make it through this process. I must also thank my friends for their encouragement, support, and comic relief, especially on those days when I became overwhelmed by this PhD journey.

Finally (I left the best for last) I have to thank my supervisor Dr. Linda Miller who has been with me for the past seven years. I am unable to put into words what your support and encouragement has meant to me over the years. American poet Maya Angelou said "people will forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made

them feel". I have encountered many challenges during these seven years, but I always left your office feeling better than when I entered. Thank you for being an extra shoulder to lean on. Your feedback and reviews over the years have sharpened my critical thinking skills, and my ability to see issues from different perspectives. I also have to thank you for allowing me the freedom to be the type of graduate student that I wanted to be, and for allowing me to explore the areas that were of interest to me. As I prepare to leave this program I feel competent that I can apply all of the skills that I have learnt in any academic or non-academic setting. Thank you!!!

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Chapter 1

1. Overview of Chapter

This chapter provides an introduction to the research study. The chapter begins by placing the transition from high school to university within the context of life transitions and provides a brief overview of the problems students experience when they transition to university. The link between the transition to university and students' mental health issues is specifically addressed. The purpose of the study is outlined and definitions of terms are provided, the significance of the study is also discussed. Finally, the study's theoretical frameworks are introduced and an overview of the subsequent chapters is provided.

1.1   Introduction

Life transitions are periods when individuals experience significant changes in their physical, social, and/or economic environments (Volger, Crivello, & Woodhead, 2008). The changes often require that individuals "make major adjustments, develop new skills, and learn to cope with new experiences" (Lenz, 2001, p.300). The individual may also experience psychological and emotional distress, and reduced daily wellbeing if the changes are perceived and experienced negatively (Elder & Giele, 2009; Schlossberg, 1981). Elder and Giele (2009) note that transitions are a part of the life trajectory; individuals' therefore experience several transitions during their life course.

For adolescents a significant life transition occurs when they leave high school and enter university/college[1] (Conley, Kirsch, Dickson, & Bryant, 2014; Paul & Brier, 2001). The transition from high school to university/college brings many challenges as students often move away from their home and friends to a new academic, social, and physical environment (Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse, 2008; Mattanah, Ayers, Brand, & Brooks, 2010). In addition to the changes in their external environments students also undergo identity and self-responsibility changes. During this transition they are required to become more independent, as they assume responsibility for their health, finances, and decision making (Darling, McWey, Howard, & Holmstead, 2007; Lenz, 2001).

The transition from high school to university/college has received much attention in the literature in recent years as the transition has been linked to what is viewed as a

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[1] Degree granting institutions are labelled and defined differently in Canada and the Unites States (US). In the US most Bachelor degree granting institutions are referred to as colleges, while in Canada, Bachelor degree granting institutions are known as universities. The majority of the research on the transition from high school to Bachelor degree granting institutions has been conducted in the US with undergraduate college students. For these reasons 'university/college' is used throughout this thesis. The terms are, however, used separately at times depending on the context, or the term used in the research that is being referenced.

student 'mental health crisis' (Eisner, 2011; Kadison & Degeronimo, 2004) across North American universities and four year colleges. Data collected from university/college counseling centers over the past 15 years indicate that not only are more students today seeking psychological services, but that current students present with more severe psychological problems than in previous years (Gallagher, Gill, & Sysko, 2000; Hunt & Eisenburg, 2010). A 1998 analysis of six years of student intake data at a large university in the United States (US) concluded that "the level of severity of the concerns were much greater than the traditional presenting problems of adjustment and individuation that were seen for college students in counseling center research from the 1950s and 1960s through the early 1980s" (Pledge, Lapan, Heppner, Roehlke, 1998, p. 387). These findings were confirmed in a more recent study (Guthman, Iocin, & Konstas, 2010) that assessed the records of 3,256 students who sought counselling at a mid-sized private US university between 1997 and 2009. Guthman, Iocin, and Konstas, (2010) found that there has been a shift in students' needs and that there was a 10% increase in moderate to severe depression among students. Other studies have reported high levels of depression, suicidal ideation, and anxiety among university/college students (Eisenburg, Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007; Gallagher, 2008).

Research investigating mental health problems among undergraduate university/college students has proposed that inability to cope with failure (Flatt, 2013), over protective parenting (Schriffin, Liss, Miles-McClean, Geary, Erchull, & Tashner, 2014), and poor preparation for university (Watkins, Hunt, &, Eisenburg, 2011) potentially contribute to the mental health problems experienced by this population.

Other research, however, suggests that changes in Canadian and US government policies to increase non-traditional students (students from different ethnic/racial groups, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, immigrants, students with disabilities) access to university has not only resulted in a change in the demographics of university undergraduate populations, but has also increased the range of mental health needs (Rossi, 2011; Vaccarro, 2012). Kitzrow (2003) and Archer and Cooper (1998) suggest that non-traditional students bring multi-cultural issues and different developmental needs to university. Additional research further indicates that non-traditional students are often less prepared for university academics and social life, and that this lack of preparation increases their adjustment difficulties and levels of distress (Michael, Dickson, Ryan, & Koefer, 2010; Reiff, 1997).

In addition to experiencing mental health issues, students are known to engage in poor health behaviours, such as unhealthy eating, lack of sleep, and reduced exercise during the high school to university/college transition; they also experience high levels of stress (Brown, Buboltz, & Soper, 2006; Driskell, Kim, & Goebel, 2005; Giddan, 1988; Gyurcsik, Bray, & Brittain, 2004). Given the health and functioning issues experienced by students during the transition from high school to university/college it is important to understand the factors that may contribute to their health issues during the transition. Increased knowledge about students' experiences is even more critical in the Canadian context, as there is very little peer-reviewed Canadian research on students' experiences of the transition from high school to university.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gather information on the transitional needs and experiences of students leaving high school and entering Western University, to explore students' conceptualization of thriving, and to develop a substantive theory of transition and thriving for Western University students. The concept of thriving has been studied extensively with adult populations in psychology and health care research. The term has, however, only recently been applied and studied among university and college students. The data from this study will therefore add to a very small body of literature on thriving among undergraduate university/college students. This study was guided by three research questions:

1. How do students leaving high school experience the transition to Western University and how do they define thriving at university?

2. What are the major factors that hinder/promote a successful transition to university?

3. How do the factors that hinder/promote a successful transition affect students' ability to thrive at university?

1.3 Definition of Terms

Advanced Placement (APs): These are first year university level courses offered by high schools.

BMOS: Bachelor of Management and Organizational Studies.

BMSc: Bachelor of Medical Sciences.

College: This refers to a US educational institutions that offer four year bachelor degree programs. There are two types of colleges in the US: national colleges and regional colleges. Both types of colleges focus primarily on undergraduate education programs.

Don: A student employed by the university, they live in student residences and create and facilitate programs to address the needs of first year students.

Executive Team: A small group of students in the student clubs who plan and organize club events and activities.

Fac Soph: This is an abbreviated term for Faculty sophs, it refers to upper year students who are employed by the university to provide mentorship and support to first year students. They are responsible for first year students within their Faculty and create Faculty related programming during Orientation Week and during the academic year.

International Baccalaureate Program: This is a university entrance program offered by some high schools (usually private schools), some of the courses offered in the program are recognised as equivalent to first year university courses.

Language barrier: Refers to problems experienced in communicating, writing, and understanding lectures or conversations in a language other than one's own.

O-Week: This is an abbreviated term for Orientation Week

OWL: This is the university's online learning management system. Professors can post course outlines, readings, class announcements, lecture slides, and grades to their entire class using this system.

RA: This is an abbreviation for Residence Assistant. RAs are students who are employed by the university to provide support and supervision to other students living in

residence. They are trained in conflict management, diversity, and mental health concerns.

Rez: This is an abbreviated term for residence, the term refers to student residences at Western University.

Soph: This is an abbreviated term for sophomores. Sophs are upper year students, they are employed by the university to provide mentorship and support to first year students. They also assist with planning Orientation Week activities and live in residence with the first year students to whom they are assigned.

TA: This is an abbreviation for Teaching Assistant.

University: In Canada this refers to educational institutions which offer degree programs and conduct research. There are four types of universities including; primarily undergraduate universities which offer primarily Bachelor degrees and comprehensive universities which offer Bachelor and graduate level degrees. In the US there are two types of universities; regional universities which offer Bachelors and Masters degrees and in some cases a small number of doctoral degrees, and National Universities which offer Bachelor, Masters, and Doctoral degrees.

1.4   Significance of This Study

This study is important for several reasons; various peer reviewed studies as well as national college health surveys continue to report declines in student health, especially mental health. Mental health problems can impact a student's physical, emotional, academic, and interpersonal functioning (Brackney & Karabenick, 1995; Landow, 2006). Even if students do not develop mental health problems many students

experience high levels of stress during the transition from high school to university as they try to acclimate to their new experiences. Landow (2006) suggests that universities are often reactive to student mental health problems as opposed to focussing on prevention. However, in order to prevent problems universities must first have a clear idea of the issues that potentially trigger mental health problems after students transition to university. In an era of increasing mental health problems among university/college students this study attempts to provide information on the transitional needs and experiences of Western University students.

Undergraduate university enrollment across Canada has been increasing over the past ten years (Statistics Canada, 2009). In 2011 undergraduate enrollment reached one million students, an increase of 2.4% from the previous year (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), 2011). In Ontario 336,637 full time undergraduate students were enrolled in universities in 2009, a 4.4% increase from 2008. A 2010 report on Trends in Higher Education from the AUCC suggests that enrollment figures are expected to continue to increase. The report indicates that the number of jobs available for university graduates in 2020 will increase by 1.3 million and that in order to meet that demand the number of new graduates will need to increase by 1.3% per year. Based on the current rate of mental health problems among students, increased undergraduate enrollment may also be accompanied by greater increases in student mental health issues. Canadian universities must therefore have a greater understanding of the needs of their students. Even though there is a significant amount of US research on this topic it cannot be assumed that all of the US data are applicable to the Canadian experience, as there are major cultural differences between two

countries and the structure and administration of the universities. This study will therefore fill a gap in the Canadian literature on the transition from high school to university.

Finally, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recently released a new report (January 2014) on adolescent health. The report indicates that there is a need for more clarity about how determinants such as school environments affect adolescent health. The authors of the WHO report suggest that more knowledge about all health determinants can help to create more effective interventions for adolescents. The WHO report also suggests that a life course perspective be adopted to guide policies and programs for adolescents, as the health behaviours that are developed during adolescence influence health behaviors in adulthood (WHO, 2014). This study focused on students' experiences, but also gathered data on aspects of the university environment that may impact student's transitional experiences and consequently their health, wellbeing, and level of functioning.

1.5   Theoretical Perspectives

Theories are created to explain and predict phenomena (Torraco, 1997). The theoretical framework of a study therefore provides a structure to explain the phenomenon being studied (Camp, 2001). In qualitative research theoretical frameworks give the researcher a lens through which she or he can examine problems and interpret the data (Reeves, Albert, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). Three theoretical frameworks were chosen for this study: Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981),

Magnusson's Holistic Person-Context Interaction Theory (1998), and Schreiner's

Thriving Construct (2010).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981) is utilised to explain students' transition

experiences. The theory provides a model for understanding how individuals experience

and navigate transitions, and how different types of transitions affect individuals. The

theory also explains how individual characteristics, environmental characteristics, and

the nature of the transition all impact how individuals adapt to a transition.

Magnusson's Holistic Person-Context Interaction Theory (1998) focuses on the

interactions between the person and the environment and explores how those

interactions affect adolescent adaptation and development; two key issues in the

transition process. The theory proposes that an individual and his or her environment

are interconnected and that interactions between the two systems affect development

(thriving in the context of this study). It is surmised that if the interactions are mutually

beneficial then healthy development is likely to occur.

The third theoretical framework is Schreiner's Thriving Construct (2010). This

framework was chosen because it examines student success from a holistic perspective

rather than focusing solely on academic success. Schreiner's thriving construct is

grounded in positive psychology and focuses on shifting the perspective away from

weaknesses to an emphasis on students' strengths. According to Schreiner, the term

thriving focuses on optimal functioning as opposed to surviving college.

1.6   Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is presented in monograph style, consisting of eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides background information for the thesis. Chapter 2 presents the literature review, it provides a general overview of the literature on the transition to university, it then specifically examines the issues faced by sub-populations within the student body (for example, international students, first generation students), and discusses health issues faced by the general student body during the transition. Previous research on students' experiences of the transition to university/college is also provided. Additionally, the theoretical frameworks chosen for the study are explained in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 reviews the research design and the grounded theory methodology used in this study. Data collection methods and data analysis techniques are explained in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents an overview of the two conceptual models which were developed from the data collected. The full results obtained from data collection and data analysis are presented in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7 the results are discussed in relation to previous literature and in relation to the theoretical frameworks. The limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are also discussed in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 of this thesis discusses the results in relation to implications for policy and practice, several recommendations are offered.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2. The Transition to University – The Impact on Mental Health

The transition from high school to university/college is often highly anticipated by students (Thurber & Walton, 2012) as they look forward to new academic and social experiences (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). Research however shows that many first year students often have unrealistic expectations about university life, and that their experiences often do not match their expectations (Larose & Bovin, 1998; Paul & Brier, 2001; Stern, 1966). The reality for many students is that the transition from high school to university is accompanied by several unfamiliar and challenging experiences.

Relative to their high school experience, first year students encounter a more demanding workload, greater independence, and increased responsibility for managing their time, studies, self-care, and finances (Flatt, 2013; Lenz, 2011; Ross, Nielbling, & Heckert, 1999). The majority of students also move away from their family home and friends to live with strangers in university residence or off-campus housing, and this disrupts their social networks (Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Srivasta, Tamir, McGonigal, John, & Gross, 2009). In addition, many students enter university/college at the age where they are leaving adolescence and entering emerging adulthood, a developmental period characterized by identity exploration, increased responsibility, and independent decision making (Arnett, 2000). Consequently, first year university/college students who are transitioning from high school simultaneously experience an ecological and developmental transition when they begin university/college (Conley, Kirsch, Dickson, & Bryant, 2014).

As a result of the multiple issues that accompany the transition to university/college, new students go through an adjustment period. For some students this adjustment is extremely difficult. The challenges that students encounter while trying to adapt to new roles, new routines, and a new academic and social environment may lead to uncertainty about their ability to meet personal and family expectations, and the other requirements of their new life (Blimling & Miltenberg, 1981; Dyson & Renk, 2006). The number of new challenges and the uncertainty about their ability to succeed in their new environment can negatively impact students' self-esteem, and their social and academic self-concept, (Blimling & Miltenberg, 1981; Compas, Wagner, Slavin, & Vannatta,1986; Dyson & Renk, 2006) and may also lead to high levels of stress and anxiety (Giddan, 1988). Consequently, this transition period is often associated with several psychological problems (Aspinwall & Taylor 1992).

2.1   Homesickness

A common issue that can result in psychological health problems for some first year students during the transition to university is homesickness. Homesickness is defined as distress or impairment caused by moving away from home (Thurber & Walton, 2007). Individuals suffering from homesickness are usually preoccupied with thoughts of home (Thurber & Walton, 2007) and have a strong desire to return home (Van Tilburg, Vingerhoets, & Van Heck, 1996a). The level of homesickness varies from mild to severe, and students experiencing homesickness typically report rumination, depressed mood, and physical health complaints (Benn, Harvey, Gilbert, & Irons, 2005;

Nijhof & Engels, 2007; Thurber & Walton 2012). Psychologists believe that experiencing some degree of homesickness is a healthy and natural initial response to leaving home (Archer, Ireland, Amos, Broad, & Currid, 2008; Hill, 1996; Thurber & Walton, 2007). Severe homesickness can, however, significantly affect adjustment to university/college and student wellbeing. According to Thurber and Walton (2007) homesickness can exacerbate pre-existing mental health problems, and can cause new mental and physical health problems, such as insomnia, gastrointestinal problems, immune deficiencies, and diabetes (Thurber & Walton, 2007; Van Tilburg et al., 1996a). Homesickness can also lead to withdrawal from school (Burt, 1993; Fisher & Hood, 1987).

In spite of its possible debilitating effects, homesickness is usually temporary (Brewin, Furnham, & Howes, 1989). Studies show that extended periods of homesickness, or severe homesickness among students is usually caused by lack of social connections within the university/college environment (Stroebe, van Vliet, Hewstone, & Willis, 2002; Urani, Miller, Johnson, & Pretzel, 2003). Social anxiety, pre-occupation with pre-university friends, and low self-esteem relating to the ability to make friends, have also been found to be predictive of higher levels of homesickness and loneliness among university/college students (Paul & Brier, 2001; Urani et al., 2003). Scholars who research loneliness, however, emphasize that securing numerous social connections does not automatically reduce loneliness. The quality of the relationships is more important than the quantity, as individuals feel lonely when their interpersonal needs are not being met (De Jong & Gierveld 1987; Perlman & Pepau, 1981; Pinquart, 2003). Van Tilburg, Vingerhoets, and Van Heck (1999) explored this idea in a study of

84 university students; they found that high-quality friendships reduced homesickness and helped students to adjust more quickly.

Self-disclosure has also been found to reduce loneliness and homesickness among university students. Self-disclosure refers to sharing personal information about oneself (Wood, 2007). Social Penetration Theory (Taylor & Altman, 1987) proposes that self-disclosure is the principal element in relationship development. In a study of first year students Bell and Bromnick (1998) found that homesickness decreased as levels of self-disclosure increased. In an earlier study, Pennebaker, Colder, and Sharp (1990) concluded that self-disclosing feelings associated with the transition to university eliminates rumination and can lead to friendships. Thuber and Walton, (2007) also noted that self-disclosure helps new students to focus their thoughts away from home, and thereby reduces feelings of homesickness. Even though self-disclosure is necessary for relationship building Berman and Hatch-Wallace (2007) warn that individuals need to use their discretion when determining what information to share in the early stages of a new relationship.

2.2   Other Mental Health Problems Experienced by Students

Other studies which examined the psychological response to the transition to university have found that some students experience even more severe psychological problems during the transition to university. A 1987 study of 102 first year students in the United Kingdom (UK) showed that students scored high on measures of depression and loneliness whether they lived in campus student residences or at home (Fisher & Hood, 1987). Beeber (1999) also found that first-year students had high rates of

depressive symptoms. Misra, McKean, West, and Russo (2000) compared students'
stress levels based on their current year of study at a US university, the results showed
that first year students reported the highest levels of stress.

Canadian research about the mental health of first year university students
reveals similar results. Price, McLeod, Gleich, and Hand (2006) found that 7% of males
and 14% of females met the criteria for a major depressive disorder in a study of 686
students. Another Canadian study used a national representative sample of 7,800
undergraduate students and found that among all university students, first year students
had the highest levels of psychological distress (Adlaf, Gilksman, Demers, & Newton-
Taylor, 2003). An earlier Canadian study by Arthur and Hiebert (1996) also found high
rates of psychological distress among first year students, but additionally found that the
rates persisted throughout the first semester and increased during the second
semester. Findings from a UK study revealed similar results; stress and depressive
symptoms among first year students increased as the semester progressed (Andrews &
Wilding, 2004). These findings suggest that the transition to university is not stress-free
and that adaptation does not occur quickly.

2.3   Current Mental Health Status Among University and College Students

The link between the transition to university/college and mental health issues is
of great concern to university officials (Mowbray, Bybee, Oyserman, Marfarlane, &
Bowersox, 2006) as the rate of mental illness among students has grown exponentially
in recent years (Gallagher, 2008). A review of the literature on mental illness among US

college students found that about 12% to18% of students have a diagnosable mental illness (Mowbray et al., 2006). Further research has found that mental disorders among university/college students are as prevalent or sometimes higher (depending on the illness) than among same-aged youth who are not attending university/college (Dyrbye et al., 2008; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010).

Increased mental illness rates among students have also been confirmed in research with university counselling centers administrators. A US qualitative study revealed that there was an increase in the demand for mental health services, as well as an increase in the severity of symptoms reported by a number of students. The data for the study were gathered through semi-structured interviews with ten administrators (Watkins, Hunt, & Eisenberg, 2011). Similarly, in the 2011 National Survey of Counselling Center Directors, 91% of the directors reported that in addition to higher numbers of students seeking psychological services, there has also been an increase in the severity of psychological problems (Gallagher, 2011). The directors further reported seeing increased problems related to illicit drug use, alcohol abuse, and self-injury, as well as an increase in the number of students taking psychotropic medication. Other studies have also found that an increased number of students are presenting with serious psychological problems, such as stress, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008; Kitzrow, 2003).

Canadian university students are also reporting high levels of psychological problems. Results from the 2013 National College Health Assessment (NCHA) show that 37.5% of Canadian students reported that they felt so depressed that it was difficult to function (anytime within the past 12 months); 89.3% reported that they have felt

overwhelmed by all they had to do; 56.5% reported feeling overwhelming anxiety, and

9.5% reported that they have seriously considered suicide. Another 14.3% reported that

they had previously seriously considered suicide. In addition, Canadian students

reported that the factors which had most the most impact on their academic functioning

were stress (38.6%), anxiety (28.4%), and sleep difficulties (27.1%). The increased rate

of mental illness among university students is consistent with data from US, Canadian,

and Australian epidemiological research that shows that the prevalence rate of mental

illness is highest among individuals who are 15 to 24 years of age (Mowbray et al.,

2006; Stallman, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2013). Furthermore, in the US the rate of

suicide among the college students has exceeded that of young adults who are not

attending college (Mowbray et al., 2006). Researchers however advise that the

increased rates in mental illness should be interpreted with caution, as the increase may

be due to higher rates of diagnoses, and increased reporting of mental illness due to a

reduction in societal stigma about mental illness (Hunt & Eiesenberg, 2010).

2.4   Sub-Populations and Mental Health

Research shows that the transition from high school to university is problematic

for many students and can result in mental health issues. University students are

however not a homogenous population; there are various subgroups of students who

can be classified based on factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-cultural identity.

Studies have shown that certain subgroups of students specifically, females,

international students, first generation students, and sexual minorities experience

greater adjustment and psychological difficulties during the transition to university.

2.4.1   Females

Female college students have been found to experience higher levels of stress than male students (Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley, & Whalan, 2005; Grant, 2002; Surtees & Miller,1990). A 2009 study on stress and sex differences among college students found that women reported a higher overall level of stress. The sample consisted of 166 college students (70 men and 96 women) from a university in Southern California. The majority of the sample consisted of first year students (62%) and the results showed significant gender differences in overall stress levels (Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, & Miller, 2009). Singh and Upadhyay (2008) also found that first year female undergraduates experienced a higher degree of academic stress than first year male students. Similarly, in a random sample of Ivy League undergraduates, Hudd and colleagues (2000) found that females reported significantly higher levels of stress than males. An earlier study by Abouserri (1994) found significant differences between females and males in both academic and life stress in a sample of 675 students.

Other research on gender differences and adjustment difficulties present mixed findings, with several studies reporting no significant differences (Bewick, Gill, & Mulhern, 2008; Bewick, Koutsopoulou, Miles, Slaa, & Barkham, 2010; Fisher & Hood, 1987). Bewick, Gill, and Mulhern (2008) studied psychological distress in a sample of 1,129 UK students from four different universities. The authors found no difference in levels of anxiety between the sexes. Similarly, in a study of 390 first year Chinese students, Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, and Pancer (2000) found no significant gender differences in scores on the adjustment measures used in the study. Other researchers however suggest that there is enough evidence to show that males experience less

psychological adjustment problems than females during the transition to university (Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, & Miller, 2009).

2.4.2   International Students

The number of students pursuing post-secondary studies outside of their own country has increased significantly. Between 2000 and 2007 the number of post-secondary international students increased from one million to two million (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010). In Canada international student enrollment at post-secondary institutions increased from 136,000 in 2001 to over 265,000 in 2012 (Canadian Bureau of International Education, 2012) and international students currently comprise 6.5% of the post-secondary student population. The growth in the international student population is viewed as a positive development as international students contribute to the economy and enlarge the number of employable university graduates. In addition, international students can increase cultural awareness, and may help the host country create relationships with the international community (Andrade, 2009; Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Farrugia, Chow, & Bhandari, 2012).

For the students, the opportunity to go to a foreign country to pursue a bachelor's degree can be an exciting and rewarding experience. Migrating allows them to live and study in a new culture, it also provides the opportunity to pursue personal, familial, and career goals (Wei, Liao, Heppner, Chao, & Ku, 2007) and may also provide a path for permanent migration and a better lifestyle (Lin, 2010). However, although studying abroad has many potential benefits, it can also be challenging for these students to

adapt to their new environment. International students encounter multiple changes in areas such as language, climate, food, finances, and social norms (Wan, 2001; Wei, et al., 2007), and research investigating the adaptation of international students has found that they experience more adjustment problems than domestic students (Abe & Zane, 1990; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Wei at al., 2007).

In order to adapt to their new social and educational environments, international students must undergo acculturation (Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003); this is the process of acquiring the practices of the new culture (Gordon, 1964). One of the most common mental health issues faced by international students is acculturative stress (Berry, 2005), which is defined as a stress reaction in response to the experiences of adapting to a new culture (Berry, 2005). Berry (1976) suggests that distress occurs because people often experience uncertainty and anxiety about the host culture's behaviours and values. When acculturative stress accumulates or is not released in a healthy way it can result in adverse psychological effects (Lin & Yi, 1997), such as anxiety, depression, and psychological distress (Williams & Berry, 1991). Studies show that depression is the principal mental health issue among international students who experience a high level of acculturative stress (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas, 2004; Yi, Lin, & Yuko, 2003).

Additional stress can also occur if international students experience conflict in relation to values and subsequently choose to abandon their own cultural values to adopt values and practices from their new culture (Miranda, Bilot, Peluso, Berman, & Van Meek, 2006; Padilla, Alvarez, & Lindholm, 1986). This can create family tension (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987; Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, & Aranalda, 1978)

and in extreme cases, it can lead to the severing of family support. Ethnic minority status may also impact stress levels, cultural adjustment, and the general university experience (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Jay & D'Augelli, 1991; Pliner & Brown, 1985). Most international students live in racially and ethnically homogenous cultures and are less likely to have experienced discrimination or racism in their country (Phinney & Onwughalu, 1996). Perceived discrimination may lead to higher rates of stress, psychological distress, and other poor psychological health outcomes for ethnic minority international students (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Williams & Mohammed, 2009).

Language difficulty is another major barrier encountered by international students. Studies of international student adaptation reveal that language difficulty is one of the most significant concerns for students. Findings from a number of studies indicate that international students who have higher proficiency in the language in which their university education is conducted report better adjustment (Ng, 2006; Poyrazli, Arbona, Bullington & Pisecco, 2001). Students with higher language proficiency however frequently experience difficulty with local accents and unfamiliar local expressions. Language difficulties also affect academic performance, which is another major challenge for many international students. Lack of fluency in the local language can result in difficulty with studying, exams, understanding lectures, and class participation (Cadieux & Wehrly, 1986; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

Diminished social support is another important issue that impacts international students' adjustment and wellbeing. Achieving social support through friendships in their host country is often difficult as language and cultural differences create barriers to forming relationships with domestic students (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Sodowsky &

Plake, 1992). Several studies have found that international students often report feeling isolated from domestic students (Fritz et al., 2008; Zheng & Berry, 1991).

2.4.3   First Generation Students

First generation university/college students (FGCS) are defined as students whom neither parent attended a post-secondary institution. They are the first generation in their immediate family to attend university/college (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004). The majority of research on this population of students has been conducted in the US and the results show that when compared to non-FGCS the new challenges of university life are often greater for FGCS (Chen, 2005). The difficulties faced by these students have been acknowledged by education officials in Ontario (Canada). The Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) has targeted this group as a priority in higher education and has dedicated funding to help post-secondary institutions improve support for first generation students (MTCU, 2006).

Studies comparing non-FGCS to FGCS have found that FGCS are less confident about their academic ability, have significantly lower grade point average expectations, and have higher dropout rates (Chen, 2005; Martinez, Sher, Krull, & Wood, 2009; Riehl, 1994). First generation students also report significantly higher levels of personal stress (Granfield, 1991). Researchers believe that some of the difficulties experienced by FGCS are related to the lack of family knowledge and experience with higher education and inadequate support from home. The parents and relatives of FGCS are usually supportive and often make significant financial sacrifices to enable the student to attend college (London, 1989, 1992; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002). However, some parents and

children feel that they cannot relate to each other after the child has begun college and this can create a major disruption in family relationships (London, 1989; 1992; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002.). Some relatives may be unsupportive and discourage FGCS from attending or completing college (London, 1992) as they perceive the student to be neglecting the family because they chose not to engage in full time employment and contribute to the family. Relationships with friends who did not attend college may also become strained. Conflictual relationships with family and friends may cause feelings of isolation and guilt among FGCS and may also reduce social support (London, 1992).

The isolation and confusion felt by FGCS is further impacted by the difficulties they experience with cultural and social adaptation. First generation college students are often from low income families and a number of research studies have shown that FGCS students experience feelings of intimidation and inadequacy because of their socio-economic status. They also report problems fitting in and forming friendships with wealthy students (Aries & Seider, 2005; Lehman, 2007).

The social isolation experienced by FGCS is additionally related to factors such as work responsibilities which prevent them from socializing and engaging in activities. FGCS are more likely to live off-campus and usually only go campus to attend classes, this further decreases opportunities for friendship development (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Pascarella et al., 2004). Consequently, FGCS report having the least number of new friends (Grayson, 2011). The ability to successfully transition into the university environment can have a significant impact on the psychological well-being of FGCS, however, Pascarella et al. (2004), found that some FGCS students experience a reduction in difficulties as they progress through college.

2.4.4 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Students

Studies conducted with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer college (LGBTQ) students show that the risk for mental health issues increases during the transition to university/college. Most of the studies have been conducted in the US and they demonstrate that LGBTQ are often excluded from events and are the least accepted minority group (Rankin, Blumenfield, Weber, & Frazer, 2010). Earlier studies examining sexual minority students show that they experience hostility (Waldo, 1998), harassment, and threats of physical violence (D'Augelli, 1992; Herek, 1993). In a 1994 study by Desurra and Church with only lesbian, gay and bisexual students, (LGB) the participants reported experiencing hostile classroom environments, they also reported encountering homophobic behaviour, remarks, and attitudes from both professors and students. In a 2002 study of LGB students living in on-campus residences, the students reported experiencing homophobic remarks, harassment, and defacement of flyers for LGB events (Evans & Broido, 2002). Recent studies suggest that LGBTQ college students continue to experience harassment and derogatory comments (Rankin et al., 2010).

As a result of these challenges, LGBTQ students are significantly less likely to report feeling comfortable with the overall campus climate, department climate, and classroom climate (Rankin et al., 2010). Their negative experiences often prevent LGBTQ students from participating in campus events and campus organizations, and affects their overall well-being (Rankin, 2003, 2005). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer college students often consider leaving their institution, due to fear for their physical

safety more often than non-LGBTQ students. A 2011 study used the data from the 2009

American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment (ACHA-

NCHA) to examine the mental health status of a national sample of US LGBTQ college

students. The results showed that sexual minority college students exhibited greater

mental health issues and psychological stressors than heterosexual students (Oswalt &

Wyatt, 2011).

2.5   The Transition to University and Physical Health

Although psychological health has become a major concern for university/college

officials, the transition from high school to university/college has also been linked to

poor physical health behaviours among students. Common unhealthy behaviours

engaged in by university students include poor dietary habits, reduced physical activity

(Bray & Born, 2004), poor sleeping habits, (Vallido, Peters, O'Brien, & Jackson, 2009)

and excessive alcohol use (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2011b;

Slutske, 2005)

2.5.1   Diet and Nutrition

The university/college years are often the first time that students are responsible

for making their own choices about all of their meals. Several studies have shown that

university and college students often have poor eating habits. Their diet usually does

not include the recommended daily amounts of fruits and vegetables, (Anding,

Suminski, & Boss, 2001; 1997; Haberman & Luffey, 1998), but is high in calories, fat,

sugar, and sodium (Brevard & Ricketts, 1996; Racette, Deusinger, Strube, Highstein, &

Deusinger, 2005). An earlier study by Melby, Femea, and Sciacca (1986) found that 69% of college students did not eat any fruit on a daily basis, 48% ate vegetables less than once daily, and the majority of students did not meet the recommended daily intake of 20 grams of dietary fiber. Studies suggest that the risk of weight gain is high for first year students due to the high consumption of sugar and fatty foods and the stress associated with the transition from high school to university,. Some studies indicate that first year undergraduate students gain at least 15 pounds (Cockman, O'Reilly, Manor, 2013; Hovell, Mewborn, Randle, & Fowler-Johnson, 1985; Levitsky, Halbmaeir & Mrdjenovic, 2004), these findings led to the creation of the term 'freshman 15' (Vella-Zarb & Elgar, 2010).

There is, however, conflicting evidence about the actual amount of weight gained by first year students and researchers question whether students really gain what is known as the freshman 15. While some studies suggest that there is a significant increase in weight among adolescents during the first year of college, a meta-analysis found that the mean weight gain among first year students is 3.86 pounds (Crombie, Ilich, Dutton, Panton, & Abood, 2009). Other studies also indicate that the amount of weight gained by students during the first year is not significant (Hoffman, Policastro, Quick, & Lee, 2006; Lloyd-Richardson, Bailey, Fava, & Wing, 2009; Zagorshy, & Smith, 2011) and that the freshman 15 is a myth. This does not, however, diminish the belief that the university environment promotes unhealthy dietary behaviors among university students. Two Canadian studies of barriers to healthy eating among undergraduate students found that factors such as the cost of healthy food, time to cook, transportation to buy healthy food, availability of inexpensive fast food, and lack of cooking skills play a

role in university students' dietary habits (Garcia, Sykes, Martin, Matthews, & Leipert, 2010; House, Su & Levy-Milne, 2006).

2.5.2   Physical Activity

The transition from high school to university/college also presents risks regarding physical activity participation and has been associated with negative changes in physical activity levels. Cross-sectional studies of late adolescence and young adulthood show that physical activity decreases dramatically when students leave high school and attend university/college (Racette, Duesinger, Strube, Highstein, & Deusinger, 2008). Similarly a longitudinal study of first-year students found that physical activity levels decreased significantly when compared with previous high school activity levels (Bray & Born, 2004). A study by Gyurcsik, Bray, and Brittain (2004) reported that 47% of first year students do not meet the amount of moderate physical activity recommended by national guidelines.

Physical activity levels do not improve when students advance from their first year of study. Various studies indicate university students' physical activity may decrease as students age (Huang et al., 2003; Racette, Deusinger, & Strube, 2005). A review by Irwin (2004) examined universities from 27 countries including Canada and the US and found that on average more than half of university students do not engage in sufficient physical activity to gain health benefits. More recent data from the 2013 National College Health Assessment, show that only 46% of males and 44% of females at Canadian universities met the guidelines recommended for moderate-intensity exercise and vigorous-intensity exercise. Other research on physical activity among

university/college students suggest that women tend to report higher rates of inactivity compared to men. In addition, some studies found higher rates of physical inactivity among minority students compared to Caucasian students (Nehl et al., 2009; Nelson, Gortmaker, Subramanian, & Weschler, 2007); these results were not observed in other studies (Butler, Black, Blue, & Gretebeck, 2004; Suminiski, Petosa, Utter, & Zhang, 2002). Research shows that university/college students who exercise on a regular basis are most likely to participate in jogging, running, weight training, cycling, and aerobics. University/college students also tend to be more active on weekdays compared to weekends (Behrens & Dinger, 2003; Keating, Guan, Castro, & Bridges, 2005).

The chronic stress associated with the transition, combined with a decline in physical activity, may negatively impact students' health, as the health benefits of exercise include increased muscular strength, prevention of bone loss, increased self-esteem, and reduced stress (Fletcher et al., 1996). The reasons for low levels of physical activity among university/college students have been examined and findings suggest that access to exercise and recreational facilities on campus, as well as qualified staff to assist students in starting and maintaining a regular exercise program are important (Ebben & Brudzynski, 2008; Reed & Philips, 2005). Support from family and friends, perceived enjoyment, self-motivation, adequate transportation, weather, and campus safety are also major determinants of physical activity among university/college students (Keating et al., 2005; Reed & Philips, 2005). Additionally Bray and Born, (1996) found that students reduce their physical activity levels as the demands and pressure of their academic schedule increase.

2.5.3   Sleep

Sleep plays a vital role in maintaining physical health and mental wellbeing (Takahashi, 2012). Previous research shows that high quality restorative sleep is necessary during transitional periods as individuals encounter challenges and must cope with new tasks and responsibilities (Dahl & Lewin, 2002; Fuligni & Hardway, 2006). When students transition to university, they often experience a negative change in their sleeping habits (Carskadon & Davis, 1989; Lund, Reider, Whiting, & Pritchard, 2010; Pilcher, Ginter, & Sadowsky, 1997). University students typically shift to an irregular sleep cycle that is characterized by short and insufficient sleep on weekdays and later wake-up time on weekends (Brown, Buboltz, & Soper, 2001; Forquer, Camden, Gabriau, & Johnson, 2008; Machado, Varella, & Andrade, 1998). In their sample of 191 undergraduates Brown et al. (2001) found that students reported at least twice as many sleep difficulties as the general population. When compared to other groups university/college students are considered to be one of most sleep deprived populations (Brown et al., 2001; Jensen, 2003; Lack, 1986).

Early studies examining sleep patterns in US university/college students found that in 1969 the average night time sleep duration for students was 7.5 hours; this figure decreased to 6.5 hours in in 1989 (Hicks, Conti, & Pelligrini, 1991). More recent studies from Canada, the US, Mexico, China, and Africa have reported that the average sleep hours among university/college students is between 6.0 and 7.4 hours on weeknights and 7.5 to 8.5 hours on weekends (Campos-Morales, Valencia-Flores, Castaño-Meneses, Castañeda-Figueiras, & Martínez-Guerrero, 2005; Galambos, Howard, & Maggs, 2010; Reid & Baker 2008). Studies have found that in addition to reduced sleep,

students also experience low sleep quality, and the number of college students who report sleep disturbance and poor quality sleep has also increased. Using self-report data from 1978-1992 Hicks, Conti, and Pellegrini (1992) found that 24% of students reported that they were not satisfied with the quality of their sleep in 1978 compared to 68% in 1992. Results from a 2001 study showed that the figure had increased to 71% (Hicks, Fernandez, & Pellegrini, 2001a, 2001b). Similarly a study of 74 college students found that at least two thirds of the students reported occasional sleep disturbances, and about one third of the students reported severe sleep difficulties (Buboltz, Brown, & Soper, 2002). A 2001 study by the same authors found that only 11% of the students surveyed met the criteria for good sleep quality. Students who report poor-quality sleep also report significantly more physical illness, they additionally report falling asleep in class, missing classes, and excessive daytime sleepiness (Forquer et al., 2008; Lund et al., 2010).

Research investigating the possible causes of sleep problems among university/college students has found that sleep problems are usually precipitated by emotional and academic stress (Buboltz et al., 2001; Buboltz et al., 2002; Lund et al., 2010). A 2011 study by Galambos, Lascano, Howard, and Maggs followed 186 students at 4 Canadian universities throughout their first year. The authors found that sleep quantity and sleep quality fluctuated monthly in response to affect, stressful academic experiences, and social experiences. Students reported sleeping fewer hours during the months in which they experienced more negative affect or higher levels of stress. Sleep quality was also lower during the months in which students reported less social interactions. Lund et al. (2010) additionally found that poor quality sleep occurs when

prescription, over the counter, and/or recreational drugs are used to help induce sleep. In the Lund et al. study, poor-quality sleepers also reported higher daily levels of alcohol use than optimal-quality sleepers, and were more likely to report using alcohol to induce sleep. Researchers have also examined the possibility of a link between students' year of study and sleep difficulties, however, most studies have found no differences between sleep quality, sleep quantity, and students' year of study. Suen (2008), however, found that first year students are more likely to be poor sleepers. Orzech, Salafsky, and Hamilton (2011) suggest that first year students may experience higher levels of sleeplessness because they have not learned how to manage their time.

Some studies have found an association between sleep and mental health problems. Fuligni and Hardway, (2006) found that the lack of sleep can lead to increased stress and higher levels of anxiety and depression in adolescents. Galambos, Dalton, and Maggs (2009) found that less sleep preceded increases in depressive affect in a sample of 191 Canadian first year university students. More recent studies have also found an association between poor sleep hygiene and depression in university students (Stansbury, 2011; Wilson et al., 2014).

2.5.4   Alcohol Use

Alcohol use increases after the transition from high school (Baer, Kivlahan & Marlatt, 1995; Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2009a; 2009b). Studies show that young adults engage in their heaviest drinking between the ages of 18 to 25 (Naimi et al., 2003; Fillmore, Hartka, & Johnstone, 2011). Data from the US suggest that

during high school, 25% of high school seniors engage in heavy episodic drinking; that rate increases to 40% after students leave high school (Arnett, 2005; Bachman, Wadswroth, O'Malley, Johnston, & Schulenberg, 1997; Johnston et al., 2009a). In relation to university/college students, research conducted across Canada, the US, and the UK has found that university and college students consume alcohol at a higher rate than their non-university peers. Gill (2002) reviewed studies measuring undergraduate student drinking within the UK and found that 52% of males and 43% of females reported drinking above the recommended limits. In a 2011 US study, 37% of college students reported consuming five or more drinks in one sitting in the previous 2 weeks (Johnson et al., 2011). In Canada, a 2005 study conducted by the Center for Addiction and Mental Health showed that 47% of undergraduate university students in Nova Scotia engaged in hazardous drinking; the corresponding figures were 33% for Ontario, and 30% for the Prairies (Adlaf, Demers, & Gilksman, 2005).

Some researchers have been critical of data on university student drinking. They note that the majority of studies have not examined daily drinking patterns and that they typically used data from short time spans and samples of less than 200 students (Hoeppner et al., 2012). One study of 301 first year students (Del Boca, Darkes, Greenbaum, & Goldman 2004) gathered data on drinking patterns during September to April. The findings revealed that students consumed alcohol at lower rates on Sunday to Wednesday, and that consumption rates were are highest on Friday to Saturday. They also found that weekly drinking increased in relation to academic requirements and public holidays. Similar results relating to increased drinking, academic pressure,

holidays, and events have been found in other studies (Lee, Maggs, & Rankin, 2006; Neighbours et al., 2007; Rabow & Neuman, 1984).

US college presidents have identified alcohol abuse as the number one problem on campuses (Task Force of the National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2002a). Heavy drinking by US college students has been classified as a major public health hazard (Task Force of the National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2002a). Alcohol use among US college students resulted in more than 1,800 deaths and 500,000 unintentional injuries in 2005. Alcohol has also been related to violent behavior, emotional difficulties, academic problems, unplanned and unsafe sexual activity, and sexual assault (Grace, 1997; Hingson, Zha, Weitzman, 2009; Weschler, Davenport, Dowdall, Moeykens, & Castillo, 1994). In relation to mental health, Blanco et al. (2008) used data from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions to examine the 12-month prevalence of psychiatric disorders and rates of treatment among 19 to 25 years old who were attending ($n = 2188$) and not attending ($n = 2904$) college. The results from the study showed that the most prevalent disorders among college students were alcohol use disorders (20.4%) and that college students were more likely to have an alcohol disorder that participants who were not attending college.

Several risk factors are associated with heavy-drinking behavior among of college students, including person-based factors, such as impulsivity and extravertedness, environmental factors such as membership in fraternities and sororities, and campus alcohol polices (Jackson, Sheer, & Park, 2005; Park, Sher, Wood, & Knell, 2009). Studies suggest that when effective campus alcohol policies are

in place and are enforced, excessive drinking may be reduced (Evans-Whipp, Plenty, Catalano, Herronkohl, & Tombourou, 2013; Knight et al., 2003). One study of 19 campuses where alcohol consumption is banned found that students were 30% less likely to engage in heavy drinking (Wechsler, Lee, Gledhill-Hoyt, & Nelson's, 2001). Weschsler et al. however noted that because the study was correlational, they could not definitively state that lower rates of heavy drinking were directly due to the ban.

2.6   Factors That Influence University Transitions

The transition to university is accompanied by many challenges and can lead to various physical and psychological difficulties for some students. The literature shows that there are factors that can either reduce adjustment difficulties or negatively affect student wellbeing. These factors include; feelings of belonging, availability of social support, and degree of parental pressure.

2.6.1   Belonging

A sense of belonging has been defined in numerous ways. It has been defined as: connectedness to one's school (Anderman & Freeman, 2004), feeling respected, accepted, and included within the school environment (Goodenow, 1992), perceptions of fitting in and belonging with other students (Osterman, 2000), and being valued and respected as a part of a group or community (Anant, 1966). Some of the definitions suggest that a sense of belonging exceeds relationships with individuals in the school and includes the feeling of being connected to a larger community. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995) this larger connection is extremely important because

individuals who lack a sense of connection to a larger group or community are more likely to experience increased stress, isolation, depression, and emotional distress than those who achieve a sense of belonging. The majority of research on belonging and students' socio-emotional health has been conducted with middle and high school students. Studies have found links between school belonging and positive student outcomes such as lower rates of school dropout (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989), better social-emotional functioning (Anderman,1999; Resnick et al., 1997; Shochet, Dadds, Ham, & Montague, 2006) academic motivation, and higher grade point averages (Anderman, 1999; Finn, 1989; Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

The research that has been conducted with university/college students has found that higher levels of affiliation toward university/college is linked to better social adjustment (Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000), lower levels of depression and depressive symptoms (Hoyle & Crawford, 1994; Mounts, 2004), higher academic motivation, and lower attrition rates (Beyers & Goossens, 2002). A greater sense of school belonging among university/college students is additionally linked to positive perceptions of academic competence (Pittman & Richmond, 2008), higher self-reported grades, and more positive perceptions of social acceptance (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Hoyle & Crawford, 1994). Students who report feeling a sense of belonging at college also have a greater degree of involvement in on campus group activities (Hoyle & Crawford, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Studies have also found an association between college students' sense of belonging and relationships with professors. Toa et al. (2002) found that students who perceived that they had high levels of support from their professors during the first

semester of college had lower levels of negative coping. In a study by Freeman, Anderman, and Jensen (2007) perceiving that professors cared about students was linked to a better sense of belonging at university. A 2002 US study investigating sense of belonging among first year college students found that empathetic faculty and perceived faculty support were among five factors related to sense of belonging. The other three factors were; perceived classroom comfort, perceived peer support, and perceived isolation (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002).

2.6.2   Availability of Social Support

Gottlieb (2000) defines social support as the "process of interactions in relationships which improves coping, esteem, belonging, and competence through actual or perceived exchanges of physical and psychosocial resources" (p.28). Social support is important for physical and emotional well-being during periods of distress, illness, or transitions (Lee, Anderson, Horowitz, & August, 2009; Lee, Lee, & August, 2011). Several studies have linked social support to positive health outcomes including prevention and alleviation of stress, resilience, fewer internalizing symptoms, and positive adjustment during periods of distress (Aneshensel, 1999; Cohen & Willis, 1985; Ensel & Lin, 1991; Gardner & Cutrona, 2004; Thompson, Flood, & Goodvin, 2006; Turner & Brown, 2010).

These findings have been mirrored in research with university/college students. Cohen, Sherrod, and Clark (1986) found that lower levels of social support were associated with increased psychological problems in students transitioning to college. Hefner and Eisenberg (2009) found similar results in a web-based survey with a random

sample of 1,378 students. Their results showed that students with lower levels of social support were more likely to experience mental health problems, including a six fold risk for depressive symptoms. Conversely, students who report high levels of perceived social support during the first year of college report having a greater sense of belonging and are less likely to consider withdrawing from school (London, Rosenthal, Levy, & Lobel, 2011).

The social support networks that have received the most attention in the literature on university/college transitions are parental support and friends. When students leave their family home to attend university, their social support networks change. Students often report experiencing less intimate relationships with their new peers (Hays & Oxley, 1986). Additionally, students who experience a painful transition often report disappointment with social interactions and friendships (Langston & Cantor, 1989). Establishing new friendships with the people in their environment is therefore critical, as a lack of friendships is associated with loneliness among university students (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991).

Parental support is particularly important during the transition to college. The quality of parental attachment and relationships can decrease during adolescence as teenagers become more attached to their peers. Some research has, however, found that this trend is reversed during the transition to university, especially since peer relationships and romantic relationships often decrease in quality when students move away (to university) from friends and romantic partners (Larose & Boivin, 1998; Laursen & Collins, 2009). Studies have found that students who have supportive parental relationships report better adjustment during the transition to college and higher overall

happiness; whereas low levels of intimacy or conflictual relationships with parents is associated with depression, loneliness, and stress (Aquilino, 2006; Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994; Larose & Boivin, 1998). Some studies show that parental support can have a positive impact on academic adjustment. In a two year longitudinal study Duchesne, Ratelle, Larose, and Guay (2007) found that students who reported high levels of parental involvement and support during their first year of university had higher levels of academic and emotional adjustment. Similarly, a 1994 study found that parental support affected future academic achievement (Cutrona, et al., 1994). The results relating to academic adjustment and parental support are, however, mixed, some other studies have found no association between academic adjustment and parental support (Fass & Tubman, 2002; Yelle, Kenyon, & Koerner, 2009).

2.6.3   Degree of Parental Pressure and Involvement

2.6.3.1   Parental Pressure

Although parental support is important for helping students adjust to university/college, certain types of parental support and parental behaviours have been found to negatively affect adjustment and wellbeing. Self-report studies have found that high parental expectations and perceived pressure for high academic achievement are major sources of stress for university students (Anderson & Yuenger, 1987; Archer & Lamnin, 1985). In a study of 895 college students, parental expectations and conflicts were rated as the second most stressful problem experienced by students (Archer & Lamnin, 1985). Data collected through university counselling centers also show that parental expectations and pressure affect students' well-being. A study by Duncan and

Anderson (1986) found that parental pressure was reported by 48% of university

students seeking help at a university counselling center. Anderson and Yuenger (1987)

reported that of 425 cases at a university counseling clinic, 24% of students reported

experiencing problems related to achieving independence from their parents.

A more recent US study comparing parental expectations and worry among

Asian and Caucasian college students found that attempting to live up to parental

expectations led to higher levels of worry in both groups of students (Saw, Berenbaum,

& Okazaki, 2012). Wang and Heppner (2002) have however suggested that parental

expectations may not be the cause students' distress. In their study of 99 Taiwanese

undergraduates, Wang and Happner (2002) found that university students' perception of

how well they were living up to their parents' expectations was strongly correlated with

psychological distress. Parents' actual expectations were not, however, related to

student distress. Agliata and Renk (2008) also found that college students' perceptions

of their performance was more highly related to lower self-worth and adjustment

difficulties than parental expectations.

2.6.3.2   Helicopter Parenting

The other parenting behaviour that can affect students' adjustment and wellbeing

during the transition to university is parental over involvement. Howe and Strauss

(2007) suggest that today's youth depend on their parents for support and guidance

more than previous generations. Harper, Sax, and Wolf (2012) suggest that various

factors contribute to parents being over involved in students' lives including; societal

focus on parenting behaviours, increased capacity to communicate with their children

through new technology, and a sense of entitlement due to payment of high tuition fees. Although studies show that parental involvement is important for healthy child development, the need for autonomy increases especially as children move into young adulthood. Various researchers therefore suggest that parental involvement and control need to be adjusted based on a child's developmental stage (Erikson, 1968; Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006; Soenens et al., 2007).

Hunt (2008) and White (2005) report that some college administrators have expressed the view that some parents do adjust their level of involvement in their children's lives when the child enters university/college This has resulted in some parents being overly involved in the lives of university/college students. Some parents call college administrators on behalf of their adult children, and they also attempt to have professors change unsatisfactory grades (Hunt, 2008; Somers & Settle, 2010). This type of parental over involvement has been referred to as 'helicopter parenting' (Cline & Fay, 1990) and has been found to be detrimental to college students (Hofer & Moore 2010; Schriffin et al., 2014). Campus officials suggest that there is an association between parental over involvement and an increase in the number of first year students who are unable to resolve minor problems, advocate and negotiate for their own needs, or co-exist amicably with other students in shared spaces. One official has argued that parental over involvement affects not only the students, but that "helicopter parents are influencing the entire university from the prospecting stage before the application process, campus housing, and relationships with academic advisors and faculty" (Hunt, 2008, p. 10). Hunt (2008), however, notes that helicopter parents only comprise a small percentage college students' parents.

Recent studies examining helicopter parenting found that helicopter parenting was related to several negative student outcomes. LeMoyne and Buchanan (2011) found that college students whose parents were over involved in their lives had lower psychological well-being and were more likely to take medications for depression and anxiety. The students were also more likely to engage in recreational consumption of pain pills. In a 2013 study with 297 participants, students who reported having over-controlling parents reported significantly higher levels of depression and lower satisfaction with life (Schriffin et al., 2014). In contrast, university students who have a high level of independence from their parents (Beyers & Goossens, 2003), but also a secure parental attachment (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991) have been found to adjust better to university. Parents must therefore find a balance between support and over-involvement, as parental over involvement can negatively impact the development of independence in emerging adults (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002).

2.7 Previous Research on High School to University Transition Experiences

The review of the literature which preceded this section presented information on the most common health and wellness issues that tend to occur when students transition from high school to university. Factors that can hinder or promote positive adjustment were also reviewed. This section of the literature review focusses on studies that examined traditional aged (18-24 years) students' non-health related experiences of the transition to university. Only ten peer reviewed studies focusing specifically on

students' non-health related transition experiences were located. The studies were published between 1987 and 2012. Five of the studies were conducted in the US, two studies were conducted in Canada, two were conducted in Australia, and one was conducted in New Zealand. There are seven are qualitative studies, two quantitative studies, and one mixed methods study. Half of the studies focussed on specific sub-populations of students (e.g. low income, Latino).The four most common experiences identified by students in the studies were difficulty developing friendships (9/10 studies), time management difficulties (7/10 studies), distant relationships with professors (7/10), and problems managing the volume of the workload (6/10 studies). Students also indicated that they believed that high school did not prepare them for university. As only a small number of studies were located the results are presented in the Table 1 which is located on the next page.

Table 1.

Previous Studies of Students' Experiences of the Transition from High School to University/College

Reference/Country	Methods/Sample	Results
Arzy, Davies & Harbour, 2006 United States	Qualitative Study *Method*: Semi structured interviews *Sample*: *N* = 14 1st to 4th year low income students; 8 females, 6 males	Students were surprised by faculty members' lack of guidance and personal interest in them. They felt disconnected from wealthy college peers because of their lower socio-economic status. Study time in residence was interrupted by noisy/drunk roommates. All study participants stopped participating in physical and social activities when they entered college to focus on their academics.
Clark, 2005 United States	Qualitative study *Method*: Individual interviews *Sample*: *N* =10 1st year students	Students experienced problems with time management and the workload. Students were dismayed about low levels of interaction with their professors. Having a close friend to talk to was important.
Hernandez, 2002 United States	Qualitative Study *Method*: Interviews *Sample*: *N* =10 1st year Latino students 18-20 years 5 females, 5 males	Students did not believe that high school prepared them for college. They thought that college would be similar to high school. They experienced problems with time management, making friends, and lack of support and guidance from professors. Half of the participants decided not to participate in extra curricula activities in order to focus on academics.
Holdaway & Kelloway, 1987 Canada	Quantitative Study *Method*:Questionnaires *Sample*: *N* = 641 1st year students	Students reported that the workload was unexpected and that high school had not adequately prepared them for university. They experienced difficulty with meeting new friends, managing time, study skills, and library skills. They were surprised at the "coldness" of staff.
Kantanis, 2000 Australia	Quantitative *Method*: Questionnaire *Sample*: *N* = 57 1st year students	Making friends was difficult. The workload was heavier than expected. Staff were not as accessible as expected. Students were disappointed that university was not as exciting or as much fun as they expected.

Table 1 continued

Reference/Country	Method/Sample	Results
McLoughlin, 2012 United States	Qualitative Study *Method*: Semi structured interviews *Sample*: *N* = 20 low income senior undergraduates 14 females, 6 males	Students felt that high school had not prepared them for university academics. Students experienced difficulty making friends; they indicated that they lacked confidence to make friends because of their low income status. Students were aware that on campus support resources were available, but were unsure about how to use them.
Nunez, 2005 United States	Qualitative Study *Method*: Semi-structured interviews *Sample*: *N* = 9 female first generation students	Students reported that they experienced difficulty managing their time, finding friends, and dealing with roommate conflicts. They also experienced difficulty locating buildings, dealing with academic failure for the first time, and distant relationships with professors and TAs. They found peer advisors helpful.
Tracy & Corlett, 2005 Canada	Qualitative study *Method*: Individual interviews *Sample*: *N* = 16 1st year student athletes 8 females, 8 males	Students felt that they needed time management skills. They were surprised by the volume and intensity of the workload. They felt that they had adequate study skills because they did well in high school. They experienced loneliness and isolation. Off-campus students felt isolated and believed that students living in residence had more fun.
Urquhart & Pooley, 2007 Australia	Qualitative study *Method*: Interviews Sample: *N* =10 17-45 years	Younger traditional aged students experienced difficulty making friends, managing time, and managing the workload.
Vandermeer, Jansen, & Torenbeek, 2010 New Zealand	Mixed methods study *Method*/Sample: Questionnaire *N* = 3872 Individual Interviews *N* =27 1st year students	Students experienced difficulty with independent study, time management, and lack of assistance from professors. They expected the workload, but did not know how to manage it.

2.8   Literature Review Summary

The literature on the transition from high school to university/college indicates that students experience significant challenges during that transition. Studies have found that after the transition to university some students experience a decline in physical health, and that students tend to engage in poor health behaviours. Of concern in recent years is the increase in the rate and severity of mental health problems among university/college students.

Previous research on students' non-health related transition experiences show that students encounter problems developing friendships, managing their time, and managing the new workload. Students are also disappointed with distant relationships with professors and report that they believe that high school did not prepare them for university/college. Although the literature suggests that students encounter many negative experiences during this transition, some research indicates that there are factors that positively influence the transition to university and facilitate adjustment, those factors include; social support from family and friends, and feelings of belonging.

The majority of the research on the transition from high school to university has been conducted in the US. A review of Canadian research on this topic showed that there were only a small number of peer-reviewed studies and that the majority of the studies were dated. Given the changes in the demographics of the university population, the increasing numbers of international students, the increase in mental health problems, and the paucity of peer reviewed literature on Canadian students' transition experiences, there is a need for more Canadian research on this topic.

2.9   Theoretical Perspectives

The purpose of this study was to gather data on students' experiences of their transition from high school to Western University, as well as their conceptualization of thriving in university. Three theoretical frameworks chosen were for this study: Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), Magnusson's Holistic Person-Context Interaction Theory (1998), and Schreiner's Thriving Construct (2010). These three theoretical frameworks were chosen because the research questions focus on three separate yet interrelated issues: transition experiences, barriers and facilitators to adjustment, and thriving. Each of the frameworks addresses one of these issues. Schlossberg's theory explains the nature and impact of transitions, Magnusson's theory provides a person-environment perspective to examine barriers and facilitators to adjustment, and Schreiner's thriving construct explores the concept of thriving in college.

2.9.1   Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Transition theorists maintain that although transitions can create chaos and are often experienced as frightening or traumatic, significant growth can occur through addressing and coping with these significant life events (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Brown & Lent, 2008). Transition theories explain and explore the processes by which individuals adjust and respond to changes in their lives or environment. Schlossberg's transition theory (1981) was developed specifically for adult transitions; it is an applied framework and has been heavily utilised in the literature on

the transition to university/college. Schlossberg has updated her theory several times since its introduction, however the basic tenets of the theory have not changed. In order to capture the full understanding of the theory, information from the original publication (Schlossberg, 1981) and the latest publication (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) is presented.

Schlossberg defined a transition as "any event or non-event that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (1981, p.4). In the latest publication Anderson, Goodman and Schlossberg (2012) define transition as "any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). According to the authors, transitions must be examined in terms of type, perspective, context, and impact, as these factors can influence whether an individual succeeds in adapting to a transition. Type refers to the nature of the transition; context refers to factors such as gender, ethnicity, and geographical location; perspective is how the transition is viewed; and impact is defined as the degree of difference between the individual's pre-transition and post transition relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles.

The theory outlines three types of transitions: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event. Anticipated transitions, are events such as marriage and childbirth. Schlossberg (1981) notes that when transitions are anticipated and planned, they are often self-initiated and made with ample time to consider multiple options. Alternatively, unanticipated transitions are unscheduled events that are unpredictable. With unanticipated transitions individuals do not have the opportunity to prepare and often do

not have the capabilities and resources to make the transition. Such transitions are typically negative in nature and are often characterized as disruptive, traumatic, or crisis-like. They include events such as divorce, loss of a job, and premature deaths of family members. The third type of transition is classified as a non-event or a change that the individual expected to happen, but that did not actually occur, such as marriage or a promotion that did not take place. The realization that the expected transition did not occur, and possibly will never occur alters the way individuals see themselves and might also alter the way they behave.

Schlossberg proposed that individuals go through three distinct phases when they are in transition: moving in, moving through, and moving out. Moving in involves being confronted with a transition or change; it requires leaving a known context and entering a new phase. Moving through follows the moving in process; this is where the day-to-day management of the new phase begins. In this stage the individual may need to learn new skills, and may also have to complete tasks and make difficult decisions. Moving out can be viewed as ending one series of transitions and beginning to ask what comes next.

Schlossberg (1981) noted that what is most important in the process is how the individual perceives the transition and the degree to which the transition alters an individual's life. The importance of perception has been identified in later research. Bauer and McAdams (2004) suggested that an individual's view of the transition as being positive, negative, or irrelevant affects how the individual copes with the transition and whether he or she develops a strengthened sense of meaning or happiness in life. Research on transition outcomes has shown that personal interpretations of life

transitions have implications not only for the course of the transition, but also for the

individual's personality and life course (Brandtstadter, Wentura, & Rothermund, 1999;

McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2001).

In her original theory Schlossberg (1981) identified 18 characteristics that impact

how an individual adapts to the transition. Those characteristics are outlined Table 2

below.

Table 2.

Characteristics that Impact How an Individual Adapts to a Transition

Characteristics of the of the transition	Characteristics of the of the environment	Characteristics of the individual
Role change	Interpersonal support	Psychosocial competence
Affect	Institutional support	Age
Source	Physical environment	Health Status
Timing		Sex
Onset		Race/Ethnicity
Duration		Socio-economic status
Degree of stress		Values
		Previous crisis experience

In a later publication Schlossberg condenses the 18 factors listed above into 4

areas known as the 4S System; situation, self, supports, and strategies (Schlossberg,

Lynch, & Chickering,1989). Situation refers to how an individual views the transition.

Does the individual perceive the transition as positive, negative, expected, unexpected,

desired or dreaded? Self includes the strengths and weaknesses the individual brings to

the transition. Support refers to the sources of support available to the person in

transition. Support could be from a spouse or partner, family member(s), friend(s), co-

worker(s), neighbor(s), organization(s), or institution(s). Strategies relate to the individual's coping strategies.

2.9.2   Magnusson's Holistic Person-Context Interaction Theory

David Magnusson is a developmental psychologist whose research focuses on the role of the environment (context) on human behaviour and development. According to Magnusson, development occurs as a result of interactions between the environment and an individual's biological, behavioural, and psychological characteristics. He adds that the interactions between the individual and the environment must be mutually beneficial for healthy development to occur.

Within his holistic person-context interaction theory (1998), holism refers to viewing the individual and the environment as organised wholes that function within the totality of all of their elements. The individual's elements are behavioural factors, social factors, and biological factors (e.g. biology, cognition, personality, self-perceptions, socio-economic status, values, norms, behavioural characteristics); while elements of the environment include physical, social, and cultural factors. These organised wholes (the person and the environment) operate together in a dynamic process that involves interactions between them. Magnusson noted that single aspects of the individual do not develop and function in isolation from each other nor the environment, they therefore "should not be divorced from totality in analysis" (Magnusson & Cairns, 1996, p.12). He further explained that "it is not possible to understand how social systems function without knowledge of individual functioning, and it is not possible to understand

individual functioning without knowledge of the environment" (Magnusson & Statin, 1998, p.658-658).

Magnusson proposes that the interactions and exchanges between the individual and the environment are reciprocal and bi-directional; as a result, a change within one aspect affects other parts of the sub-system and the total person-environment system. Thus, while the environment affects the person, the person also impacts the environment through direct or indirect actions. This type of relationship is often referred to as transactional (Baltes & Graf, 1997; Sameroff & Chandler,1975), or co-constructive (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Kindermann & Valsiner, 1995).

Even though Magnusson's theory focusses on the role of person-environment interactions in development, Magnusson's points out that individuals' must take an active role and take advantage of the resources the environment provides (assuming the resources fit their needs). According to Magnusson the individual is active and purposeful and because she or he is at the center of the person-environment interactions, the individual is also a source of and co-producer of his or her own development. To further explain this, Magnusson noted that even though the environment can serve as a source of stimulation for certain behaviours or as a source of information, the individual still needs to possess certain abilities or engage in certain behaviours for the most effective interactions to occur. Magnusson notes that to understand how an individual contributes to his or her own development the role of individual differences in human development must be considered, as an individual's 'internal distinctiveness' influences their interactions and exchanges with the conditions that the environment offers and total person-environment system. Magnusson suggests

that to assist individual's with their role as co-producers of their development interventions that "increase the understanding of the individual's ability to adapt to environmental opportunities, demands, and restrictions in a way that best satisfies the individual's own needs and also benefits society are needed" (Magnusson & Mahoney, 2001, p.4). Holistic interaction principles however require individual interventions be combined with "programs that assess the total person-environment system and not just single problems of individual functioning" (Magnusson & Stattin, 1998, p.740).

Magnusson's theory points to the importance of understanding the role of person-context (environment) interactions in human development. The theory shows that examining relationships between an individual, particularly a child or adolescent, and their school, community, or other environments can provide valuable information about possible interventions to increase optimal development and goodness of fit between individuals and their environment.

2.9.3   Schreiner's Thriving Construct

For many years the literature on student success at university/college has focussed on academic success. In recent years higher education researchers have begun to look beyond academics as the principal measure of student success. The construct of thriving in college has been developed to encourage a more comprehensive view of the factors that impact student success. Thriving is grounded in positive psychology; it is a "new perspective of student success that focuses not only on academic success, but also on the relationships, perspectives, and psychological well-being that allow students to gain maximum benefit from their college experience"

(Schreiner, 2010, p.2). Thriving is based on the positive psychology concept of flourishing, defined by Keyes and Haidt (2003) as a life lived with high levels of emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Flourishing individuals have an enthusiasm for life, are productively engaged with others and in society, and are resilient when they encounter personal challenges. In relation to university students, the concept of thriving is used to explain the difference between students who flourish and those who simply survive (Kinzie, 2010). Thriving is conceptualized as optimal functioning in 3 areas: (a) academic engagement and performance, (b) interpersonal relationships, and (c) psychological well-being.

To measure the concept of thriving, researchers developed a Thriving Quotient based on U.S research including 8,839 college students at 18 private and 9 public four-year colleges and universities. The surveys were administered online and the average response rate was 18%. The sample consisted of 71% females, 19% first-generation students, and 88% Caucasian students. After the data were collected, data from students over the age of 25 were eliminated and the final sample consisted of 4,602 participants. Factor analysis resulted in a 25 item survey with five constructs: (1) engaged learning, (2) academic determination, (3) positive perspective, (4) diverse citizenship, and (5) social connectedness. To be included in a construct, items had to be measurable, empirically connected to student success, malleable (state vs. trait) and amenable to interventions that work (Schreiner, 2012). These five factors provide an expanded explanation of the three main areas of academic engagement and performance, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being.

2.9.3.1   Academic Thriving

According to Schreiner (2013), academic thriving comprises engaged learning and academic determination. Students who are thriving academically are energised by the learning process (Schreiner & Loius, 2011), they are attentive to new learning opportunities, and they actively think about and discuss what they are learning with others. Thriving includes more than attending class and completing assigned readings; it requires students to be psychologically engaged in the learning process. Academic determination is characterized by behaviours, such as intentional pursuit of goals, effort, motivation, and effectively managing time to pursue academic and personal needs. It also includes trying new strategies, asking for help, and refusing to give up when academic difficulties occur. This concept of academic thriving is linked to models of student retention in higher education as high attrition rates in US universities are a major concern for higher education officials and researchers.

2.9.3.2   Interpersonal Thriving

In the Thriving Quotient there are two aspects to interpersonal thriving: social connections and diverse citizenship. Social connections involve having healthy friendships with others. Good social connections allow the student to feel connected to others and prevents loneliness. Diverse citizenship refers to being open to others who are different, and valuing differences in others from diverse backgrounds. It also involves a desire to make a contribution in the world through volunteering or being involved in organizations (Schreiner, 2012).

2.9.3.3   Intrapersonal Thriving

Intrapersonal thriving is comprised of the positive perspective factor of the thriving quotient. Students with high levels of intrapersonal thriving have a positive outlook on life, high self-esteem, and an optimistic way of viewing the world. They tend to be more satisfied with their lives and enjoy the college experience more. Schreiner (2013) notes than positive perspective is not simply a matter of believing that everything will turn out well, rather it requires proactively coping with reality and taking whatever action is necessary to resolves problems. Schreiner (2013) further suggests that students with a positive perspective can reframe negative events and view them as a learning experience. Students with a positive perspective also have a long-term view of negative experiences and are therefore less likely to overreact. This results in effective stress management and increased resilience. The experience of positive emotions that accompanies the optimistic outlook can lead to higher levels of satisfaction with the college experience.

Schreiner, Louis, and Nelson (2012) point out that students enter university with behavioral tendencies, life experiences, personality predispositions, and ways of seeing the world that often result in poor outcomes and ineffective reactions to life changes. They therefore believe that focusing on these three domains of thriving, which represent areas of student functioning that are amenable to change, could help university officials and counseling and advising staff to better understand students' needs. Further research by Schreiner (2012) has also found that faculty interaction, involvement in campus activities, involvement in student organizations, satisfaction with living arrangements, and satisfaction with student advising have a positive effect on thriving.

Clearly, there are multiple issues that affect university students' ability to thrive. Utilizing interventions that can promote change in the individual and the environment is therefore important.

2.10   Summary

These three frameworks provide theoretical bases from which the results of this study can be examined. Schlossberg's transition theory (1981) provides a comprehensive explanation of the transition process; it is helpful for understanding student's experiences. Magnusson's theory provides a lens to examine how characteristics of the student and the university environment interact to facilitate or hinder adjustment and student development. Finally, the term thriving has only recently been applied to explain and explore successful student outcomes. Schreiner's thriving construct provides a basis to examine the concept of thriving and success among Western University students.

Chapter 3

3.   Method of Inquiry

This chapter outlines the research design and method used in this study. A brief history of grounded theory is presented and the characteristics of this research method are reviewed. An explanation of how each of the characteristics was employed in this study is provided. The purpose of this study is discussed and is linked to the methodological choice.

3.1   Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of students transitioning from high school to Western University, to explore students' conceptualization of thriving at university, and to develop a substantive theory of transition and thriving for Western University students. The study was motivated by the increasing incidents of mental health issues among university students and the paucity of Canadian literature on students' experiences during the transition from high school to university. The goal of the study was not to assess student mental health problems, but to gain knowledge about students' transition experiences and to glean from those experiences factors that could possibly impact mental health and overall thriving. The study was guided by three research questions:

1. How do students leaving high school experience the transition to Western University and how do they define thriving?

 2. What are the major factors that hinder/promote a successful transition to university?

3. How do the factors that hinder/promote a successful transition affect students'

ability to thrive at university?

3.2   Research Design

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study. According to Brown, Stevens, Troiano, and Schneider (2002) qualitative methods are useful for exploring and describing the experiences of college students, especially when little is known about the topic of interest. Three other considerations led to the choice of a qualitative research design for this study. First, qualitative designs provide a detailed understanding of the topic being explored (Creswell, 1998). Second, qualitative designs can generate information for the development of valid and reliable measures (Dumka, Gonzalez, Wood, & Formoso, 1998; Sofaer, 2002). Third, while quantitative analyses can determine if there are relationships and interactions between different variables, qualitative research can provide information about why those interactions and relationships occur (Keys, 1997).

3.2.1   Methodological Choice

The qualitative method chosen for this study is grounded theory. The goal of grounded theory is theory development. This method was developed by Barney Glaser and Anslem Strass in 1967 as a method to help sociologists systematically gather and analyse data for theory development. Glaser and Strauss (1967) indicate that although theory development is the principal aim of grounded theory, another key goal of this method is the discovery of the basic social processes underlying the phenomena of

interest. A researcher using grounded theory methods therefore not only seeks to develop new theory, but also to understand the underlying social patterns that cause the phenomenon of interest to occur (Benoliel,1996).

Theory development in grounded theory requires data collection from a variety of sources in order to discover the relationships that exist within the phenomenon. After data collection, the researcher engages in data analysis and concept (category) development; concepts refer to patterns within the data (Glaser, 2002). The researcher often identifies several categories within the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) note that all of the categories must be linked to one core category that represents the main theme of the research findings. The core category describes what is significant about the population (Glaser, 1978). According to Glaser (2005), there are two criteria that must be used to establish a core category: centrality and frequency. The core category must relate meaningfully and easily to many of the other categories within the data, and must also be a stable pattern that frequently occurs within the data. Conceptualizing the categories and discovering the relationships that exist between them allows the researcher to produce an explanatory theory that is grounded in the data collected and expands the knowledge base about the phenomenon.

3.2.2   Rationale for Methodological Choice

Within qualitative research, there are four commonly used methods: phenomenology, ethnography, case study, and grounded theory. The purpose of phenomenology is to understand the meaning of participants' experiences. According to Husserl (1970), pure phenomenology only seeks to describe experiences and not to

explain them; consequently, phenomenology was not deemed to be suitable to answer this study's research questions. Ethnography involves studying people within their own environment. Hammersley (1992) notes that the ethnographer's role is to document the culture, perspectives, and practices of the people in their settings. A major data collection strategy in ethnography is participant observation of experiences as they occur. This study sought to understand the experiences of first to fourth year students at Western University, and the first year transition experiences would have already occurred for some of the study participants. Therefore an ethnographic research method would not have been appropriate. Case studies are in depth examinations of an individual, a small group, or institutions that are used in both qualitative and quantitative research. Case studies require multiple data collection methods including direct observation and participant observation (Yin, 1984). As stated earlier direct observation of students' experiences would not have been possible and for this reason a case study design would not be suitable for this study.

The grounded theory method was determined to be a good fit for this study for several reasons. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that discovery is a central purpose of engaging in grounded theory research. As noted in the literature review, the majority of research on the transition from high school to university has been conducted in the US, there is very little Canadian research on this topic. In order to understand the transition experiences of Canadian students, it is necessary to first discover their experiences. In addition, the goal of this study was not only to describe and understand students' transitional experiences, but to identify the factors that hinder and facilitate successful transitions, and to understand how those factors affect thriving. Those

research questions point to the need to understand relationships among variables and to discover underlying social patterns. According to Keys (1997) and Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory would facilitate the discovery of such information.

3.3 Description of the Research Method

To conduct high quality qualitative research, the researcher must ensure that the strategies that are used are consistent with the method chosen. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that researchers can be flexible in their employment of grounded theory strategies. Charmaz (2006) also indicates that grounded theory methods are a "set of principles and practices …. flexible guidelines not methodological rules, recipes, or requirements" (p.9). However, there are characteristics that distinguish grounded theory from other qualitative methods. Clark and McCann (2003) proposed seven grounded theory characteristics (a) theoretical sensitivity, (b) theoretical sampling, (c) constant comparative analysis, (d) coding and categorizing the data, (e) theoretical memos and diagrams, (f) literature as data sources, and (g) theory integration.

3.3.1 Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity refers to understanding the data, giving meaning to the data, and determining what is important within the data (Glaser, 1978). Theoretical sensitivity allows the researcher to develop concepts and a theory that are grounded in the data. A researcher develops theoretical sensitivity through numerous sources including a review of the literature, data immersion, and personal experiences. A literature review provides background information on the phenomenon under study and

sensitizes the researcher. A review of the literature is also necessary to help with the development of research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Researchers are, however, warned not to immerse themselves too deeply in the literature as this could lead to bias that limits the researcher's ability to fully explore potential concepts and theories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Calman (2006) also notes that the literature review should be used to inform, but not to direct data analysis. To reduce the possibility of bias from the literature, I conducted a brief general review of the literature prior to data collection; the brief review of the literature provided enough information to support theoretical sensitivity. The literature review on previous studies of students' non-health related transition experiences was conducted after data analysis was completed.

Theoretical sensitivity can also be increased when the researcher becomes immersed in the data and the data analysis process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978). Corbin and Strauss (2008) recommend using various analytical tools to increase theoretical sensitivity. The tools used in this study were: (1) drawing upon personal experience, (2) waving the red flag, which refers to recognizing biases and assumptions that can affect analysis, (3) analyzing words and phrases to explore all possible meanings, (4) examining emotions that were expressed and the situations that aroused them, and (5) questioning the who, what, where, and why of the data. Drawing upon personal experiences was particularly important during data collection, data analysis, and concept development. This strategy acknowledges the researcher's history and utilizes that history for conceptual comparisons with the data. As an international student who transitioned to a foreign country to pursue graduate studies some of the experiences described by the student participants were very similar to my own transition

experiences and therefore increased my theoretical sensitivity. My experiences as a

graduate teaching assistant at the undergraduate level also helped to increase my

theoretical sensitivity to the data. My interactions and conversations with students

especially during office hours helped me to understand the data. I do not believe,

however, that my experiences biased the analysis. I pursued undergraduate studies in

my home country (Barbados, a small Caribbean island) where I attended the island's

only university with the majority of my friends and schoolmates, while living at home. My

undergraduate experiences were vastly different from what was described by most of

the students in this study. The differences between my graduate transition experiences,

my undergraduate transition experiences, and the experiences reported by the students

in the study provided a balance. I was therefore able to understand the data, but was

also able to view the data objectively.

3.3.2. Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling refers to the process of choosing participants, modifying

research questions, or changing research sites in order to increase the researcher's

understanding of themes and categories that emerge from the data. The goals of

theoretical sampling are theory refinement and clarification of the emerging categories

by obtaining data to confirm or refute original categories (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical

sampling is not intended to produce a representative sample or increase the

generalizability of the results (Charmaz, 2006). In order to engage in theoretical

sampling, data collection and analysis must occur simultaneously. Backman and

Kyngas (1999) suggest that if the data are not analysed as they are collected, the

researcher may not know which direction to take the next interview, and may also find it difficult to know when data saturation has been reached. Data saturation occurs when no new concepts emerge from new data and all variations are explained (Munhall, 2007).

In this study, theoretical sampling was employed through expanding the selection of participants and revising the interview questions. After the first individual student interview and the first student focus group, the researcher reviewed the wording of the questions and her approach to conducting the interviews. As themes began to emerge in subsequent focus groups, the questions became more focussed until data saturation occurred. For staff focus groups, the original interview schedule consisted of five questions; however, continuous review of the data from each focus group allowed the researcher to expand the number and/or the content of the questions posed to staff in subsequent data collection sessions until data saturation was reached. In addition, because staff and student focus groups were conducted concurrently (the groups were not combined, but separate staff and student focus groups were at times conducted within the same day or same week) the researcher was able to use the knowledge gained from the data analysis within and between the groups in subsequent data collection sessions, (i.e. data gained from student focus groups was used to inform subsequent students focus group as well as staff focus groups and vice versa). Specific examples of theoretical sampling relating to the selection are participants are provided in the next chapter.

3.3.3   Coding and Categorizing Data

According to Charmaz (2006), coding involves categorizing pieces of the data with a label. Coding is the first step in analysing and interpreting the data and is considered as the nexus between data collection and theory generation. Through coding the researcher begins to define what the data mean. The initial phase of the coding process is referred to as open coding. The first step in open coding is line by line coding; this requires attaching a label to every line in the transcript. Initial codes are provisional as the researcher remains open to all possibilities about the codes and meanings of participant statements. The codes may also be reworded to more accurately capture the participants' meanings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The second phase of coding is focussed coding. In this process the researcher reviews the codes and eliminates less useful codes. In focussed coding the researcher moves from a descriptive phase that was initially used to summarize the data to an analytical phase. The researcher is required to develop categories, rather than label topics, as the purpose of focused coding is to build and clarify categories. In the process the data are synthesised as the most apt codes from the open coding phase are attached to large segments of the data.

Axial coding is the final stage of coding. This process involves creating sub-categories from the categories created in focused coding. During this process connections are made between the categories and sub-categories. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggests that while "open coding fractures the data into concepts and categories, axial coding puts those data back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its sub-categories" (p.97).

3.3.4   Constant Comparative Analysis

Constant comparative analysis is the process of constantly comparing newly

collected data with previously collected data and then reducing the data through

recoding (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). It is a cyclical process where the researcher codes,

reflects, re-reads, sorts through new data, and recodes. It is also considered to be an

iterative and inductive process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) through which concepts are

formed, confirmed, or refuted. Constant comparative analysis guides theoretical

sampling as the themes that emerge from the data inform the data collection process

(Conrad, Neuman, Haworth &, Scott, 1993). It also allows the researcher to identify

relationships and interactions and leads to theory development. Glaser (2002) notes

that because of its nature, constant comparative analysis is a form of latent structural

analysis. In this study constant comparative analysis was consistently employed as all

new data were analyzed and compared with previously collected data.

3.3.5   Memos

Memo writing involves recording reflective notes, this technique analyses what

the researcher is learning from the data. Memo writing is viewed as a valuable analytical

tool (Clarke, 2005) that helps the researcher to establish an intense relationship with the

data (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). Charmaz (2006) suggests that memo writing is

crucial to grounded theory because it requires the researcher to analyze the data as

soon as the research process begins. Memo writing also keeps the researcher in

constant contact with the data and continually involved in the analysis throughout the

research process. Memos can help a researcher sort data and explore codes. Unlike

field notes, which are mostly descriptive, memos provide an in-depth analysis of the data. In addition, memos add credibility and trustworthiness to qualitative research and provide a record of the meanings derived from the data (Groenwald, 2008).

3.3.6   Diagrams

Diagramming is the process of creating a drawing or a map that outlines a process and depicts findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In qualitative research, diagrams are often used as data analysis tools to help clarify relationships, create categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and illustrate the dimensions of categories. Throughout this study, diagrams were used to help the researcher conceptualize categories and sub-categories and the nature of the relationships between them.

3.3.7   Theory Integration

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), theory integration is complete when all categories and sub-categories are well defined and explained. Birk and Mills (2011) suggest that theory integration requires advanced analytical strategies as analysis must reach the highest conceptual level. They further suggests that three elements are required for theory integration: a core category, theoretical saturation, and memos. As stated earlier, the core category is centrally related to all other categoriess and therefore has the ability to explain the phenomena. When the theory is integrated, the other categories that surround the core category should clearly explain the causal conditions, contextual conditions, strategies, and consequences that exist within the phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Conditions are events or variables that lead to the occurrence

or development of the phenomenon. Context refers to a set of conditions that create

circumstances or problems. Strategies are activities which individuals engage in in

response to the phenomenon, and consequences are the outcomes of the strategies

used. The causal conditions affect the core category, the core category and the

contextual conditions affect the strategies, and the strategies affect the consequences.

The grounded theory approach used in this study is illustrated in Figure 1 below.
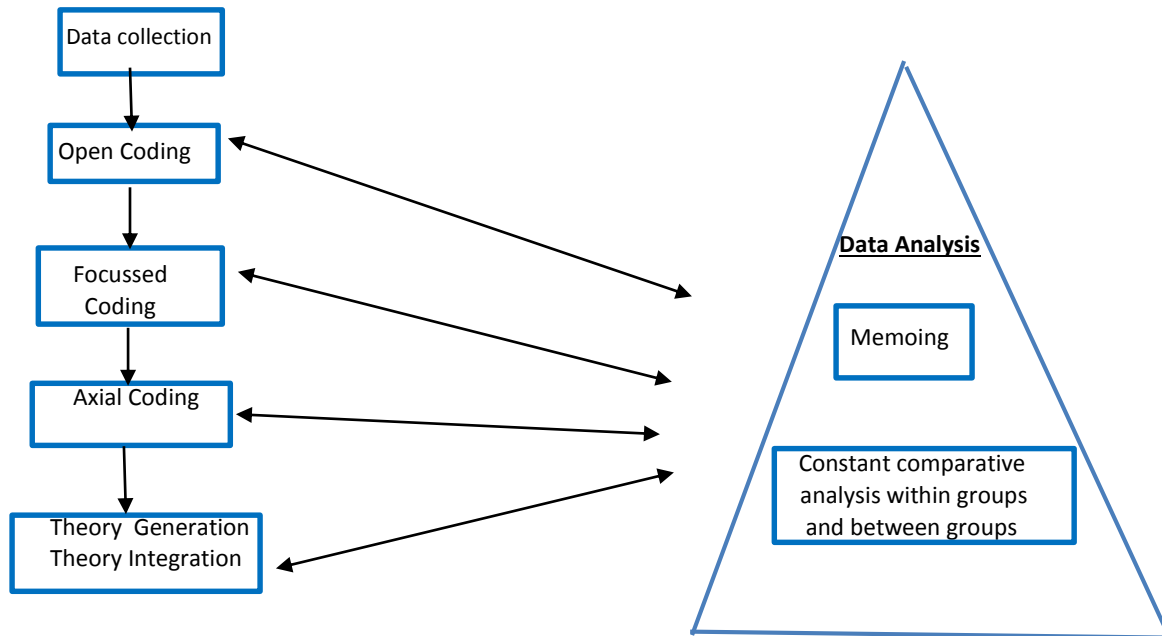
Figure 1. Grounded theory methods used in this study

3.3.8   Summary

This chapter presented the methods used to conduct grounded theory research. Grounded theory was determined to be the most appropriate qualitative methodology for answering the research questions because the goal of the study was not just to describe students' experiences, but to understand the underlying issues that may influence successful transitions.

Chapter 4

4. Data Collection

This chapter discusses the procedures employed to collect the data for this study. Ethical considerations are explored and a description of the research site is provided. Participant recruitment and sampling techniques are also described. The data analysis methods are reviewed, and the methods employed to ensure methodological rigour and trustworthiness of the data and study findings are also presented.

4.1 Ethics

Ethical approval to conduct the study was received from Western University's Research Board for Health Sciences Research involving human subjects (HSREB) on August 16, 2013. A copy of the approval notice can be found in Appendix A.

4.2 Research Site

This study was conducted at Western University, a four-year public research University located in London, Ontario, Canada. Western University also hosts three affiliated university colleges: Kings University College, Brescia University College, and Huron University College. According to the University's main website (www.uwo.ca) there were 22,070 undergraduate students enrolled at the university in 2013; 2,600 of the students were international students. Western University has a mean entrance average of 88.9% and a first to second year retention rate of 93.2%. In 2013 there were 2,184 male first year undergraduate students and 2,639 female first year undergraduate

students enrolled at the main campus. The majority of the first year students enrolled at

the main university and its affiliate colleges in 2013 were from the province of Ontario,

(5,309), there were 290 out of province students and 696 international students. In 2013

the university employed 1,403 full time faculty members and 2,488 full time staff,

including 796 professional staff. Western University offers a variety of support services

to students, including psychological services, learning skills, and writing support. The

2012 Western Student Services Annual Report indicates that there was a 69% increase

in the use of Psychological Services between 2008 and 2012; the number of students

utilizing Learning Skills Services increased by 63% between 2006 and 2012.

4.3   Sampling Strategies

The population of interest for this study was Western University undergraduate

students and support services professional staff. In qualitative research the sample size

is dependent on the amount of data needed for saturation. Morse (1994) suggest that

30 to 50 interviews are an adequate sample for grounded theory research. Munhall

(2007), however, notes that studies with a narrow focus can utilise a smaller sample as

data saturation may occur earlier than with studies that have a broader scope. For this

study ethics approval for 60 to 80 students and 24 to 30 staff members was sought and

obtained to allow for the possibility that a large sample might be needed for data

saturation. The final sample consisted of 42 students and 21 staff members.

In qualitative research, purposive sampling is used to target participants.

Purposive sampling consists of a variety of non–probability sampling techniques that

allow for participants to be selected based on specific characteristics needed to answer

the research questions (Patton, 2001). Unlike quantitative research, the goal of purposive sampling is not to randomly select participants for the generalizability of the results. In this study three types of purposive sampling were used: expert sampling, stratified purposive sampling, and convenience sampling. Expert sampling involves selecting individuals with specific knowledge or experience in the area being studied; this sampling technique was used to select staff participants for this study. The researcher, her supervisor, and advisory committee developed a key informant list of senior administration and staff who have direct knowledge of the transition issues experienced by Western University undergraduate students. Other staff members from the Student Development Centre, Student Health Services, Housing and Ancilliary Services, the University Students' Council, the International and Exchange Student Centre, and Indigenous Services were also invited to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria for staff was a minimum of one year of experience working directly with students.

Stratified purposive sampling involves dividing the sample into strata then obtaining a sample from each strata. This sampling technique was originally used with the student sample in the first round of recruitment. This sampling technique allows for group comparisons and results in a sample that is representative of the population (Babbie, 2007); it however still does not allow for generalization. In the second round of student recruitment, convenience sampling was utilised, this technique involves sampling participants who meet the inclusion criteria, are available, and are willing to participate (Morse, 2004). A disadvantage of this technique is that the resulting sample may be comprised of individuals who are very similar; however, such samples can still

yield rich data (Kober & McMichael, 2008). Student participation in this study was limited to undergraduate students between the ages of 17 to 24 years.

4.4   Participant Recruitment

4.4.1   Student Recruitment

Three methods were used to recruit students to participate in the study: e-mails, posters, and advertisements in a Western University student newspaper. One of the goals of the study was to capture the transition experiences of various categories of students including international students, first generation students, high achieving students, out of province students, and off campus students. Stratified purposive sampling was used to target these students. Western Student Success Center (SSC) has clubs, programs, and associations that provide services specifically for these categories of students. An e-mail from the researcher was sent to personnel at the SSC introducing the study and requesting that an e-mail invitation to participate in the study be sent to these students. The letter of information was also included in the e-mail. A meeting occurred between the researcher and a member of the SSC staff on September 24, 2013 to further discuss the study and the students that the researcher was hoping to target. After this meeting occurred the e-mail invitation was sent to students from the SSC on September 27, 2013. A similar process occurred in an effort to recruit international students. The researcher contacted personnel at Western's International Student and Exchange Center via e-mail on September 20, 2013 to introduce the study and request that an e-mail invitation to participate in the study be sent to undergraduate international students That e-mail was sent to students on

September 27, 2013. A total of 40 students expressed interest in participating in the study from these emails, however, only six of these students actually participated; one of the main reasons for non-participation was schedule conflicts.

Staff and student recruitment occurred concurrently (not in combined groups, rather separate student and staff groups were recruited within the same data collection time period) and prior to data collection with the six students, three focus groups with staff had already occurred. Although the data from the six students added knowledge, theoretical saturation of the emerging themes had not occurred. Theoretical sampling dictated a need for a second round of student recruitment, which was done via a mass-email to the entire undergraduate body (main campus and affiliate colleges). Permission to have a mass-email sent on my behalf was sought from the Office of the Registrar on October 25, 2013 and the mass e-mail was sent to students on October 31, 2013. An adjustment was made to the e-mail script utilised in the mass e-mail. During the first round of recruitment several students over the age of 24 expressed a desire to participate in the study as the inclusion criteria was not listed. Permission to address this oversight and add the age limit to the recruitment script was requested from the HSREB on September 27, 2013 and approval was obtained on October 25, 2013. In addition to the mass e-mail, posters with the study details and the researcher's contact information were placed around the campus. An ad was also placed in the Gazette; one of Western's student newspapers. Copies of the student letter of information, the student e-mail recruitment script, the poster, and the newspaper advertisement can be found in Appendices D, F, L and M respectively. Students who expressed an interest in participating in the study were sent a letter of information as well as a Doodle link

(Doodle is an online scheduling tool) where they could choose a time and a date to participate in a focus group. Five students opted to participate through an individual interview; the time and dates for those interviews were coordinated via e-mail between the student and the researcher. A total of 42 students participated in the study; ten student focus groups and five individual interviews were conducted. The students were from six faculties: Faculty of Science (40.5%), Social Science (26.2%), Health Sciences (14.3%), Arts and Humanities (14.3%) Music (2.4%) and FIMS (2.4%). International students comprised 16.7% of the sample, while 37.5% of the students identified as first generation students.

4.4.2   Staff Recruitment

To recruit staff participants, the researcher sent e-mails to administrative personnel in the Student Success Center, the Student Development Center, the International Students and Exchange Center, Housing and Ancillary Services, the University Student Council, Campus Police, and Indigenous Services to introduce the study and request that they send the e-mail on my behalf to the staff in their departments. Senior level administrative staff who work in various student support services were also invited to participate in the study via e-mail. As data collection progressed, the data analysis from the student and staff focus groups suggested that academic counsellors would be useful to help to elucidate some of the issues and themes that emerged from the data. A request was made to have to an e-mail invitation sent to academic counsellors. A total of 21 staff members participated; four focus groups and two individual interviews were conducted with staff participants. The

demographic data for student participants is presented in Table 3 while the

demographic data for staff participants is presented in Table 4.

Table 3.

Student Participant Demographics

Partic. #	Gender	Age	Ethnicity/Race	Major/Program	Year	Residence Status	First Gen. Student
1	F	23	Asian	Psychology	5	Domestic	No
2	F	19	Asian	BMOS	1	International	No
3	F	19	Asian	SASAH	1	International	No
4	F	20	Asian	Food & Nutrition	3	International	Yes
5	F	19	East African	Health Sciences	2	Domestic	Yes
6	M	20	Asian	BMOS	2	International	Yes
7	F	18	Asian	BMOS	1	Domestic	Yes
8	F	19	White	Health Sciences	2	Domestic	Yes
9	F	19	Multi-racial	Health Sciences	2	Domestic	Yes
10	F	18	Asian	Psychology	1	Domestic	No
11	F	21	Asian	BMSc	4	Domestic	No
12	M	19	White	BMSc	1	Domestic	Yes
13	F	21	White	Psychology	4	Domestic	No
14	F	18	S.E. Asian	BMSc	1	Domestic	Yes
15	F	21	White	History/Sociology	4	Domestic	No
16	F	21	Multi-racial	Earth Sciences	2	Domestic	No
17	M	21	White	English	1	Domestic	Yes
18	F	19	White	Kinesiology	2	Domestic	No
19	F	21	S.E. Asian	Sociology	4	Domestic	No

Table 3 continued

Part. #	Gender	Age	Ethnicity/Race	Major/Program	Year	Residence Status	First Gen. Student
20	F	20	Mid. Eastern	Visual Art	1	Domestic	Yes
21	F	17	White	Biological Science	1	Domestic	No
22	F	19	White	Health Sciences	2	Domestic	No
23	F	18	White	BMSc	1	Domestic	Yes
24	F	17	White	BMSc	1	Domestic	No
25	M	18	Asian	Undeclared	1	Domestic	No
26	F	18	White	Food & Nutrition	1	Domestic	No
27	F	18	S.E. Asian	BMSc	1	Domestic	No
28	F	21	Asian	Actuarial Science	2	International	No
29	F	20	White	Music	4	Domestic	No
30	F	20	Asian	Biological Science	1	Domestic	No
31	M	17	White	Philosophy	1	Domestic	No
32	M	19	White	BMSc	1	International	Yes
33	F	20	White	English	3	Domestic	No
34	F	20	S.E. Asian	Environ. Science	2	Domestic	No
35	M	19	Asian	Biology	2	Domestic	No
36	M	20	Asian	BMSc	2	Domestic	No
37	F	21	White	English	4	Domestic	____
38	F	21	White	History	4	Domestic	Yes
39	F	19	White	FIMS	2	Domestic	No
40	M	17	Asian	BMSc	1	Domestic	Yes
41	M	21	S.E. Asian	Biology	3	Domestic	No
42	F	18	White	Psychology	1	Domestic	Yes

Table 4

Staff Participants Demographics

Participant #	Department	No. of years in position	Gender
1	Housing & Ancillary Services	2	F
2	Housing & Ancillary Services	2.5	F
3	Housing & Ancillary Services	2	F
4	Student Success Centre	1.5	F
5	Housing & Ancillary Services	6.5	F
6	University Student Council	1.5	M
7	Academic Counselling	1	F
8	Academic Counselling	8	F
9	Academic Counselling	1	F
10	Campus Police	1	M
11	Student Health Services	1	F
12	Campus Police	3	M
13	Housing & Ancillary Services	2	F
14	Student Development Centre	15	F
15	Student Development Centre	14	F
16	Student Development Centre	1	F
17	Student Development Centre	1	M
18	Student Development Centre	7	F
19	Student Development Centre	3	F
20	Student Development Centre	2	F
21	International & Exchange Student Centre	1	F

4.5   Data Collection and Sources

Grounded theory provides strategies to analyze data, but there are no specified data collection strategies for grounded theory research. Given that the researcher was seeking a relatively large number of student participants, focus groups were chosen as the primary data collection method. Focus groups are a form of group interviewing that allow a researcher to collect a large amount of information within a short period of time. Focus groups provide group interaction (Kreuger, 1994) and allow respondents to build on each other's ideas while still discussing their individual response (Kitzinger, 1994). It was taken into consideration that some students may have had difficult transition experiences and may not feel comfortable discussing their experiences within a group setting; therefore a decision was made to allow for the option of conducting a maximum of ten individual interviews, at the choice of the participants.

A semi-structured interview format was used for the focus groups and individual interviews. The questions were developed by the researcher from themes in the literature. Study questions were also based on discussions with my supervisor and advisory committee who have higher level administrative positions that allow them to be familiar with various issues faced by undergraduates at Western University. The questions were reviewed by my supervisor and advisory committee and the HSREB. The questions designed for the student focus group schedule were also reviewed by a fourth year Western University student who provided feedback on the questions prior to submitting the interview schedule for ethics review. A copy of the interview schedules for students and staff can be found in Appendix J and K.

4.5.1   Interview Process

For both student and staff focus groups and individual interviews, participants were asked to review and initial the letter of information, sign the consent form, and complete a brief demographics questionnaire prior to the start of the interview. These documents are located in the Appendix C, D, E, H and I. At the beginning of each interview, participants were provided with an overview of the purpose of the study and were reminded of and assured of confidentiality. Interviews began with introductions and casual conversation to establish rapport and comfort among participants and between the researcher and the participants. The interview schedules for student and staff were designed as a guide and not as a schedule that would be rigidly followed. During the focus groups and individual interviews, additional probing questions were asked based on the need to further explore points raised by the participants. Throughout the interviews rephrasing and paraphrasing were used to ensure that the researcher accurately understood participants' views (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

All interviews were tape-recorded. At the end of each interview participants were thanked for their time and reassured of confidentiality. Each student was given an opportunity to express how they were feeling after the interview. Each student was also given a Western University pamphlet which contained information about maintaining mental wellbeing and a list of on-campus mental health support services. All students were given an honorarium of $10.00 for their participation in the study. Each student was also entered into a draw for six $50.00 gift certificates from Western's Book Store. Staff participants were not given an honorarium, but they were entered into a separate draw for four $ 50.00 gift certificates from Western's Book Store. Staff and student focus

groups were conducted at the Qualitative Research Lab at Elborn College or in conference rooms at Western's University Community Center. Individual interviews with students were conducted at the researcher's student office at Elborn College; this office is occupied by the researcher only and provided privacy. Individual staff interviews were conducted at the staff member's personal office.

4.6   Data Analysis

Immediately following the end of each interview, field notes were taken by the researcher. The field notes documented the researcher's observations about group interactions, participants' mood, important points raised during the interview, perceptions about the session, and notes about possible changes for the next interview. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Respondents were not provided with a copy of their individual transcript for verification. However, to ensure accuracy, the researcher listened to each interview as often as needed to confirm that the transcription was correct. All final transcriptions were then double-checked with the audio recording to ensure the accuracy of the data. This was done to help increase the trustworthiness of the data and the analysis. Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Charmaz (2007) suggest that transcribed data be read first without attempting to code the data. During the second reading, the researcher engaged in manual line by line open coding. Constant comparative analysis was employed within and across student and staff groups to discover similarities and differences. A master list of codes was created.

On completion of open coding, the researcher met with her supervisor who had also read the transcripts to discuss the data, and the differences and similarities

between the codes assigned to the data by the researcher and her supervisor. A subsequent meeting was held with the researcher, her supervisor, and a member of the advisory committee, who had also read the transcripts to discuss the data and compare and contrast codes. After this meeting, the researcher moved on to focussed coding and axial coding. During this process, diagrams were used extensively as an analytic technique to help the researcher develop and clarify categories and sub-categories and the relationships among them. Memo notes and the field notes were also used during this higher level analytical process.

After completing an initial draft of the emergent theory, which was depicted through a graphic model, the researcher met with her supervisor and both members of her advisory committee. In this peer debriefing session, the second member of the advisory committee who had not read the transcripts was updated on the data collected and presented with the emerging theory and model. This committee member verified that categories were logical based on the data. During this meeting, the categories and sub-categories, as well as the relationships among them, were agreed upon; however, the direction of the relationships (whether uni-directional or bi-directional) were to be further reviewed. Four subsequent iterations of the model and theory were produced as analysis and theory generation continued until conceptual saturation was reached. During this period there were several debriefing meetings between the researcher and her supervisor. The researcher also shared the emerging model with student and staff participants, who were asked to provide feedback. A total of 12 students and 3 staff members responded and all students stated that the model was an accurate representation of their experiences. Staff comments and questions related to definitions

of the terms used in the model; this clarification was sought in relation to being able to

apply the model to practice at Western University. No changes were made to the model

as a result of student and staff feedback. A final meeting occurred between the

researcher and her advisory committee to discuss and confirm theory development.

4.7   Methodological Rigour and Trustworthiness of Data

In qualitative research, it is important to evaluate the trustworthiness of the study

in order to have confidence in the results. Trustworthiness refers to the validity and

reliability of the data. The criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to determine

trustworthiness were applied in this study. These criteria are: credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability. The criteria represent parallels to the criteria of

internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity utilised in quantitative

research (Polit & Beck, 2010).

Credibility refers to confidence that the interpretations of the data represent the

views of the participants. Strategies to increase credibility include triangulation, member

checking, and thick descriptions of the data. Denzin (1970) suggested that there are

four types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theoretical

triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Data triangulation requires that the

researcher gathers data through using several sampling strategies, so that data are

collected from a variety of people. Investigator triangulation also referred to as

triangulation by observer was also used in this study. This technique involves having

multiple individuals code, analyze, and interpret the data to ensure that important

themes are not overlooked. Theoretical triangulation refers to using multiple theoretical

frameworks to interpret the data. In this study three theoretical frameworks were used to interpret the data. Methodological triangulation involves using more than one method to collect the data. In this study, focus groups and individual interviews were used to collect the data.

Member checking was employed in this study by providing participants with a copy of the emergent theory and seeking their feedback to determine if the findings and interpretation reflected their experiences. Thick description involves providing "deep, dense, detailed accounts" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83) through quotes from the data; several thick descriptions of the data are provided in the results section. The use of constant comparative analysis to verify themes, along with numerous peer debriefings between the researcher, her supervisor, and members of the advisory committee to discuss and validate interpretations additionally helped to increase credibility. Credibility can also be achieved through managing researcher bias. Bias may be reduced through engaging in reflexivity (Drisko, 1997). Reflexivity involves self-awareness of personal opinions about the phenomena; this bias may be reduced through keeping a written journal and engaging in dialog with peers (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). Throughout the data collection and data analysis period, the researcher consistently engaged in self-reflection and peer debriefings to reduce bias.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings are applicable or useful to practice and future research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and whether they fit populations outside of the study's context (Sandelowski,1986). Qualitative research studies are not generalizable because probability sampling is not employed; however, the findings may be relevant to a similar setting or population. To help determine transferability, the

researcher must provide thick descriptions of the data to help external readers and practitioners determine if the data can be applied to their contexts and populations. The study's context must also be described in detail (Devers, 1999).

Confirmability refers to confirmation of the study's findings (Drisko, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Shenton (2004), "steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (p. 72). To achieve confirmability, relationships between the findings and the data must be clearly established. Strategies that can be used to increase confirmability include member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trails. An audit trail consists of field notes, memos, and all other documents that describe the decisions made from the conceptualization of the research. These strategies allow individuals outside of the research team to evaluate the research procedures and findings.

Dependability refers to whether the findings would be repeated if the study was replicated with similar participants in a similar environment. To check the dependability of a qualitative study, the conceptualization the study, data collection procedures and decisions, interpretation of the findings, and the reported results are reviewed. Consistency in the research process increases the dependability of the results (Hopefl, 1997). A major technique for assessing dependability is an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is suggested that dependability cannot be assessed if the researcher does not maintain an audit trail, as the audit trail enables readers to understand methodological decisions and determine the reliability of the findings (Carcary, 2009). Carcary (2009) also notes that there are two types of audit trails: a physical audit trail, which documents

decisions made during each stage of the research, and an intellectual audit trail, which provides information on how a researcher's thinking evolved throughout the study.

4.8   Summary

This chapter presented information on the methods that were used to collect and analyse the data. The grounded theory guidelines for systematic collection and analysis of data through coding and constant comparative analysis were employed in this study. Several recommended methods, including peer debriefings, reflexivity, and the creation of an audit trail, were used to ensure that the study meets the quality criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Chapter 5

5.   Description of Conceptual Models

Based on the data gathered in this study, two conceptual models were created. The first model describes students' transition experiences, as well as how students define thriving. The second model explains how transition experiences combine with person-environment interactions and tensions to impact students' ability to thrive during the transition from high school to Western university.

Figure 2. Model of University Transition and Thriving for Western University Students
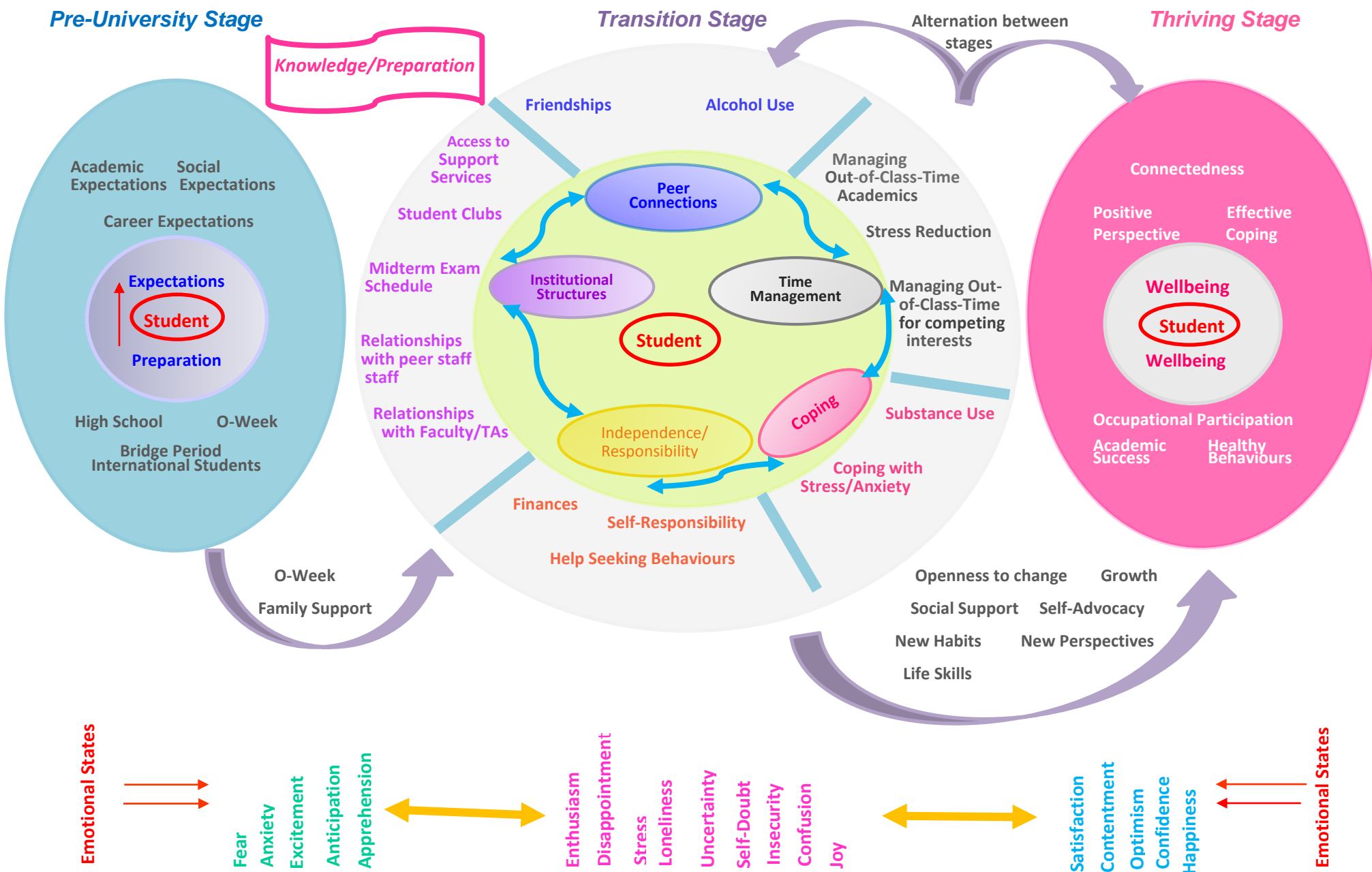
Figure 3. Transition –Interactions/Tensions – Outcomes Model for Western University
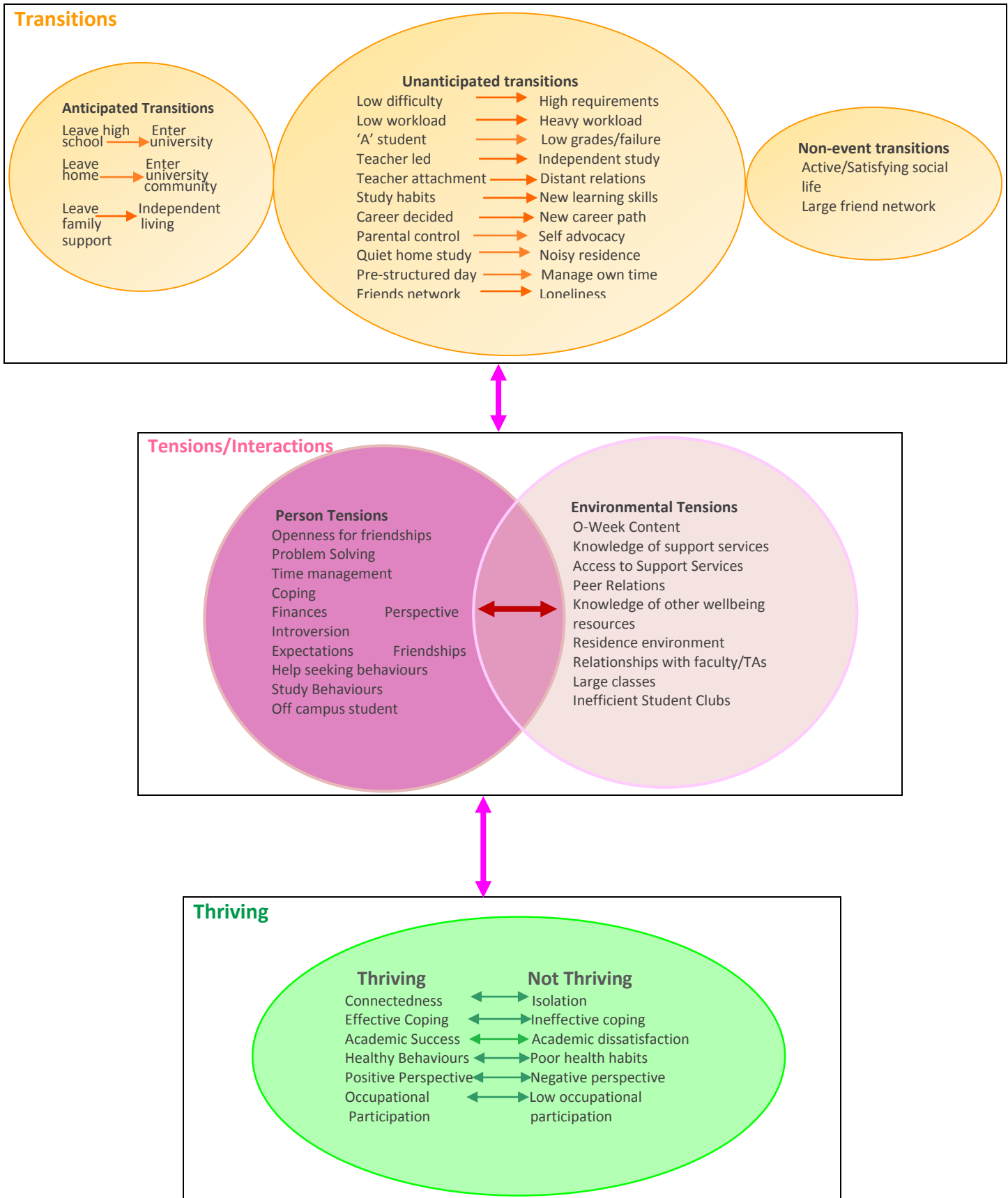
5.1 Explication of Model 1

The Model of University Transition and Thriving for Western University Students provides a pictorial representation of a grounded theory that describes the transition experiences of students at Western University. This model attempts to answer the first two questions that guided this research: (1) how do students leaving high school experience the transition to Western University and how do they define thriving? and (2) what are the major factors that hinder or promote a successful transition to university? The model consists of 3 stages, the Pre-University Stage, the Transition Stage, and the Thriving Stage. The student is at the center of each stage of the model. Each stage consists of various categories and sub-categories that depict the issues and experiences that impact students when they leave high school and transition to university. Each of the categories and sub-categories are extensively explained in the 'Study Results' chapter (chapter 6). The current section provides an overview of the model.

5.1.1 Pre-University Stage

The Pre-University Stage depicts assumptions and events that precede students' entry into university. These assumptions and events influence how students conceptualize and approach the transition to university. This stage consists of two categories: preparation and expectation. The red arrow within the categories circle indicates a relationship between preparation and expectations; the data from the study suggest that students' expectations are heavily influenced by their preparatory information and experiences. The connector at the bottom of the Pre-University Stage

represents a pathway that students must physically and psychologically travel in order to reach Stage 2. The connector also signifies that when students travel on this pathway, they take their expectations and preparatory information and experiences with them into the Transition Stage. Along the pathway, there are support systems that influence the student's transition, including family support and university orientation (O-Week). The Core Category of Knowledge/Preparation lies between the Pre-University and the Transition Stage.

5.1.2   Transition Stage

Stage 2 of the model is the Transition Stage, this stage represents the period where students begin classes and begin to experience the full scope of university life. This stage has five categories that were identified by the study participants as being the most critical issues that affect students during this stage. The categories are depicted using double arrows, to show that the categories are interrelated and interconnected. Each category has an impact on the other categories and there are dynamic relationships among them. For example, a student's ability to cope with stress and anxiety is affected by his or her coping skills and help seeking behaviours. If a student has ineffective coping skills and seeks assistance for emotional distress, institutional structures, such as campus support services, must be accessible in a timely manner to assist the student and help him or her to cope. The connector at the bottom of the Transition Stage again represents a pathway that students must travel in order to reach the Thriving Stage. Unlike the pathway from the Pre-University Stage to Transition Stage, the data from the study suggests that this journey is based on developing

psychological and skill based elements. Those elements are listed along the pathway and include personal growth, self-advocacy, openness to change, and life skills.

5.1.3   Thriving Stage

Stage 3 is the Thriving Stage. It is characterised by optimal functioning. Students reach this stage when they find and implement effective resolutions to the challenges they encounter in Stage 1 and Stage 2. The data from the study suggest that most students do not reach this stage until their 3rd or 4th year in university and some students may never reach this stage. A few 1st and 2nd year students in the study, however, indicated that they experienced a successful transition and were thriving (optimally functioning in all or most of the categories outlined in this stage). The data also suggest that even when students reach the Thriving Stage, it is not always a place of permanence, and that some students move back and forth between the Thriving Stage and the Transition Stage, particularly during high stress periods. The double arrow on top of the Transition and Thriving Stages depicts the back and forth movement between the two stages.

Underneath each of the stages are the emotional states that students experience at each stage. The double arrows denote that these emotions are not static, and that different emotions may be experienced at different stages depending on personal experiences. The emotional states were derived from the data.

5.2 Explication of Model 2

This model relates to the third research question; how do the factors that hinder or promote a successful transition impact students' ability to thrive? The research findings are embedded within the theoretical frameworks that inform this study to explain how the characteristics of the transition, the environment, and the person impact thriving.

5.2.1 Transitions

The transition from high school to university is often framed as one major transition. The data from this study, however, show that within that overall transition, multiple transitions occur during the first few weeks of the first semester. The Transitions layer of the model depicts those multiple transitions. The majority of the transitions are unanticipated, although there are a few non-event transitions and anticipated transitions. The unanticipated transitions were described by both student and staff participants and they include transitioning to independent study, transitioning to a heavier workload, transitioning from being a Grade A student to a Grade B or Grade C student, and transitioning from a network of friends to being alone. The non-event transitions include failure to procure a large network of friends, and not having an active social and satisfying life.

This stage of the model reflects Schlossberg's (1981) theory of the various types of transitions. According to Schlossberg, when transitions are unanticipated, individuals do not have the opportunity to prepare for them and often do not have the capabilities and resources to make the transition effectively. This was confirmed in the data from

this study. Schlossberg also noted that since unanticipated transitions are typically negative in nature, they are often experienced as disruptive, traumatic, or crisis-like. This aspect of Schlossberg's theory was also reflected in the study as the students reported high levels of stress, depressed mood, and other negative reactions to the multiple transitions.

5.2.2   Interactions/Tensions

Within this stage interactions refer to the reciprocal effect the person and the environment have on each other; while, tensions refer to barriers and challenges within the person and the environment that affect the student's ability to thrive. This stage of the model is based on Magnusson's Holistic Person-Context Interactions Theory (1998, 2006). Magnusson views the individual as a whole system that functions as an active element within an integrated person-environment system. He proposes that human development is driven by the interaction between the mental, biological, and behavioural person factors, and the social, cultural, and physical factors of environment. According to Magnusson, "it is not possible to understand how social systems function without knowledge of individual functioning, just as individual functioning and development cannot be understood without knowledge of the environment" (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006, p. 401). He also noted that changes within one system can impact the functioning of the other system.

The person-environment tensions that emerged from the data are identified in this layer of the model. The intertwined circles represent the interactions between the person and the environment; the arrow pointing to the next layer of the model indicates

that the tensions and interactions affect students' ability to thrive. The impact of person-environment tensions and interactions on thriving can be demonstrated through examining friendships and student clubs, and are illustrated by student participant 038. Friendships are important to students because as they leave home, students often leave their familiar peer network and enter a new environment where they may not know anyone. Students perceived that personal characteristics such as being shy, or being open to new friendships are a barrier to friendship development. Participant 038 is a 2nd year male student who is too timid to approach other students in his residence or large classes, but finds that the smaller student organisations that he joined do not function effectively and therefore do not provide the opportunities for connectedness and occupational participation that he had anticipated. When the tensions in the person (shyness) and the environment (large classes, poorly functioning student clubs) interacted they affected participant 038's ability to thrive. The interactions instead contributed to depressive symptoms, disenchantment, loneliness, self-doubt, and poor self-concept.

5.2.3 Thriving

Many students in this study described person-environment interactions that were negative in nature, person-environment interactions can however have a positive impact on students if few or no tensions exist, or if tensions are successfully resolved. For example, participant 018 is a 2nd year female student who described herself as having an easy academic transition to university because of the strength of her high school's baccalaureate program. Her family's financial status allows them to provide all of her

financial needs and this eliminates any financial worries, or the need for her to work while attending university. She was involved in several activities prior to attending university, including figure skating and other sports, and she has continued to engage in these activities within the university environment. Engaging in various extra-curricular activities during high school required her to implement effective time management skills, which she continues to use in university. Her involvement in various effectively organised university activities has led to the development of several friendships. She described herself as having a very open, fun loving personality, she enjoyed her residence experience, and made many friends while living in residence. Her academic program is small, and this allowed her to develop friendships with other students and to interact with her professors. This participant noted that she loves her university experience; she experienced few unanticipated transitions, and described herself as optimally functioning in all of the sub-categories of the Thriving Stage of Model 1. For participant 018 there were few person-environment tensions, the interactions between the person and the environment there led to a good fit and allowed her to thrive.

Chapter 6. Study Results

6. Chapter Overview

The previous chapter provided an overview of the two models developed from the data collected for this study. This chapter presents detailed results, from each category and sub-category of Model 1 – Model of Thriving and Transitions for Western University Students. Each category and sub-category is described and quotes from the participants are presented.

6.1 Pre-University Stage
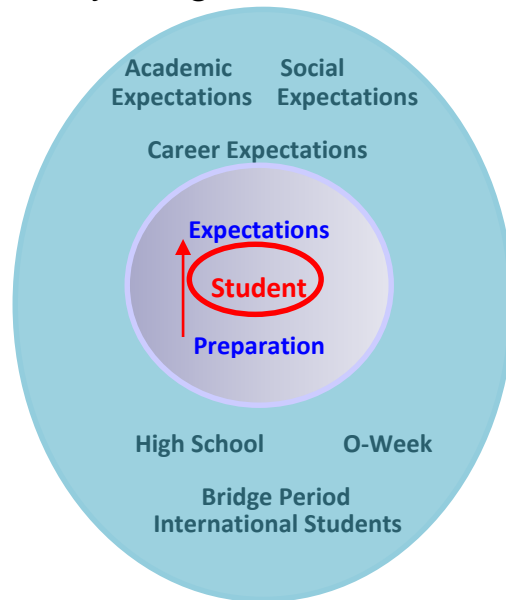
This section presents data relating to the Pre-University Stage of the Model of Transition and Thriving for Western University Students. Preparation and Expectations are the categories within this stage, however, there are sub-categories within each category.

6.1.2   Preparation

The category of Preparation consists of data about student and staff perceptions of formal and informal preparation for university. During data analysis, three sub-categories emerged: high school preparation, O-Week, and a bridge period for international students. The sub-category of high school preparation refers to the academic and coursework activities and experiences students engaged in while in high school. Orientation is a tool utilised by universities to help students transition to university. The sub-category of O-Week presents students' views about how Western University's Orientation Week contributed to their preparation for university life. Participants suggested that high school and Western's O-Week did not provide them with the information and experiences needed to successfully transition to university. A bridge period for international students is the third sub-category, it outlines international students' views on how arriving a few months prior to the start of school bridged cultural and language gaps and helped them to be better prepared for university. Figure 4 provides a breakdown of the sub-categories.
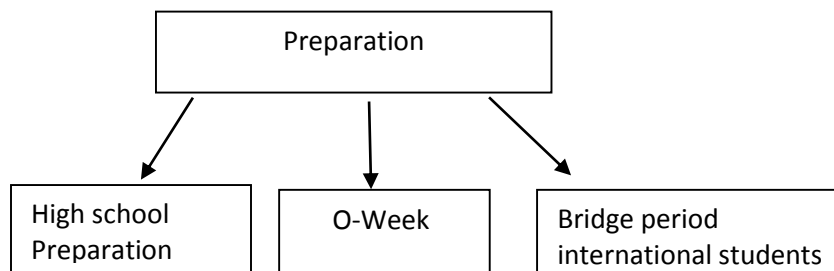
Figure 4. Preparation: Sub-categorical breakdown

6.1.3 High School Preparation

The majority of the students attributed their poor preparation for university academics to the high school system:

> To be honest 1st year was so hard and frustrating because the studies are so different from high school. Everyone was like – "Oh, grade 12 prepares you for university", it doesn't, not at all.
>
> (Student participant 034, female, 2nd year)

Other students expressed that the high school system does not require enough of students academically, but rewards them with good grades:

> In high school I wasn't one to get 90's, but I did get really good marks for literally doing nothing. So when I came to university it was a big shock, you actually have to learn to read a text book, and how to write a paper. I feel that my high school did not prepare me at all.
>
> (Student participant 013, female, 5th year)

> My high school was very laid back. They didn't give me a lot of work, so I don't think they prepared me well for university. They tried so hard to make people succeed which was good in some aspects. But when you go somewhere where they don't baby you as much, it makes it so hard.
>
> (Student participant 042, female, 1st year)

Several staff participants also commented on a possible link between the high school system and student's' poor preparation for university:

> My brother in law is a high school teacher. At his school if students take work home and complete it, it doesn't count towards their marks, everything must be done in class. It's highly structured class time, and that model is opposite from university where you do most work outside of class on your own, and it's highly unstructured.
>
> (Staff Participant 010)

One staff participant commented on the role of extra lessons in high school, as well as

the policy of not failing students:

> The other thing is that students were getting a lot of help in high school
> so it's a matter of who did the work. Teachers are under a lot of
> pressure to help students succeed in Ontario. You can't fail students,
> and students can resubmit their work as many times as they want to get
> the grades they want.
>
> (Staff Participant 009)

This staff participant further reflected on how the structure of the high school system

impacts preparation for university:

> In high school you can hand in an assignment that was due in
> September in January, or you can read your text book the night before
> the exam (and get a good grade). That just comes back to them not
> being prepared when they get here.
>
> (Staff participant 008)

Participants also suggested that high school grade inflation impacts student's

level of preparation for university academics. Both staff and students noted that inflated

grades led to stress, disappointment, and poor academic self-concept when students

reached university:

> High schools are setting this unrealistic expectation of what students
> can achieve. It's very devastating to a student when they come in with a
> 90 average, but their 1st year average is 68. That causes a lot of
> disappointment.
>
> (Staff participant 007)

> Inflated grades from high school is also a problem. The incoming
> average in my program this year was 85.5, but when we look at
> performances from 10 years ago students are not performing any
> better. High schools are setting this unrealistic expectation of what
> students can achieve.
>
> (Staff participant 008)

Student participant 042 described her experience with inflated grades and explained how it has affected her academic self–concept:

> Like my high school, the high grades I think really messed us up. During the last few years they decided to give us marks for everything. You could answer a question with points that are completely unrelated and still get some points somehow. It was really easy to get high 90's. I was like "look at me a 97 average, I'm so good", and I got here and I'm not actually as smart as they made me feel. So I feel like my high school should not have been so easy on us.
>
> (Student participant 042, female, 1st year)

Students who experienced a more rigorous high school program through taking Advanced Placement courses or who attended schools with baccalaureate programs reported less stressful academic transitions:

> I took 4 APs so that makes classes here a lot easier.
>
> (Student participant 031, male, 1st year)

> I actually thought that high school prepared me pretty well for university. My high school had the international baccalaureate program; I was in a specialist academic program. It was a high achieving school, so we were all pretty set coming to university.
>
> (Student participant 018, female 1st year)

> Academically it was ok. My school had a baccalaureate program so that prepared me well for university.
>
> (Student participant 022, female, 2nd year)

A first year student who felt that her high school academic program was not rigorous enough stated:

> I would tell teachers and the principal that we really are not learning at the level that we should be. My roommate she's from BC (British Columbia), she had a really heavy schedule last year (final year of high

school) and so she transitioned really well in terms of school. Last year she hated it and I loved it. She was super stressed from all this homework, and I had all this free time.

(Student participant 042, female, 1st year)

6.1.4   O-Week

Western University provides new student orientation for all students using a hybrid model. The hybrid model consists of a one day Summer Academic Orientation during the summer, followed by more extensive orientation programming (referred to as O-Week) the week before classes begin. Although a few students reported that they enjoyed O-Week, the majority of students stated that, in its current form, O-Week does not provide enough information or skills based sessions to help prepare them for university life. One 2nd year student commented that:

> I didn't find it particularly useful in terms of skills for university… There are some half an hour skills management sessions offered on campus during the term, something like that would be helpful from the get-go (beginning), because it would be like ok, this is how you do it. But when it comes to university it feels like you're just thrown in, and you have to figure out how to do it.
>
> (Student participant 009, female, 2nd year)

Other students expressed similar sentiments, they specifically expressed the view that O-Week was primarily focussed on social activities, instead of providing information that would help them to be prepared for the academic aspect of university. This resulted in them feeling unprepared when school started:

> Orientation was kinda like a long tour guide without people actually telling you what university is about. What they showed you was here's the dances, here's the parties, but towards the more academic side they

don't really tell you what it's about. So you go in 8:30 on Monday
morning and it's like – 'Oh, here's university'.

(Student participant 040, male, 2nd year)

They didn't give me any information that was useful for university. For
me it was more information about the social aspect of university. They
never said, here's what school is going to be like.

(Student participant, 008, female, 2nd year)

Students indicated that not only did O-Week not help to prepare them for school,

but, that it contributed to them developing inaccurate perceptions of what university

would be like. They indicated that O-Week left them with the impression that university

life consists of a constant party:

Orientation Week is supposed to be about getting me ready for
university. But based on my O-Week experience it's as if prepping for
university is about partying and not schooling.

(Student Participant, 008, female, 2nd year)

O-Week was fun, but I feel like it gave me a false representation of what
school was going to be like. I went with one of my friends to O-Week,
and he came to my house the first week after school, and he was like,
"woah!! it's totally different".

(Student participant 012, male, 1st year)

Another 1st year student added:

They focus too much on partying. So they're basically setting the
mindset that this is what university is, a party every night.

(Student Participant 007, female 1st year)

Students offered suggestions on activities and information that could be included

during O-Week that would help them to feel more prepared for the school. The students

stated that information on preparing for classes would be helpful. Students divulged that

they were unaware of OWL and how to find their syllabi. Some students even reported

that they did not know that they had a university email address where messages from

their professors about classes were being sent. Not having this information led to

students feeling lost, unprepared, and panicked on the first day of class:

> ….already your profs are saying you should've done the first 2 weeks
> reading, the syllabus was posted online, and you didn't even know
> where to look online. So you show up on the first day of class and
> you're like – 'I'm behind already'.

> (Student participant 033, female, 4th year)

Students also indicated that more specific information about how to find classes

and navigate the campus would be helpful. Students expressed that they were often

unable to find their classes and that this led to feelings of anxiety and stress:

> I knew where the buildings were, but I didn't know where my classes
> were, and I didn't know where my labs were. Finding my labs was the
> most frustrating. For labs if you're not on time they shut the doors, and
> you get a 0, you're only allowed to be 5 minutes late. So them telling us
> that, and me not knowing where they were just added a lot of stress.

> (Student participant, 024, female, 1st year)

This 4th year student also highlighted the need for classroom tours:

> We had a general tour during O-Week, but it wasn't really good. When
> classes started our RA took us and showed us more specific stuff
> because we were still lost.
> (Student participant 019, female, 4th year)

Students who received a tour during O-Week that showed them where their classrooms

were located reported that it was extremely helpful:

> During O-Week my Fac soph took us on a campus tour. He made all of
> us take out our schedules and showed us where our classes were. He
> went to everybody's classroom, he showed us the best short cuts and

the best places to study. It was like a 2 or 3 hour tour, but it was the most useful thing my Fac soph did for me.

(Student participant 025, male, 1st year)

The one thing I found super helpful was that one of our sophs took us on a tour of all the rooms on our class list. I found that was super helpful, especially when it says on your class list some kind of code, and there's no way to figure that out (the code) through Googling or anything. So that was helpful.

(Student participant 033, female, 4th year)

Finally, students reported that O-Week has too many events and that it is overwhelming. They are not accustomed to the late night and early morning scheduling, and as a result they were exhausted both during and after O-Week:

It was fun, but it was tiring, because it's a little too much and there are events every night. Then they make you get up at seven, and like half the time I didn't feel like doing anything because I was so tired. So I felt that it was a little overwhelming.

(Student participant 007, female, 1st year)

I didn't like it, it was too much. I need time by myself and it was like you're with people 20 times a day. I needed time to settle in and mentally wrap my head around the change. Parties aren't my thing, loud music isn't my thing, so it was kinda rough, it was just not my scene. I felt like I missed out on a lot of O-Week because I couldn't enjoy what was going on, and coming to a new place that's hard. Plus I got bronchitis that week, I was really sick, partially because I was really worn down from O-Week.

(Student participant 024, female, 1st year)

Another student also reflected on how the O-Week schedule impacts the transition experience, as well as health and wellbeing:

Yeah and that makes the transition harder, cause you're tired, you miss home, and you haven't had a proper meal … I was so hungry during O-Week because the schedule is so packed. I was jamming protein bars in my shoes.

(Student participant 022, female, 2nd year)

Other students noted that the exhausting schedule results in them not being able to

focus on the information presented at the seminars:

> Like this one day, it was the latest I had ever been to sleep. I went to bed at 6:30 am and my soph came at 7:15 am and was like, "get up, we're going to this thing, and it's gonna be so much fun" and we went to some informational thing. I was half asleep, I don't even know what it was about.
>
> (Student participant 021, female, 1st year)

Participants indicated a desire for a schedule that consisted of fewer scheduled

events and more time to settle in:

> I would've preferred a few days off to settle in.
>
> (Student participant 032, male, 1st year, international student)

> ….it would be nice to have time to unpack your stuff, set things up, chill for a bit. I liked the dances and the other activities, but there was no break between moving in and O-Week, and O-Week and classes. I would've appreciated a break to get myself together before classes started.
>
> (Student participant 025, male, 1st year)

Participants noted that additional free time would be useful to gather items needed for

school:

> Like you didn't even have time to go find your text book.
>
> (Student participant 033, female, 4th year)

> My friends and I we skipped some of the day activities to get our books and bus pass. The sophs were trying to encourage us to stay and do the ice breakers …. Like backwards hopscotch, what's the point? It's better to go do something to benefit me.
>
> (Student Participant, 010, female, 1st year)

6.1.5 Bridge Period for International Students

In the US some colleges and universities offer what are known as summer bridge programs. These programs allow incoming first year students to live on campus for four to six weeks during the summer while taking at least one university course. The programs are designed to help with adjustment to university by allowing students to become familiar with university life and resources in a less demanding university atmosphere. Western University offers a 14 day Academic Transition Program (ATP) for international students. The program is self-funded and includes academic components and social activities. Two students in this study attended the ATP and found it to be helpful, especially for making friends. Other international students reported that coming to Canada for a few months before school began helped them to have a smoother transition to university.

International students reported that they used the period to improve their English and learn about Canadian culture:

> I took a year off just to come here to spend time studying English. I wasn't sure that I was ready for university. I needed to take some time off to study English, and better prepare myself, because it's a big gap when you get into university. After you get into university you actually have a little chance (sic) to improve your English because you will be very busy with material that you are studying. So I took a year off, that's why I find that it is not very hard for me.
>
> (Student participant 006, male, 1st year international student)

Another first year international student also commented on the importance of taking time to study English and arriving a few months prior to the start of school:

> I came in May. I went to Fanshawe (College) to study language. I did a 4 month ESL course at Fanshawe ....If you come here and you don't have enough time to adapt before school starts it's difficult.
>
> (Student participant 002, female, 1st year international student)

Participant 005 stated that before entering university she spent time learning about writing styles and Canadian culture and that this assisted her with the transition to a Canadian university:

> I spent a year at a university in China then I transferred here. I arrived in Canada last year July, but I took one year off to learn the culture, and learn MLA (Modern Language Association writing style), and different writing styles. I found that to be very helpful when I got into university.
>
> (Student participant 005, female, 2nd year international student)

6.2   Expectations

The category of Expectations describes the various assumptions and expectations with which students entered university that hindered or facilitated their transition. Three types of expectations - academic, social, and career - are described, and the data show that students tend to enter university with several inaccurate expectations. Inaccurate expectations are result from students being unprepared for university, and a lack of accurate knowledge about university. Inadequate high school preparation contributes to their inaccurate academic and career expectations, while O-Week re-affirms their academic expectations and contributes to their social expectations. Unmet expectations lead to high levels of stress and a more difficult transition. Figure 5 below provides a breakdown of the sub-categories.
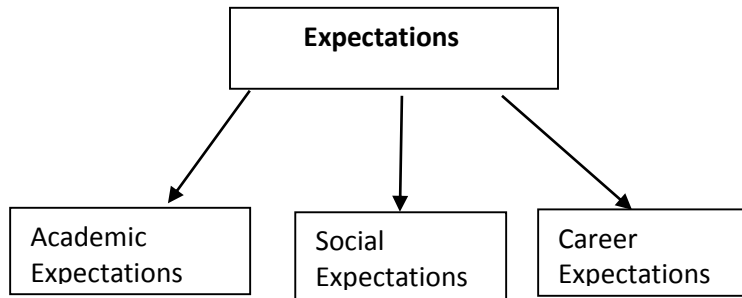
Figure 5. Expectations: Sub-categorical breakdown

6.2.1   Academic Expectations

Many students reported that they had inaccurate expectations about university

academics. Students indicated that they did not expect university to be academically

challenging:

> They really didn't tell me what to expect, and the high school I went to
> was pretty easy, so I'm coming to university thinking it was going to be
> nothing.
>
> (Student participant 012, male, 1st year)

> Academically I didn't expect much to happen in 1st year. I thought - how
> hard could it be? There are hundreds of people here, and if they could
> do it, I can do it…… it didn't hit me until I saw my grades.
>
> (Student participant 036, male, 2nd year)

One student noted that her expectation was based on the premise that Western was a

school for high achieving students:

> You think I'm smart, it's Western, you have to have a certain average to
> be here. So you think school's not gonna be that hard.
>
> (Student participant 038, female, 4th year)

For most students, their inaccurate expectations about university academics were related to the workload, specifically the number of required readings:

> It was a lot more than I expected. When you get to university they don't tell you that you're going to be reading everything all the time. You have so many readings for every class.
>
> (Student participant 037, female, 4th year)

> It was a total shock. I had no idea that I would have so many readings and how often you'd have to read over things. The attention you need to pay to certain things I was not accustomed to it.
>
> (Student participant 038, female, 4th year)

Participant 039 also commented on the difference between high school and university workload:

> In high school you just have homework and it's done. But in university there's always another reading, always another assignment. It's like it never ends.
>
> (Student participant 039, female 2nd year)

Students also reported that they did not anticipate the independent nature of university studies. The transition from the high school system, where teachers assisted students with many aspects of their learning, to the university system where students are responsible for their own learning, was described by participants as a difficult process:

> When I was in 1st year I struggled with two different aspects. First, high school did not prepare me at all for how independent my studies would be. (Second) in high school I could ask questions, and they would tell you the answer, as long as it wasn't on the exam. But now I'm here and profs are like, I can't tell you the answer.
>
> (Student participant 033, female, 4th year)

This 2nd year student also commented on independent study:

> I would say the most difficult thing was having to do self-study. In high school with the teachers it was more one-on-one and smaller classes. Here it was much bigger, and it's up to you to do the readings. They don't really care if you do them, it's up to you.

> (Student participant 008, female, 2nd year)

This staff participant confirmed that the transition to independent study was difficult for many students:

> …..They are going from a model where they are given a lot of information that they need to know, to a model where the need to figure out what it is they need to learn. It's not enough to look at the information, they actually need to learn it. A lot of students don't understand the difference between reading and learning.

> (Staff Participant, 009, female)

The inaccurate academic expectations, combined with the reality of university workload and lower grades, resulted in stress, distress, and self-doubt for students:

> In the beginning it was good, but now I'm becoming more and more stressed about the workload. Especially now, it seems like there's just more and more stuff I have to do, and it's like you're not good….I think what I thought of myself in high school is being challenged here.

> (Student participant 026, female, 1st year)

The following quotes from two 2nd year students further describe the levels of stress that students experience:

> At first it seemed ok, but then school started. I think school was like the anchor to how I would feel, and my academics were not good. It started to go bad. I was stressed about the amount of work, and the amount of knowledge you have to take in…. it was pretty hard and depressing …I thought back to that time in high school, and it was like, I wish I was back there.
>
> (Student participant 035, male, 2nd year)

It was tough and then like you give 100% and come back with a mark that's like 65. I had so many breaking points where I just cried because I didn't know what else to do ….. It was hard, and it's still hard. I just looked at my exam schedule and I'm like 'whew - one week and I have exams, back to back projects, and assignments', so it's a lot of work.

(Student participant 034, female, 2nd year)

6.2.2   Social Expectations

In addition to their academic expectations, students had high expectations about having an active social life when they entered university:

When I came, I was expecting lots of parties and fun, like a crazy experience, but that didn't happen.

(Student participant 019, female, 4th year)

Another student reported that she expected to have a lot more freedom and fun:

I thought I'm going to be 19, I can go downtown in the evening. Then you look at your schedule and you're like no…. I thought I'd be able to party all the time and still do great. But it's like no, you have to pick one.

(Student participant 009, female, 2nd year)

Student participant 013 suggested that she was unclear about her academic goals, but she was excited about coming to university based on her social life expectations:

I didn't know what to expect academically. I have older siblings at university so I knew the social part was going to be good.

She continued:

Coming from high school, I didn't know what I wanted to do. Everyone in my family went to university so I figured I'd go too. I was more looking forward to the social aspect of it …. I was like why is everyone going to the library? It's the first week of school, who does school at university? So it was like kind of a shock that I actually needed to get my ass in gear and study.

(Student participant 013, female, 5th year)

Many students enter university with high expectations for an exciting social life and an academically successful experience. This comment from student participant 026, a first year student, aptly captures the level of disappointment and stress that occurs when students realise that their experiences do not match their expectations:

> I think people in grade 12 need a reality check. The summer before I came here I envisioned myself getting 90's, joining all the clubs, going to the gym every day, and being skinny. But having too many goals can be detrimental, and when you can't achieve them it adds to your stress.

> She continued:

> Grade 12 students need some perspective, and not to live in a dream world with their fantasies about university.

(Student participant 026, female, 1st year)

6.2.3   Career Expectations

Although most students in this study entered university with a general idea of their career path, some students in the Bachelor of Medical Sciences (BMSc) program, and international students in the Bachelor of Management and Organizational Studies (BMOS) program reported being very strongly attached to careers in medicine or business prior to entering university. These students expressed that they experienced extreme disappointment, and high levels of stress when they realised that they may not be able to pursue their chosen career. Further discussions with many of these students revealed that the career path was often what their parents wanted, and not the student's personal preference. The stress they experienced was, therefore, also related to attempting to fulfill their parents' dreams. In addition, some of the students in the BMOS

program reported that they believed that they did not have the academic aptitude to

succeed in these programs.

International students in the BMOS program reported that parental choices and

expectations played an integral role in their decision to apply to the program:

> Sometimes people choose the programs because of their parents. My
> parents did a lot of works (sic). I myself didn't research the school, or
> know more about the school, my parents did all the works ….They
> wanted me to study business, but I am not the person to study business
> … so I failed some courses during the first year. I actually was put on
> probation.
> (Student participant 001, female, 5th year international student)

She also spoke of other friends who experienced difficulty with their studies in

programs that their parents chose:

> I know some people that had problems also in the first year, it was the
> most struggling (sic). Actually for a lot of them they didn't know the
> programs to study, it wasn't what they expected. They were struggling
> to figure out if this program was the one they want, because it's usually
> what the parents want. Yeah, what the parents want.
>
> (Student participant 001, female, 5th year international student)

This 1st year student also commented on the role her parents' played in her career

choice:

> I don't like business, I like geography and psychology. I think I will
> change, but I don't know yet. In China a lot of the jobs are more
> business jobs, so with this program you can find a good job, and jobs is
> the first thing (sic). I wanted to be a doctor, but my father didn't allow me
> to do this because he is a doctor. He thinks that in China if you want to
> be a doctor and you are a woman it's not that easy, so I gave that up.
>
> (Student participant 002, female, 1st year international student)

This domestic student in the BMSc program commented on the role his family

plays in his career choice:

> Since high school I've told myself that I wanted to be in sciences, so I just drilled it into myself. I've thought about other subject areas, but I really can't wrap my head around it. What I'm really thinking about is being a high school science teacher, but my family wants me to be doctor.

He added:

> I have pressure from my family. I'm the only guy so there's a lot of pressure to succeed and be efficient. So while you want to do other things, you also want to live up to the expectations of your family. That's like basically all my pressure for these last two months.

> (Student participant 035, male, 2nd year)

Other domestic students in the BMSc program explained how parental career

expectations add to the pressure of university life:

> Both my parents went to university. Actually, my dad is a doctor. I think he has certain expectations of me that I'm not fulfilling. I've talked to them about it. I've told them, "ya know I hope you guys know that it's not definite that I'm going to be a doctor". I have gotten medical school interviews in the last two years and this year I'm waiting to hear back. My mom is completely understanding and my dad says it's ok, but in his heart I know he wants me to be a doctor … I understand it's his world view, but like if get a bad mark I won't tell him cause he just adds to the pressure.
>
> (Student participant 011, female, 4th year)

Student participant 041 explained how pressure and expectations to get into medical

school led to suicidal thoughts during his first year at university:

> Over the first year I got depressed and suicidal. I really wanted to go to med school and my parents wanted me to go. I got it in my head that any bad grade I get is gonna lessen my chances of getting into med school, so I was like - what's the point? If I can't make it, I might as well end it now.
>
> (Student participant 041, male, 3rd year)

The students in BMOS and BMSc programs indicated that they had assumed that being accepted into these programs meant that acceptance into Western's Ivey Business School or the medical school was assured. The students who were enrolled in the BMOS program who changed majors or who were planning to undertake a new major were comfortable with making a change. Students in the medical sciences program were, however, disappointed when they realised that there was a high probability that they would not be able to pursue their chosen careers. These students also experienced a sense of being lost as they had never considered alternative career options:

> They don't tell you that this dream isn't necessarily going to come true and that there's other areas you can explore. So I came in here with the mindset of doing science and going to med school.
>
> (Student participant 040, male, 1st year)

Another student commented:

> I blame the medical system here. You don't know if you're gonna get into medical school so then you think, what am I gonna do with my life? If I don't get in why am I taking these courses? I'm not even sure if I will need them.
>
> (Student participant 036, male, 2nd year)

6.3   Transition Stage
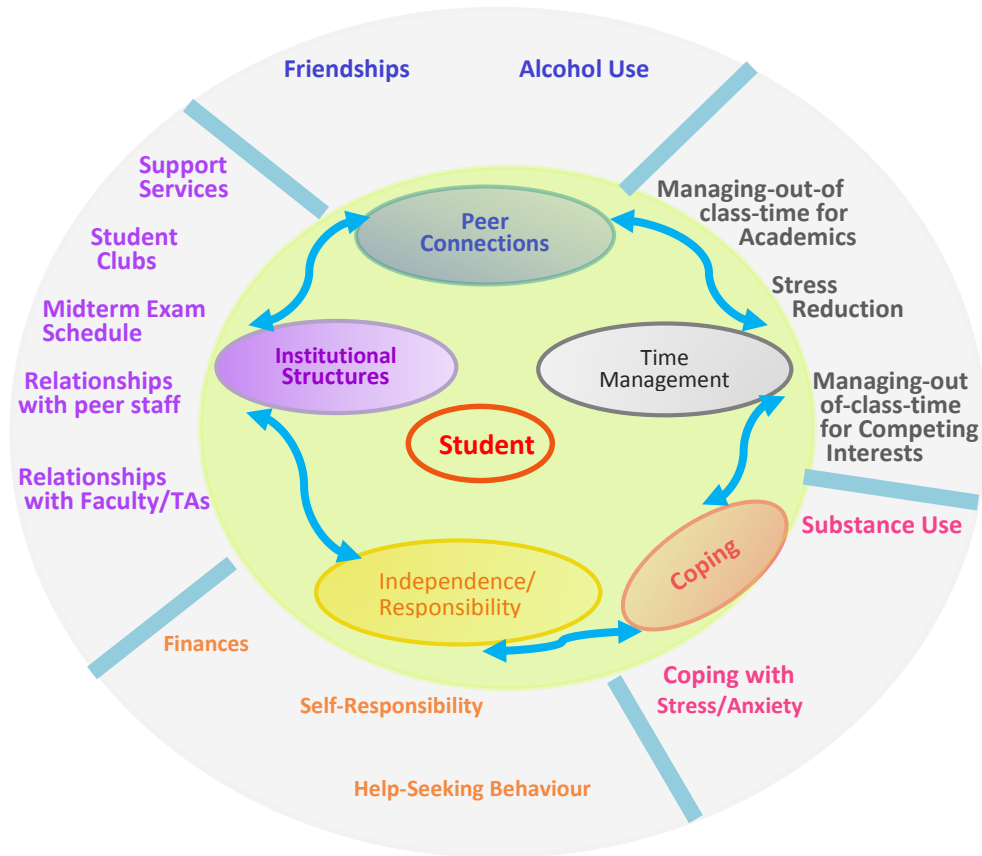
The following sections describe students' experiences during the transition stage; which is the period after classes begin. The categories and sub-categories were identified by students and staff as factors that contribute to students' transition and adjustment to university.

6.3.1   Peer Connections

The category of peer connections explains the importance of connectedness for students when they transition to university. There are two sub-categories; friendships and alcohol use. Within the sub-category of friendships multiple descriptions of the difficulty students encountered developing friendships are presented. The students also offered explanations about why it is difficult to make friends. The sub-category of alcohol use emerged from students explanations of how the desire to develop new friendships within the university environment can lead to alcohol use. Figure 6 provides a breakdown of the sub-categories.

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        ┌──────────────────┐
        │ Peer Connections │
        └──────────────────┘
          ↙              ↘
┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
│  Friendship  │      │ Alcohol use  │
└──────────────┘      └──────────────┘
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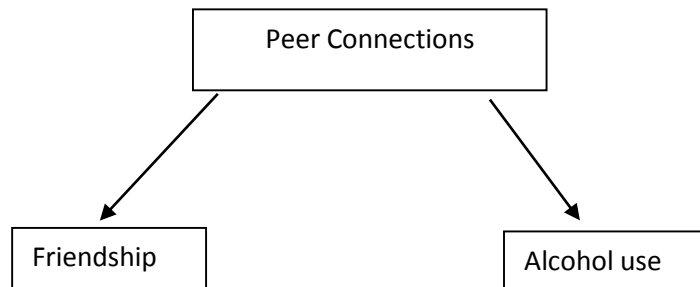
Figure 6. Peer Connections: Sub-categorical breakdown

6.3.2   Friendship

Throughout this study developing friendships was consistently identified by students as one of the most difficult challenges they encountered when they transitioned to university; 38 of the 42 students reported that they experienced difficulty making friends when they came to university. Their difficulty is illustrated by the following quotes:

The one thing that was really challenging for me was making friends and meeting new people.

(Student participant 004, female, 2nd year)

I try to get to know people, but it's very hard.

(Student participant 003, female, 1st year)

Making friends has been the most difficult thing.

(Student Participant, 014, female, 1st year)

Being in a new environment without the support of friendships resulted in feelings of loneliness for some students:

One thing I found about university is that I'm alone a lot, unlike high school where I was surrounded by friends.

(Student participant 012, male, 1st year)

I had no trouble with friends in high school and elementary school, but here I could not find a clique, so I struggled….I have one good friend, but I don't have a large social group. I've gotten over that, but in 1st year it was a big setback.

(Student participant 013, female, 5th year)

The issue of loneliness was also noted by a staff participant. When asked to identify issues that affect students during the initial transition, he responded:

Loneliness and isolation are big; people don't feel like they have a social community here.

(Staff participant 010)

Another staff participant indicated that there is a link between loneliness, friendships, and mental health. She stated that:

Some other social issues that come up here and exacerbate mental health issues are being separated from the peer network at home, and trying to integrate with the peer network here.

(Staff participant 011)

Students reported that friends are important for helping to reduce feelings of loneliness

and isolation:

> It was very isolated…..I didn't have anyone to communicate with about my learning style, I didn't know how to study, and I didn't communicate with my roommate. In the first week I didn't have friends so it was very stressful. I didn't study in the first week, but after the second week, the clubs week, I joined some clubs, then I had some friends I could communicate with.

> (Student participant 001, female 5th year international student)

Reducing loneliness and isolation through friendships helps with adjustment to

university:

> I think making a friend in my faculty was helpful. Just to have someone to sit with in class helped me to settle in.

> (Student participant 009, female, 2nd year)

Participants, however, pointed out that although developing friendships play an

important role in their transition to university, having a close friend was even more

important for building deep connections, and helping with loneliness and adjustment:

> I have friends, but you don't really connect with them on a personal level.

> (Student participant 040, male, 1st year)

> You need that best friend that you can talk to about everything.

> (Student participant 038, female, 4th year)

Although the majority of students reported that they experienced difficulty

developing friendships, certain sub-categories of students, specifically off-campus

students and international students, perceived that making friends was more difficult for

them. Off-campus students suggested that students who lived in residence had more

opportunities to socialize:

> For off-campus students it's harder to interact because when people live
> in the rez they find the same topics to talk about. They can hang out
> together and throw a party, but for students living off campus we don't
> have the same chance.

> (Student participant 006, male, 1st year international student)

Other off-campus students reported that they felt disconnected from the campus

community and that this affected their ability to develop friendships. They also

commented on the role that social media plays in connecting students to campus and

keeping students informed about social events. They noted that information about

campus social events was often posted on Facebook pages designed exclusively for

students living in residence, and they were therefore unaware and often not invited to

events. This results in them being and feeling excluded. This student who lives at home

with her parents described her experiences:

> Living at home is completely different from living on campus, they are
> more connected with all the university events that are going on. My
> friends would text me and she'd be like, 'Oh my God there's this going
> on' and I'm like 'really'? She's like 'aren't you on Facebook rez group'?
> and I'm like, 'no, cause I'm not in rez'.

> So that way it was hard to make friends, because whenever I was at
> university people would already be in groups with people they know
> from rez. So trying to incorporate myself into that, it was like I was an
> outsider, literally.
>
> (Student participant 034, female, 2nd year)

This first year student from outside of London lives in an apartment off-campus, she

expressed similar views:

> You come to campus on Monday and you hear about things that
> happened and you wonder how come you didn't know about it.
> Facebook is so divided, you only get accepted to certain groups, so you
> never know what's going on, and you don't always get invited. So
> making friends in 1st year is really difficult.

> (Student participant 020, female, 1st year)

For international students, challenges with friendship development were mostly

related to developing friendships with Canadian students. Students indicated that this

was a goal for them and that they viewed it as part of the international university

experience, as noted by participant 002 "experiencing a lot of different cultures is the

purpose of studying abroad". Participant 002 further added:

> We can't make good friends with foreigners, I'm not sure if that's
> because I haven't been here for a long time. I want to communicate with
> them, but I'm not sure why I can't make Canadian friends. It makes me
> confused sometimes.

> (Student participant 002, female, 1st year international student)

Other international students reported that they believed cultural and language

differences played a role in their inability to make friends with Canadians:

> Making friends is still very hard for me with local people. Chinese
> people have a reputation for wanting to stay in a local circle, but I think
> most of us have the attitude to want to open up ourselves to others. I
> think the culture gap is huge. But even though we have the attitude to
> want to mix, when you talk with them you don't know what to say,
> because it's a different culture.

> (Student participant 030, female, 2nd year international student)

> My floor has Chinese and Canadian people. I like to be with Canadian
> people, but it's kind of hard to be with them all the time. If it's only

Canadian people it's hard to get used to the conversation because they have something in common. Like when they are making jokes they refer to an old movie, but I don't know the movie, or sometimes they use language or expressions that I don't know.

(Student participant 005, female, 2nd year international student)

As noted earlier developing friendships was difficult for all students. Domestic students living in residence also offered their opinions about factors that hindered friendship development. Some students reported that some of their floor mates appeared anti-social:

It was definitely hard making friends. I came from a really small high school in Halifax, no one else came with me. A lot of people on my floor didn't seem to want to be social, they just stayed in their room. I never saw them.

(Student participant 015, female, 4th year)

Class size was also identified as an issue that impacted students' ability to develop friendships:

My biology class in 1st year was like 800 people, so I was sitting next to a different person every day. Even if I get acquainted with someone, the next day I don't even know where that person is sitting. If you don't exchange numbers right away you don't know where that person is.

(Student participant 034, female, 2nd year)

Developing friendships also seemed to be associated with the size and type of residence:

I really love my floor. It's the smallest floor, it's only 14 of us and so it's really nice. That's why I said I didn't miss home because it's like a small family.

(Student participant 025, male, 1st year)

In my residence, we're not even at half capacity so you get to know people on your floor.

(Student participant 032, male, 1st year international student)

In addition, students at the smaller affiliate colleges reported that they made friends

easily at these colleges because the student population was smaller, but that they

experienced difficulty making friends on main campus:

> I think because Brescia is so small it's easier to make friends…I feel like
> I made most of my friends in first year at Brescia, I hardly made friends
> on main campus.
>
> (Student participant 037, female, 4th year)

> Brescia is kinda open because of the size, so it was easy to make
> friends.
>
> (Student participant 038, female, 4th year)

Students also added that they believed it is easier to make friends if you live in a

traditional style residence:

> I try to get to know more people, but sometimes it's really hard. I think it
> is much easier in traditional style because you have to go outside to go
> to the washrooms so you might meet someone. I don't really have to go
> outside of my room because I have a kitchen in my room, I have a
> bathroom inside my door, so I think it's hard to get to know people.
>
> (Student participant 003, female, 1st year international student)

> I was expecting it to be harder to make friends, but living in a traditional
> style residence you're kinda forced to make friends.
>
> (Student participant 018, female, 2nd year student)

Finally, participants noted that making and keeping friends required openness and

effort:

> I think it's how you approach it. You have to be open to new
> opportunities and if you're open to meeting new people you will.
>
> (Student participant 012, male, 1st year)

> I feel like in high school I had this group of friends, my crew, that I
> always hung with and I'm still close with them. I didn't come with anyone

so I didn't know anyone here, and I was so comfortable with my old
friends that I didn't want to open up to anyone.

(Student participant 027, female, 1st year)

Openness and effort were perceived to be related to personality. Some students

commented that difficulty developing friendships in university was related to personality

type:

I'm not the type to just walk up to people I don't know and start talking.
I'm introverted, I'm shy, so that made it a lot harder.

(Student participant 015, female, 4th year)

I think the most difficult thing is that you're expected to make friends
and to talk to a lot of people. I'm not very outgoing, so it's difficult when
everyone else around you is doing that and you're not.

(Student participant 014, female, 1st year)

6.3.3   Alcohol Use

As noted in the literature review, alcohol use is a major concern on university and

college campuses. Most students reported that they had not consumed alcohol (at least

not in large amounts or on a regular basis) prior to university. The literature identified

several reasons for university students' consumption of alcohol, including campus

alcohol policies and personality factors. However, in this study students identified

making friends as the principal reason for alcohol use among first year students.

Students reported that:

There's definitely drinking in the first year. It seems like a good way to
de-stress. RAs try their best to stay on top of it, but you're also trying to
impress your new friends.

(Student participant 037, female, 4th year)

You're trying to make friends, you don't wanna be the only person in
rez doing homework while everybody else is out drinking.

(Student participant 022, female, 2nd year)

One international student discussed the role that alcohol use plays in friendship

development with domestic students. She noted that many of her friends suggested that

partying and drinking seemed to be the only way that they connected to and were

accepted by domestic students:

Many of my friends when they came to Canada they changed, they
become party girl and drunk girl (sic). I asked them why they did it and
they say because it's cultural, that they really want to be friends with
Canadians, and it's the only way to make friends.

(Student participant 005, female 2nd year international student)

Other students reported that not engaging in alcohol use can lead to isolation:

In terms of drinking, people would alienate you because you didn't go
to the party they went to last night.

(Student participant 020, female, 1st year)

The most difficult thing in first year for me was making friends in my
Faculty. I don't drink, and I don't seek out experiences where everyone
is drunk out of their minds.

(Student participant 029, female, 4th year)

Staff participant 010 also commented on the role that alcohol use plays in

friendship development and isolation:

….I see students who don't drink, who feel alienated because the
culture is to drink, and they don't know how to find a social group.

(Staff participant 010)

6.4   Time Management

Time management is another issue that was consistently identified by students as being challenging for them during the transition to university. Three sub-categories emerged during data analysis; managing out-of-class-time for academics, managing out-of-class-time for competing interests, and stress reduction. Students revealed that they were unaccustomed to having large amounts of unstructured time. They expressed that they experienced difficulty managing time, specifically managing the large amount of out-of-class-time they have at university. Several students also noted that they experienced difficulty balancing time for competing interests, especially personal care activities and socializing. Many students expressed a desire to have more time for non-academic activities, but guilt and what they perceived as lack of time often prevented this from occurring. Finally, students reported that their stress levels were reduced when they implemented effective time management strategies. Figure 7 provides a breakdown of the sub-categories.
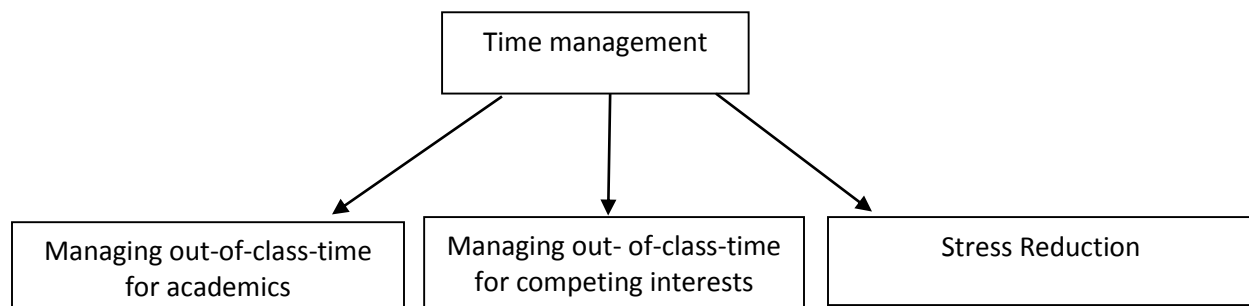
Figure 7. Time Management: Sub-categorical breakdown

6.4.1   Managing Out-Of-Class-Time for Academics

Students reported that they experienced difficulty making decisions about how to use

their out-of-class-time for academic activities, such as studying and completing

assignments. These first year students described their struggle in this manner:

> It kinda feels like I'm swimming against a curve (sic). When one thing
> finishes another comes up and I'm finding it hard to manage my free
> time. I work on the weekends so managing my work around school is
> difficult.
>
> (Student participant 012, male, 1st year)

> When I have those 1 or 2 hour breaks I pretty much spend my time
> doing nothing. Then after class since there is no real homework I tend
> to procrastinate instead of studying, and I find that difficult.
>
> (Student participant 040, male 1st year)

Difficulty managing the amount of flexibility in the university schedule was also

mentioned by other students:

> For me the biggest issue is trying to figure out my own time
> management. In high school I was like ok, I have this amount of
> homework, I can do it in two hours and then relax. Then it was these set
> of questions that you have to do, and this page you have to read. Here,
> (at university) it's like, here's a range of pages you have to get done by
> this far off time. Then I'd be like – oh I have time, and then I just would
> not have time. So it was really a struggle figuring out my own time
> management. Then during midterms I would literally just crush myself
> with work.
>
> (Student participant 009, female, 2nd year)

Some students related their academic time management difficulties to independence

and lack of structure:

> It's not like in high school where you have homework and you can't
> watch tv unless you do it. You're on your own, you decide if you do it.
> It's a lot more freedom, so time management is a problem.
>
> (Student participant 040, male, 1st year)

Another student described the amount of free time as overwhelming. He noted that:

> I think the culprit is not workload, but the lack of work, the free time. For me that is the biggest difference between high school and here (university). In high school you go to class 8:00 to 3:30, whereas here you don't have that set schedule. You have a lot of flexibility and the amount of free time to me is just overwhelming, what should I do with it?

> (Student participant 036, male, 2nd year)

6.4.2 Managing Out-of-Class-Time for Competing Interests

Students also reported that they experienced difficulty managing their time to achieve a balance with their academics and their personal life. Some students reported that they felt as though they no longer have social life:

> Well I don't have a social life ...If my friends are at school the same time I'm here I'd see them. But on the weekends I have a job as well, so between school and work I maybe go out once a month. My friends think I don't exist anymore and I kinda don't.

> (Student participant 009, female, 2nd year)

This first year student commented that finding time for socializing disturbed her sleeping habits:

> Managing time for my social life and school work, that's really tough. Everyone has a different schedule, so there is only a certain amount of time that your friends are free. I find myself prioritizing social (activities) sometimes, and I end up staying up really late to study.

> (Student participant 007, female, 1st year)

Other students noted that even though personal life activities are important to them, they often feel guilty about taking a break from studying:

In university it's so hard to be human. I can't study in a dirty house. I need to take at least 3 hours every week to clean and do laundry, and then I feel so guilty.

(Student participant 020, female, 2nd year)

Other non-academic activities such as physical activity were often reduced because of

the guilt that resulted from taking time off from studying:

I went to the gym yesterday and that was the first time in a year. But going makes me feel guilty, because I feel like that's time I could've spent studying.

(Student participant 019, female, 4th year)

In terms of exercise that definitely went down since coming to university, but I always feel like I should be doing homework.

(Student participant 009, female, 2nd year student)

6.4.3 Stress Reduction

Although the majority of students reported experiencing problems with time

management upper year students who used strategies to help them manage their time

reported that effective time management helped to reduce stress:

I get so stressed out if I'm not organised. I have a schedule for everything, and that helps me to map out everything and actually believe that it's possible to do.

(Student participant 033, female, 4th year student)

Time management really helps with stress. This week I had 2 midterms and 2 book reviews. Every year at the beginning of the semester I look at each syllabus and write down all the due dates for the book reviews, and this year I started reading ahead.

(Student participant 015, female, 4th year student)

Another 4th year student reported that changing her schedule and managing her time more effectively has been helpful:

> I've changed what I'm doing this year. The last 3 years I've been spending all my time at the library, like 12 hours a day it was just crazy. I realize that's just not the best thing, you just get so burned out ….so I think now I can go home and do work, and balance out my time better.

<div align="right">(Student participant 019, female, 4th year student)</div>

6.5   Coping

The category of coping encompasses the challenges that students experience in adapting to their new roles, environment, and daily life. The sub-category of coping with stress/anxiety describes the high levels of stress and anxiety that students experience during the transition to university. Interpersonal problems encountered by students during the transition and their inability to cope with these problems are also addressed. The sub-category of substance use provides information about how students engage in substance use to cope with stress, pressure, and anxiety. Within this sub-category students also describe their experiences of coping with the effects of alcohol use within student residences. Figure 8 provides a breakdown of the sub-categories.
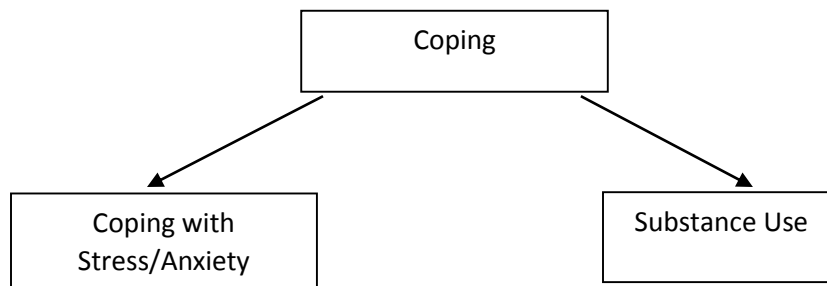
Figure 8. Coping: Sub-categorical breakdown

6.5.1 Coping with Stress/Anxiety

Experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety was identified by staff participants as a major issue that affected how students experienced the transition to university. Staff participants expressed the view that some students enter university with high levels of anxiety:

> Initially for students there can be a lot of anxiety. Students have heard a lot about university and how hard it's going to be, and how their grades are going to drop. So a lot of them are very anxious about that and wondering how they will fit in.
>
> (Staff participant 009)

Anxiety is a common emotional reaction to moving to a new environment. However, when students face multiple stressors within the university environment and are unable to cope with those stressors, it increases their levels of stress and anxiety. This was articulated by another staff member:

> Feeling overwhelmed and anxiety is often triggered or exacerbated by meeting the demand of a university curriculum, either in terms of how I fit in, or how I negotiate these new demands. These demands are really difficult to meet (especially) for students who are dealing with multiple stresses and multiple work responsibilities.
>
> (Staff participant 011)

In some cases, the anxiety combined with the multiple stressors can lead to serious mental health problems for students:

> The most common issues we tend to see are issues around anxiety; depression and depressive symptoms.
>
> (Staff participant 010)

Staff participants acknowledged that students experienced anxiety and distress during the transition to university because it is a major transition during which they encounter many new situations. They also indicated that some of the distress occurred because students do not have the coping skills to manage many of the issues that they encounter, even issues that are considered by staff to be minor:

> I think conflict resolution with peers is something that we help them with a lot…. A lot of times the conflict is minor, but we have to coach them through it because they don't have those skills.
>
> (Staff participant 001)

Not having the requisite coping skills to manage the various emotional states they experience during the transition to university was described by other staff members:

> I think a lot of them struggle to process what they are feeling, and what is the appropriate way to deal with their feelings …. Even those emotions that come with having a problem with their roommate, they don't have the skills to deal with them. So instead of reflecting, 'I'm going to tell everyone on my floor how mad I am', or 'I'm gonna call my mom, make things sound bigger than they are, and get her to call and request a room switch'. Just things like that that show an inability to cope on their own.
>
> (Staff participant 002)

Staff participant 003 added:

> And then feeling like things are the end of the world for them. Calling parents over something minor, or they get a poor mark on a quiz and it's like 'oh my gosh I'm not going to be a doctor', or 'I'm going to fail everything'. Or their partner breaks up with them and it's difficult for them to see past that. That's some of the wellness and mental health issues that we see, everyday life stresses that you will go through they struggle with those.
>
> (Staff participant 003)

This staff member added that it must be kept in mind that:

> 82% of incoming first years are 17 (years old). They are still a paediatric population, developmentally their brain is not fully developed.

<div align="right">(Staff participant 015)</div>

Like the other staff participants, she did, however, acknowledge that students do not have the skills to cope with the pressures of their new life:

> There is a lot of anxiety and pressure in society and at home and these kids come with it. Then on top of that they enter university with hopes, dreams, and expectations for themselves. But also parental pressures and expectations, and they don't know how to cope.

<div align="right">(Staff participant 015)</div>

6.5.3 Substance Use

Staff participants spoke extensively students' inability to effectively cope with the stress, anxiety, and new interpersonal issues that accompany the transition to university. Staff participants, however, noted that there was a common coping mechanism used by some students. They indicated that some students engage in substance use to help them to cope with the academic and social pressures that they encounter at university:

> Most of the people I see are using alcohol, marijuana, and very frequently something else, and that's 88% to 90% of them.

<div align="right">(Staff participant 011)</div>

Staff also spoke about a newer trend in substance use among university/college students; the use of drugs prescribed for the treatment of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) by students for whom they have not been prescribed:

The other thing is the other substances students are using that are not prescribed to them, but they are using them anyway. The excuses we hear are "I need to stay up all night to focus". I've had 2 students this year who stopped me in the hallway to say "I need some medical attention, I've taken some stuff that was not prescribed to me". I've never had that happen before and I'm hearing more about it.

(Staff participant 009)

Staff participant 010 in commenting on this issue added:

I think with Aderall it's sad that these 18 and 19 year olds are affecting their biochemistry for a 2% to 3% (academic) gain.

(Staff participant 010)

While staff spoke of engaging in substance use to cope, students highlighted another aspect of substance use and coping issue. Students spoke of their experiences of having to cope with the effects of other students' substance use, specifically alcohol use. The literature notes that non-drinking college students often experience various second hand effects of drinking behaviours including interrupted sleep, property damage, inability to study, dissatisfaction with school, and unwanted sexual advances. First year students in this study spoke about how alcohol use affected their ability to study in their rooms in residence:

Most social sciences students don't have class on Friday so they just drink from Thursday night. I have class Friday morning at 9:30 so I just go to the library. (But) especially on the weekends everyone is just hanging around in the stairwell drinking.

(Student participant 014, female 1st year)

On my floor weekends start on Thursday. People who have less of a workload start drinking and partying on Thursday. I find it difficult to stay in my room and focus on my work, so I usually go to the library.

(Student participant 040, male, 1st year)

One 4th year student spoke about noise disturbances in residence caused by alcohol use:

> You just go the library to do school work cause you can't do it there (in residence). You can call the front desk to complain, but if the person being loud is an RA or a soph then there's not much you can do.
>
> (Student Participant 015, female, 4th year)

Alcohol use by others can also affect student's ability to sleep:

> I've definitely had my share of waking up at 1:00am to drunk people banging on the door.
>
> (Student participant 031, male, 1st year)

It was noted that noise disturbances caused by alcohol use did not affect all students. Participants suggested that cultural factors play a role in drinking behaviors and loud behavior in residence:

> I was on the alcohol free floor. There were a lot of international students who didn't partake in drinking so that floor was quiet.
>
> (Student Participant 016, female, 3rd year)

> I was on the all girls floor and there were a lot of Muslim girls, so that floor was quiet.
>
> (Student Participant 015, female, 4th year)

The students who were affected by noisy behaviour also reported that alcohol use affects the cleanliness of their living environment and it was clear from their tone of voice and body language that this was an issue that students were displeased about:

> ...The cleaning staff would never clean on the weekend and people would get drunk and pee on the stairwells on the weekend.
>
> (Student Participant 015, female, 4th year)

> People are always drunk, and the elevators and other places always have alcohol, and it's like they don't clean it.
>
> (Student Participant 014, female, 1st year)

6.6   Independence/Responsibility

The category of independence/responsibility depicts the need for students to become independent and responsible for themselves during the transition to university. The sub-categories describe the salient issues that affect how students experience the transition of becoming responsible for themselves within the university environment. Self-responsibility explains the challenges students experience moving from high school and home environments in which the adults in their lives played a major role in decision-making. It also highlights the role self-responsibility plays in the transition to university and adulthood. Help seeking behaviours refer to students being proactive and seeking help; the issues that prevent help seeking are also explored. The finances sub-category addresses the financial challenges students encounter as emerging adults who are undertaking financial responsibility. Figure 9 provides a breakdown of the sub-categories.
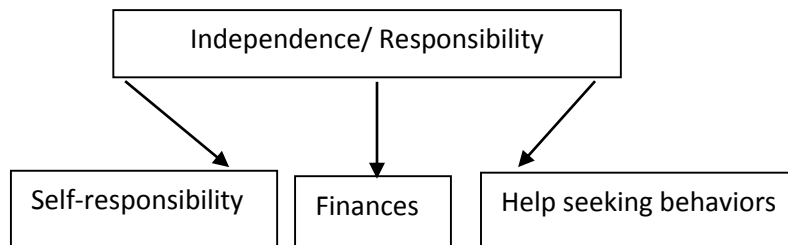
Figure 9. Independence/Responsibility: Sub-categorical breakdown

6.6.1   Finances

Western University is often described as a university attended by privileged students (Rogers, 2013). Results from the demographic data collected in this study revealed that 11.9% ($n = 5$) of students have a family income of less than $50,000,

14.3% (n = 6) have a family income of $50,000, 16.7% ($n$ = 7) reported a family income

of $50,000 to 100,000, 14.3% (n = 6) have a family income of between 100,001 to

150,000, and 11.9% (n = 5) reported that their family's income exceeds $150,000.

Thirteen students (31%) chose not to respond to the family income question. A total of

75% (n = 30) of students reported that their family pays for their tuition fees, while

47.5% (n = 19) reported that they also use loans to pay their tuition fees, 60% (n = 24)

of students reported that they pay for their own personal expenses. It is acknowledged

that these descriptive statistics from an extremely small percentage of the

undergraduate student body cannot provide an accurate picture of the socio-economic

status of the general student body.

Many of the students who participated in this study reported experiencing

financial difficulty:

> I have OSAP and work study, but things are still tight, so I need to be
> really careful. Like right now, I had to get a new charger for my laptop
> and unexpected expenses are hard.
>
> (Student participant 019, female, 4th year)

> I had a job last year and that really changed things. That's an
> experience I hope never to repeat. There weren't really a lot of financial
> options available to me.
> (Student participant 029, female, 2nd year)

Students who have to work to supplement their finances found that the transition to

university and living on their own resulted in financial stressors that impacted their

wellbeing:

> I usually work in the summer. This is the first year that I worked during
> school. It's really tough. I work on main campus so I'm here every day
> from 7:00 am til 10:00 pm. I'm feeling like the university is my home, I'm
> only at my apartment to sleep. It's tough on your sanity and your health

because I'm doing more to my body than it can handle. But I need the money, so it cancels out the negatives.

(Student participant 037, female, 4th year)

Another 4th year student commented that:

Well I like money, I'm not gonna lie. A lot of times I'll put work before school and I'm realising that it does take a toll on your body.

(Student participant 038, female, 4th year)

First year students who were not employed reported skipping meals in order to save

money:

The first few weeks I definitely lost weight. I'm paying for university by myself, so I didn't eat to avoid using my meal plan a lot.

(Student participant 023, female, 1st year)

I had that same problem. I divide my meals into two, so I have like a brunch and a linner (meal eaten between lunch and dinner). Otherwise I'd skip breakfast and have lunch, then you feel sick in the morning because you're having food at 3:00am. I condensed my meals, it's cheaper, so that you don't pay for 3 meals a day.

(Student participant 025, male, 1st year)

6.6.2   Self-Responsibility

Many staff participants expressed the view that some of the stress and anxiety

experienced by students during the transition to university resulted from inability to cope

with being responsible for themselves and making decisions for themselves:

Students are uncomfortable with increasing levels of responsibility from year to year. I taught in high school and in high school someone was looking out for you and saying, 'hey you should really go to this service', but here you need to self-assess. I think that's the biggest thing that I see, and the one thing that evokes the most panic. What I hear most

often is 'that nobody told me', and I'm thinking nobody had to, you had to figure it out yourself.

(Staff participant 005)

Other staff members also highlighted the issue of self-responsibility:

There are students who come in and say I need to change this, versus those who say I really wanna feel better, you told me this last time and I still don't feel better. That locus of control for whose responsibility it is, is not there for some students.

(Staff Participant 011)

Yesterday the conversation in a workshop was about concentration. Students were saying well the prof is boring, the prof doesn't make it interesting for me - well wait a second, we don't control our professors and how they teach, but what's your job? Your job is to try to figure out how you learn and how do we interpret whose responsibility it is for learning. It certainly feels like we're having more of those conversations with students.

(Staff Participant 009)

The participant further added that in their department they are now trying to track whether students are taking responsibility for themselves:

We just added a new code to our discharge form. We found that students need to learn the responsibility of managing their learning away from their parents. So now you don't have somebody checking in, you're doing things yourself. Independent, self-sufficient learning, and ways of being as a learner, we think is important.

(Staff participant 009)

Other staff members noted that parents are still playing a prominent role in decision making and problem solving for students:

Students are accustomed to having someone else do everything for them. It's really evident when students have a problem and their mom is coming instead of the students.

(Staff participant 007)

....Someone else has always done the advocacy. We see that with a lot of parental calls and e-mails and we usually suggest that we'd like to have a conversation with the student ourselves.

(Staff participant 004)

The issue of self-responsibility was most often referred to by staff, however, when asked about advice for incoming first year students, this student highlighted the need for self-responsibility:

> I think being in first year, a big thing is to take responsibility for what you do and for decisions you make. I know a lot of people come in spoon fed from high school and they expect the same when they get here, but you need to take responsibility for yourself.

> (Student participant 014, female, 1st year)

This 4th year student added:

> I think a lot of people come to university with a sense of entitlement. University is like the beginning of your adult life, it's the time when you have to be learning those life skills and leave the nest.

> (Student participant 029, female, 4th year)

6.6.3   Help Seeking Behaviours

Another issue identified by staff as having an impact on students' transition experience is seeking help. Staff participants noted that while the university provides various services to assist students, many students do not take advantage of those services:

> I think the one issue with services and we've had this discussion many times is that we keep seeing the same students, or that students don't show up. So throughout the year, with the programs we offer we may see 2,400 students, but with a population of 32,000 that's a drop in the bucket.

> (Staff participant 003)

Other staff participants pointed out that students often do not seek help immediately, and that they often wait until the situation has reached a crisis stage:

….they don't want to admit that anything's wrong until they realise that it's beyond repair, and that's when they come seeking help. Unfortunately at that point there's not a lot you can do. You certainly don't have that magic wand they're looking for. They're not particularly good at preventive maintenance.

(Staff participant 005)

I think self-advocacy is a huge issue. We have many students who don't seek out services, or if they do they're not persistent. Then we see in them March and they're like – 'I've been struggling with this all year'.

(Staff participant 004)

Students failing to attend appointments was also identified by staff participants as a major issue:

For our initial assessments that are booked weeks in advance, the no show numbers are pretty high. That can be frustrating because someone else that needed the help could've been seen and that's a pretty consistent issue.

(Staff participant 010)

Another staff participant from a different department added:

We get a lot of no shows too for that initial appointment.

(Staff participant 009)

The majority of the students who participated in the study admitted that neither they nor their friends utilised many services:

I did not use a lot of services during my first year. I went to a time management seminar, but I haven't used many other services.

(Student participant 008, female, 2nd year)

This student who utilises campus services described her frustration with trying to encourage her friends to use services:

I am someone to seek help, but I have friends and roommates who don't. I read all those emails while my roommate is like delete, delete,

delete, and I'm trying to help her. I'm like you need to go help yourself
too…..I tell them all the time you have to seek help, but they're like no.

(Student participant 013, female, 5th year)

Although staff and students seemed to suggest that help seeking behaviours

among students are somewhat erratic, other findings from this study show that students

who seek help and those who have positive help seeking experiences find campus

support services to be beneficial. When asked to describe some of the things that

helped to make the transition to university easier this student responded:

I think using services available on campus makes it easier ….I try to use
things that I find out about.

(Student participant 029, female, 4th year)

A first year student who reported that she had a relatively smooth transition to University

and that she was enjoying university life noted that:

I'm not having too much stress and anxiety. I mean it's definitely
different, but I've been to workshops offered by main campus which
have definitely helped.

(Student participant 010, female, 1st year)

Another student who revealed that she developed mental health issues after

coming to university received help through on campus Psychological Services. She

advised students to seek help. She considered herself to be thriving partly due to the

help she received:

I think this year I'm finally finding my feet, figuring out what I wanna do,
and getting good marks. So my best advice is if you're struggling get
help.

(Student participant 006, female, 3rd year)

6.6.4   What Prevents Help Seeking

Most students acknowledged that they were aware that the university provided many services and resources to help them; however, they reported that they do not know what many of the services actually provide, or how to find them. Some students were also unaware of many of the services that exist. Several students who lived in residence were unaware that there was a residence counsellor. When asked about the handbook of services that they are given when they enter university, students readily admitted that they did not read it and that they threw it in the recycling bin during the first week of school while unpacking. Most students, however, pointed out that they often discarded it because they received too printed much information at the beginning of the semester and they were unable to process all of the information while trying to cope with all of the changes they were experiencing. They therefore only kept what they felt was pertinent to their situation at the time. Staff participant 002 acknowledged that students received large amounts of information when they enter university. She indicated that "we definitely frontload at the beginning of the school year".

Students identified several factors that prevent them from seeking help, being unaware of services was often mentioned by students. Two students who self-identified as having mental health issues commented that:

> I didn't even know about campus counselling options. I would think it was something they would tell us at orientation.
>
> (Student participant 020, female, 1st year)

> Right now I'm a member of one of the mental health clubs and I didn't even know we had support services on campus until the end of 2nd year. I find that disturbing.
>
> (Student participant 041, male, 3rd year)

Another student stated that she was not sure if she was eligible to access psychological

services:

> … I thought about going to counselling because I get really stressed
> easily. But I thought because I opted out of the health plan those
> services would not be available to me.
>
> (Student participant 009, female, 2nd year)

Other students reported that they were unaware of the nature of the services provided

by different departments:

> (At orientation) They said we have student services and a bunch of
> other stuff, they don't actually say what they are. It's very vague and not
> very helpful, like if I have a certain kind of problem who do I go to?
>
> (Student participant 007, female, 1st year)

> …. about the services, (at orientation) they kinda just told us what was
> available, not what they did.
>
> (Student participant 042, female, 1st year

The comments expressed by students were acknowledged by one staff member who

noted that:

> I'm not sure that at orientation we go into detail about all of our services,
> but we do tell students that there are tons of services available.
>
> (Staff participant 002)

Not knowing how to use other wellbeing resources specifically the recreation center was

also mentioned:

> I think the rec center is one of the most underutilised places on
> campus…. They tell you it's free, but there's no tour showing what's
> available, or how to use the equipment.
>
> (Student participant 008, female, 2nd year)

The tour thing with the rec center, I feel like that's important because I really didn't even know how to get in. I was just standing there watching other people and looking lost.

(Student participant 007, female, 1st year)

In relation to support services, students also pointed out that their lack of help seeking was often related to conflicting schedules:

I've heard of them, and I looked them up, but it's hard to fit them in your schedule sometimes.

(Student participant 029, female, 4th year)

I tried to see a counsellor, but thanks to the Faculty of Sciences every time they wanted to see me I had labs.

(Student participant 040, male, 3rd year)

I signed up (for workshops), but they never fit with my schedule.

(Student participant 037, female, 2nd year)

Finally, students expressed that they have difficulty finding information about the university's resources online:

…. it's hard to find out how to get those services. You have to search for them and they are all these different links, so it's difficult to find them. It would be more helpful if they just told you everything. They did give us booklets, but it's like really thick pages and pages of reading. You don't really want to read all of it, so maybe there needs to be an easier way to access everything.

(Student participant 007, female, 1st year)

I didn't even know what OWL was. Plus, a lot of other universities are more centralised with websites. All of the services can be found in one place, it would be helpful if Western had one website where you could find everything.

(Student participant 032, male, 1st year international student)

One staff member agreed that having support services information on multiple websites is confusing for students:

> Everything here is so divided, even our websites are different. Even just going and being able to find something is hard, the information is all over the place and students are confused. It's indicative of how the university operates internally because each part is separate.

(Staff participant 007)

6.7   Institutional Structures

The category of institutional structures presents information on formal and informal structures within the university that affect the transition experience. This category has five sub-categories: relationships with peer staff, relationships with faculty/TAs, student clubs, midterm exams schedule, and access to support services Students described different experiences with peer staff, faculty, and teaching assistants. Peer staff are viewed as helping to provide a friendly and supportive environment; students however reported less positive experiences with teaching assistants. Student clubs, midterm exam schedule, and support services were identified as institutional structures students experienced difficulty with during the transition. Many of the difficulties involved how these structures functioned in relation to student's needs. Figure 10 provides a breakdown of the sub-categories.
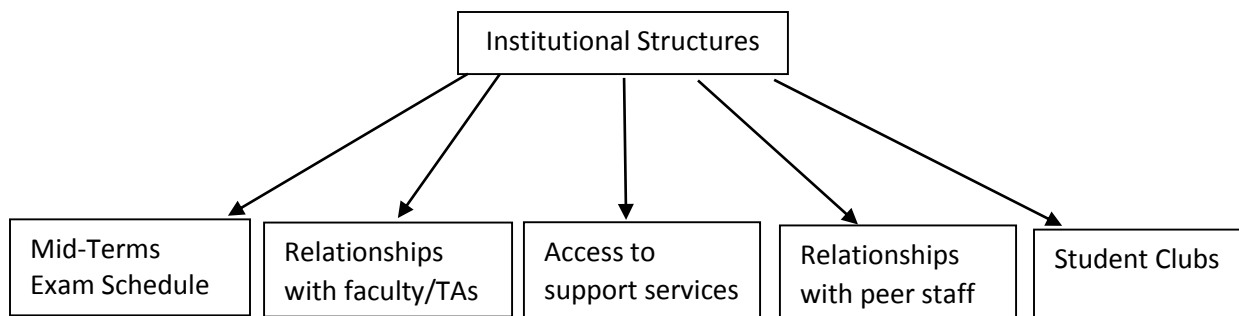
Figure 10. Institutional Structures: Sub-categorical breakdown

6.7.1   Access to Support Services

Support services are designed to help students cope with their new life. Access
to these services was discussed extensively by both students and staff. Students spoke
about challenges in accessing formal support services, specifically psychological and
academic counseling services. Students experiencing psychological distress spoke of
being wait-listed for services:

> One time I was super stressed about missing my family because we are
> really close. My roommate and I have opposite schedules, I have all
> morning classes, and she has all night classes. I was stressed and
> homesick and I was in bed for 2 days. I called Student Services for an
> appointment to talk. This was a month ago, and they put me on wait list.
> I still haven't heard from them and that wasn't helpful. So it's kinda like
> they're there, but they're not.
>
>   (Student participant 007, female, 1st year)

> I signed up for the anti-anxiety workshops but I was waitlisted.
>
>   (Student participant 014, female, 1st year)

This student, who experienced a serious mental health issue, described her inability to

get an appointment:

> I had anxiety before my first midterm and I went to a party. I was trying
> to be someone that I'm not and so I was drinking. There was this girl
> there I was trying to get to know, so I was trying to impress her and
> drugs were involved….
>
> I didn't think that weed and anxiety don't mix and I had 6 days where I
> could not sleep. I felt like I needed to talk to my (Western University)
> therapist immediately, but I couldn't because they were no
> appointments. I couldn't go home because I felt like I was invisible, my
> body was totally disassociated from me…. I eventually had to take a 6
> week medical leave of absence from school.
>
>   (Student participant 019, female, 1st year)

This Brescia student reported that the news of long appointment wait times prevents

students from seeking help:

> I went to a mental health forum on main campus. Afterwards I was
> talking to some girls and they say they've been trying to see someone.
> They've been referred to main campus and have been put on a waiting
> list. I just found that to be interesting. Some people have been waiting
> so long and they've been talking about their experiences. Now their
> friends won't even go and try to get help even though they need it,
> because they don't want to be put on the list.
>
> (Student participant 010, female, 1st year)

Staff participants acknowledged that over the years there has been a significant

increase in the number of students seeking psychological services and that this had led

to some students not being seen in a timely manner:

> I think services are expanding, but we did have one period this year
> (2013) where we saw unprecedented numbers. There is no way to plan
> for what you don't expect, and demand is increasing. It's also difficult to
> manage those spikes in demand in September and October.
>
> (Staff participant 010)

> From our standpoint we are basically circumventing the fact that they
> are not enough resources and we're basically supplementing them at
> the Faculty level. I know lack of resources is a huge discussion point. I
> think Fanshawe (College) may have more psychologists than Western. I
> know they have a triage which Western does not have, that ensures
> that any student with an emergency gets seen within 24 hours.
>
> (Staff participant 006)

Another staff member commented on the absence of a system for emergency mental

health care:

> Western says they have that (triage), but we recently had a student who
> went off and other students tried to help him, and it took days to find out
> who would see him.
>
> (Staff participant 008)

Another support service which students reported experiencing difficulty accessing was academic counselling. Academic counsellors can play an integral role in students' educational experiences and choices. Academic counsellors assist students with choosing courses, modules, or degrees to fit their career goals. They also help with academic probation, and accommodation for missed assignments or exams. Students reported experiencing long wait times for appointments to see academic counsellors:

> …I tried to get a meeting with an academic counsellor once, but it was too full. I had to email him and he emailed me back. I didn't feel like I got everything I wanted, but I didn't want to wait a month for an appointment.
>
> (Student participant 009, female, 1st year)

> … This year we got a new academic counsellor, I stopped by to talk to someone because I wanted to add a certificate to my degree. I asked if they had drop in hours because I wanted to talk to someone face to face. It was like, 'there's nothing available, we have a lot of paper work and we have a new counsellor'. So I said, well when will you be ready? They said there may be some time available tomorrow if we get this paperwork done, if not mid-October, and this was the first week of September.
>
> (Student participant 008, female, 1st year)

One academic counsellor acknowledged the long wait time issue:

> I wanted to talk about the issue of wait times. My department is small so we can see students the same day. But I've had other students from other Faculties come in and say, can I talk to you? I can't get an appointment in my Faculty for 2 weeks and my friend said you were really helpful.
>
> (Staff participant 007)

6.7.2 Student Clubs

In addition to formal campus support services, students also look to student

organizations as a means of support. Student clubs were consistently mentioned as the

organization that students depend on for developing connections and fostering

involvement in activities. Students, however, reported being dissatisfied with their

experiences with student clubs as some clubs do not have any events, or enough

events to meet the needs of their members:

> I joined some clubs, but clubs at Western suck. No one continues on
> with anything. (They say) 'oh we're gonna have a first meeting' and then
> that's it.

> She continued:

> I love playing the piano and I joined the piano club, and they were like
> 'we're gonna play at all these concerts', and they haven't done
> anything. Then it's like – ok, can I get my money back?

> (Student participant 039, female, 2nd year)

Another student suggested that disorganization within the clubs and having events in

locations that are far away from campus were issues that affected participation and

satisfaction:

> I joined a few clubs, like the Sociology Students Association and Best
> Buddies, but I was too super stressed out to keep up. You had to make
> a lot of plans on your own to meet up with your buddy ….
> I find that a lot of clubs don't really do anything, or they have stuff that's
> difficult. I joined the Challenge and Change Club and they have stuff
> way up on Dundas which is creepy, I'm not going up there.

> (Student participant 019, female, 4th year)

Other students reported being alienated from club activities because of cultural biases:

> I joined the Arab society because I thought 'yeah I'm going to get back
> to my Arab roots'. I went and said I'm Arab, and they said no you're not.
> There are cliques in every fricking club on campus, so because I dye
> my hair and wear a septum ring they think I'm not Arab. That seclusion
> was definitely something I struggled with….. The new clubs don't do a
> lot. I paid $15.00 and we're not doing anything. It's things like that that
> make you don't want to be a part of anything.
>
> (Student participant 020, female, 1st year)

Another student reported:

> I'm a certain sect of Muslim, and there was this club that is another sect
> of Muslim, and my brother is in that club so he told me to join. That sect
> is really to themselves. They really don't like outsiders, so there were
> some people in the club who were like you can't come to certain events.
> Then there were others who were like, you should be able to come.
>
> (Student Participant 004, female, 2nd year)

One staff member acknowledged that although clubs can provide support networks and

various developmental opportunities for students, some students encounter problems

within their clubs:

> ......Someone tried to commit suicide because their club was in disarray.
> Four others also indicated that they were thinking about it (suicide)
> because they were having problems in their clubs. There was bullying
> and all other types of things going on.
>
> (Staff participant 008)

6.7.3   Midterm Exams Schedule

The format of the university's midterm exam system results in high stress levels

for students during the transition to university. Students reported varying experiences

with midterms, this student reported how studying for midterms caused her to fall behind

in other courses:

> I had 2 midterms one after another in 2 weeks. In those 2 weeks I did nothing else but study for those midterms, so I fell behind in everything else and I'm still catching up.
>
> (Student participant 023, female, 1st year)

Another student commented about her experience of having multiple midterms and assignments at the same time:

> I wish there was more prof collaboration. I wish they didn't have them all at the same time, it definitely stresses out 1st years. When I came back from Thanksgiving I had 4 midterms and 3 papers all due in the same week, I didn't sleep. I don't know why they can't talk among themselves and have them spread out, and say ok, we're not gonna kill these poor students.
>
> (Student participant 022, female, 2nd year)

This 1st year student agreed with the idea of having midterms spread over a period of time:

> Yeah I'd much rather have them spread out, that was the most stressful part. I fell asleep during one of the exams because I'm not accustomed being up that late.
>
> (Student participant 023, female, 1st year)

Another 1st year student who had her midterms spread over a period of six weeks, however, expressed a preference for a short structured midterm exam period:

> I'd rather have a week with no class than seven midterms over 6 weeks.
>
> (Student participant 024, female, 1st year)

6.7.4   Relationships with Peer Staff

While most students in this study suggested that they experienced difficulty with the transition to university, and that they experienced difficulty accessing the resources designed to help with the transition, there was one campus structure that was consistently mentioned as being helpful. The majority of students reported that

connections with sophs and RAs were extremely helpful and assisted in their transition

to university:

> I have a don on my floor, she's great. My sophs are great. I've heard others say their soph is really absent, but not mine, and my don checks on me like 4 times a day. My Fac soph is around all the time, he really cares about the floor. They're like if you need help let me know.
>
> (Student participant 024, 1st year)

Other students reported varying experiences, but the overall opinions suggest

that students have good relationships with peer staff, and that they view these

relationships as integral to their transition experience:

> My RA is fantastic and I love my don. Faculty sophs are not so good, I feel like they don't care about me. I wish I had someone who could help me academically and give me tips.
>
> (Student participant 023, female, 1st year)

> Some sophs are amazing, they would tell you everything you want to know. But my soph, and my friend's soph, we barely hear from them.
>
> (Student participant 007, female, 1st year)

> My RA is fantastic. I'm not very fond of my soph. On my floor there are only 7 of us who are interacting, the rest just close their door, including my soph, she's not really involved, but the Faculty sophs are good. My Fac soph brought me a bunch of past exams. I've actually seen sophs tutor kids.
>
> (Student participant 025, female, 1st year)

6.7.5   Relationships with Faculty/TAs

The literature shows that good relationships with professors can help foster a

sense of belonging. The change in the relationship with teachers is difficult for students

during the transition to university. Students expected to have a more connected

relationship with professors and teaching assistants, similar to their past experiences

with high school teachers. This student described how professors can contribute to

adjustment and academic success:

> I think most professors are really helpful, some aren't, but for the most part they are really helpful. In my faculty they want you to come and bring your assignments, they want to talk to you, get to know you. Knowing that those resources are available and using them has been really helpful.
>
> (Student participant 029, female, 4th year)

This 2nd year student had a different experience. She opined that her experience would

have probably been different with a high school teacher:

> I have seen the profs, but it's not like they remember your name. One time I went to see this prof and she was very intense about what she wanted ....she was just not very nice. I just feel like if it was a high school teacher they would've been nicer.
>
> (Student participant 042, female 2nd year)

Many students reported that TAs were sometimes less approachable than faculty and

some seemed not to care about students:

> I was terrified of my TAs. It depends on how they interact with you. At Brescia I went to one and he completely brushed me off and that didn't help me out, but I went to another one and he was fine.
>
> (Student participant 038, female, 4th year)

> I'm not a fan of TAs. They always seem so busy and it's really hard to get hold of TAs. This year my psych (psychology) TA was really quick in responding, but most times you don't get an answer from them.
>
> (Student participant 037, female, 4th year)

> It doesn't seem like they really care. When you go talk to TAs it doesn't seem like they really care, but professors are different, once you talk to them you realise they do care.
>
> (Student participant 007, female, 1st year)

6.8   Thriving Stage
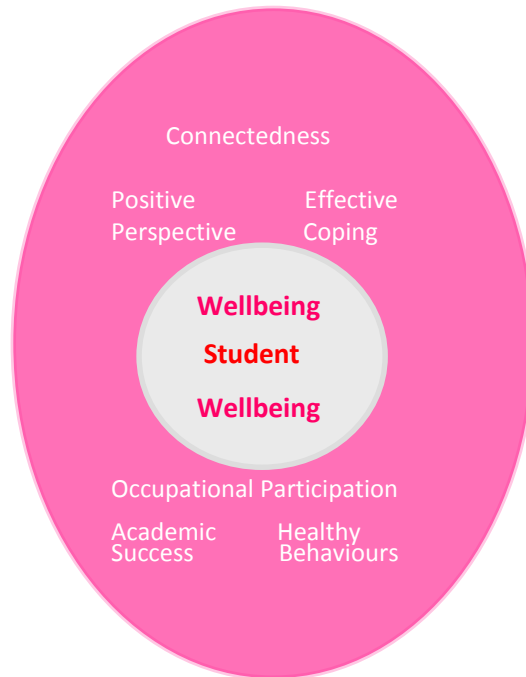
Schreiner and colleague's (2010), definition of thriving as optimal functioning was utilised to define thriving in this study. The five factors identified by Schreiner as the constructs that determine thriving in college were, however, not adopted for this study. The main category and six sub-categories were not predetermined by the researcher or by Schreiner's theory. Rather, the sub-categories are based on the students' definitions of what success and optimal functioning meant to them. Themes for the concept of thriving were derived from students' responses to the question "what does success at university mean to you – when you get to the end of your first year, or the end of your undergraduate program what are the things that you want to achieve that will make you say that you were successful?" Themes were also derived from analysing the interview and focus group transcripts of students who perceived that they experienced a smooth

transition to university, as well as the interview or focus group transcripts of students who reported that they were enjoying their university experience.

Six sub-categories were derived from students' responses: Academic Success, Occupational Engagement, Connectedness, Healthy Behaviours, Positive Perspective, and Effective Coping. This quote from student participant 009, a female 2nd year student best captures the overall conceptualization of thriving, she defined success at university as "being able to fulfill all your social, emotional, and physical life". The main category of the thriving stage was labelled as wellbeing as the six themes identified by the students match the six dimensions of Hettler's (1976) wellness model. Figure 11 provides a visual breakdown of the sub-categories of the thriving stage of the model.
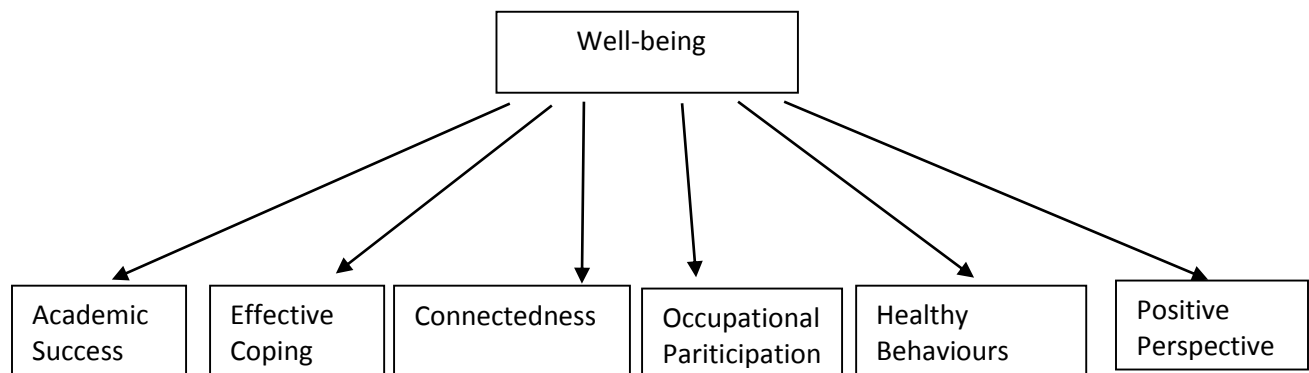
Figure 11. Coping: Sub-categorical breakdown

6.8.1   Academic Success

Being academically successful was very important to students, it was related to how they felt about themselves as well as to goal achievement:

Success for me - I wanna pass everything.

(Student participant 026, female, 1st year)

Success for me is getting good grades.

(Student participant 009, female, 2nd year)

Success for me is getting grades above 70, even above 80.

(Student participant 042, female, 1st year)

Every once in a while you get those A's and you feel good about
yourself.

(Student participant 037, female, 4th year)

Some students in defining success, however, pointed out that learning and

enjoying their courses was more important than getting good grades:

Grades are not so important. If I was to get a 90 and I didn't learn a lot
of stuff or it wasn't interesting, then that's not really success. If I learned
more and got only 75 then that's better.

(Student participant 022, female, 2nd year)

My views on things have changed. In my classes I'm learning so much
about the world and I think that's more valuable than anything ….

(Student participant 019, female, 4th year)

6.8.2   Occupational Participation

In addition to academics, students identified having a social life and engaging in

activities that were important to them as integral to success and optimal functioning.

This international student described the importance of engaging in non-academic

activities:

When I first came I put academics as my number one priority, but after
midterms and finals I started to feel the need to study more things than
academics… So in 2nd year I feel like grades is (sic) no longer a priority.

> I feel like you can have average grades and put more time into other things you are interested in.

> (Student participant 028, female, 2nd year international student)

Another student described how she was making progress in finding time for activities in which she wants to participate:

> Last year I wanted to join a lot of clubs, but I wasn't able to do that because I was so focussed on school. So now I've been able do that, and looking back I can see that I'm progressing slowly.

> (Student participant 034, female, 2nd year)

This first year student noted that:

> For success, I wanna be able to say that I was a really balanced student, that I got the marks that I wanted …. and took part in extra-curricular activities.

> (Student participant 025, male, 1st year)

Student participants 008 and 009 defined success in relation to their social life:

> Success for me is having a social life.

> (Student Participants 008 & 009 females, 2nd year)

Both participants (008 and 009) indicated that they felt as though school consumed the majority of their time, and that they were unable to socialise with their friends on a regular basis, an activity which they believed was important. They suggested that their desire for more social activities was not about maintaining friendships, but about having a balanced life.

6.8.3   Connectedness

Friendships again emerged as an issue that is very important to students and their success and functioning. These 1st year students in defining success stated that:

> I wanna be better friends with the people on my floor and hopefully me and my roommate stay friends.
>
> (Student participant 023, female, 1st year)

> I want to spend time with my floor and with my friends.
>
> (Student participant 007, female, 1st year)

> I have a good social network and I'd like to keep that up.
>
> (Student participant 027, female, 1st year student)

Older students also commented on the importance of friendships and success:

> Being social and making friends is so important.
>
> (Student participant 034, female, 2nd year)

> Connections, you need to make friends. That plays a big role in university.
>
> (Student participant 033, female, 4th year)

6.8.4   Healthy Behaviours

Several students reported that they were aware that they did not engage in healthy behaviours. Many reported having poor eating habits, and not exercising on a regular basis. They also reported engaging in excessive studying, which led to high levels of stress, and inability to spend time focusing on their personal development. These poor health behaviours were of concern to many of the students in the study,

several students suggested that they wished to engage in more healthy behaviours and

included health behaviours in their definition of success:

> Success for me is being healthy and getting active.
>
> (Student participant 009, female, 2nd year)

> I wanna be able to say that I was a really balanced student, that I got
> the marks that I wanted ... and ate well.
>
> (Student participant 025, male, 1st year)

> Success for me would be that I grew...... and worked on my own
> physical health, mental health, and stress.
>
> (Student participant 013, female, 5th year)

Students acknowledged that they were aware that they needed to spend more

time attending to their physical health in order to be successful and thrive. Exercising

and eating well were identified as being important elements of success and thriving.

Eating well was particularly important because it impacts how their body feels:

> When you're really stressed, out do you really have the time to go the
> grocery store and buy food? So I ended up eating badly or not eating
> anything, but that is something that I'm getting better with.
>
> (Student participant 033, female, 4th year)

> It's all about maintaining balance. You just feel like crap if you eat crap,
> so I'm learning to maintain that balance.
>
> (Student participant 013, female, 4th year)

> I ate a lot of junk food and I used to feel so unhealthy. I'd just go to
> sleep feeling bad because I felt so unhealthy, but this year it's much
> better.
>
> (Student participant 004, female, 2nd year)

Exercise was also important to students. Many participants stated that exercise

improves how they feel:

I think exercise is helpful for me even though sometimes I'm like 'oh I just spent my time at the gym'. But it does make me feel better about my personal self to have done that because it's important.

(Student participant 029, female, 4th year)

I recently started exercising at home, it makes me feel better compared to last year.

(Student participant 004, female, 2nd year)

6.8.5 Positive Perspective

Perspective refers an individual's outlook, attitude, or view towards a particular situation (Oxford Dictionary, 2013). When the focus group and individual interview transcripts for this study were reviewed it was noted that some of the students who believed that they had a relatively smooth transition, or those who were enjoying their university experience had a positive outlook. These students were able to reframe their experiences, and they had a different attitude towards the challenges and disappointments they experienced as they pursued their academic goals:

It's in the input, not the grade. You can't always be at the top of the class. You build character through writing an essay, and in the process I learn something about myself. Even in art, you can create something you think you did really well, and I guess your teachers have different ideas about what what's good art, because you get a 70. But it's like, I put in a lot of effort, and I'm still proud of myself.

(Student participant 020, female, 1st year)

Focus on the process rather than the results....if you're there to get the least amount of red ink when you get your paper back, you're setting yourself up for more of never achieving, and never being satisfied.

(Student participant 017, male, 1st year)

Participant 006 noted the importance of not having a temporary or short-term life view:

> ..grades are important but don't pay much attention to it. It is the first year, you have 3 years left, you can make them up. Think long term, don't just think temporary.
>
> (Student participant 006, male, 1st year international student)

6.8.6 Effective Coping

Learning and using techniques that enable them to cope and manage the stressors and requirements of their new lives is also very important to students. Time management is identified in the literature as a critical skill for coping with change and stress. It was identified by students in this study as the mechanism that most helped them to cope with the transition to university. Other students also commented on the role of psychological and emotion focussed coping strategies in helping them to reduce stress, maintain balance, and function at optimal levels.

In defining success, this first year student commented on the importance of time management:

> Success for me is getting better at learning all the skills, like time management.
>
> (Student participant 021, female, 1st year student)

Other students who were able to implement time management strategies described how it helped them to cope:

> Time management really helps with stress.
>
> (Student participant 007, female, 1st year)

> I like to make plans I have everything set out in my calendar. I have goals and plans, but it took me a while to figure out that system. Before I just threw myself in a panic.
>
> (Student participant 009, female, 2nd year)

Students also related coping to overall stress management. These students defined

success as:

> Being able to breathe after the year is over…to take time for self-
> reflection and problems in my personal life.
>
> (Student participant 017, male, 1st year)

> Not finishing the year super stressed.
>
> (Student participant 042, female, 1st year)

Other students spoke about role of psychological and emotional self-care

strategies in achieving success and coping with university life:

> A lot of people in university are too hard on themselves. If you need
> certain grades to get into medical school that's fine, but just give
> yourself credit for what you've done….You just have to step back and
> appreciate it. My friends they're all working hard and I'm just like,
> breathe a little.
>
> (Student participant 013, female, 5th year)

One first year student, and one final year student reported that, with the help of their

therapists, they have new perceptions about success, and the role of self-care in that

process:

> I've learned that self-care is important and I'm trying to do that more.
> I've changed my perspective of what is the perfect student 'cause you
> can get so burnt out.
>
> (Student participant 019, female, 4th year)

> Self-affection is important, don't be so hard on yourself. Everyone makes
> mistakes, I think that needs to be emphasised more for 1st years.
>
> (Student participant 020, female, 1st year)

Finally, for these other students success is defined in relation to finding themselves:

> I hope that I would really find myself. I hope to figure out what I like to
> do, and what makes me happy.
>
> (Student participant 014, female, 1st year)

> Success would be that I grew and figured out what I want to do.... that I found little things that I enjoy and keep doing them.
>
> (Student participant 013, female, 4th year)

6.9   Core Category

According to Glaser (1978) the development of a substantive theory requires the identification of a core category. During coding and data analysis two interrelated themes consistently emerged from the data: students lacked accurate knowledge about university life, and students lacked the effective skills needed for the new demands of university life. The data suggested that the knowledge gap and the skills gap resulted in students being unprepared for university. Knowledge/Preparation was therefore designated as the core category. In the context of this thesis, knowledge refers to factual information, while skills refer to effective behaviours used to respond and adapt to new and unfamiliar situations (Lauby, 2009).

As noted in the Method of Inquiry section, the two criteria for a core category are frequency and centrality. The core category must meaningfully relate to other categories within the data, must occur frequently, and should represent the main theme of the research findings. The data show that students were unprepared for their new academic and social environment, and for the demands that would be required of them. These factors were supported in all of the categories and sub-categories of the first two stages of Model 1, as well as the first layer of Model 2. Students lacked accurate knowledge about the amount of work required in university. Their lack of knowledge and lack of preparedness were illustrated in many of their comments. For example, student

participant 012 stated, "I was coming to university thinking it was going to be nothing".

Similar sentiments were expressed by several other students. Their lack of knowledge

contributed in part to them being unprepared for independent study, the increased

workload, and the effort and skills that would be required to achieve high grades. It was,

however, suggested that students also lacked the skills to manage their new academic

tasks because high school and O-Week did not give them adequate preparatory

experiences. Alternatively, students who took advanced placement courses or were

enrolled in a baccalaureate program in high school suggested that they were better

prepared for the demands of university academics. The theme of

Knowledge/Preparation was also evident in international student's explanation of how a

bridge period helped with their preparation for university. Coming to Canada a few

months before school began helped them to increase their knowledge of the cultural

landscape, as well as to improve their English language skills. They therefore felt that

they were better prepared for university.

The theme of Knowledge/Preparation emerged in all five categories of the

Transition Stage of Model 1. Students assumed that because there would be a large

number of other first year students that they would not experience difficulty developing

friendships. They lacked knowledge about the difficulties faced by first year students in

relation to developing friendships, and were unprepared for this social aspect of

university. The theme of Knowledge/Preparation also emerged within the category of

time management. Students were aware that they would have large amounts of out-of-

class-time prior to entering university; their class schedules were completed in early

summer. Many students noted that they were pleased when they saw so much "free

time" on their schedules. Even though students possessed knowledge about the vast amount of out-of-class-time they would have, the majority of students were unprepared to manage this "free time".

The theme of Knowledge/Preparation was additionally evident within the sub–categories of self-responsibility, coping, relationships with faculty/TAs, and midterm exams schedules. Several staff members indicated that students lacked the appropriate coping skills to manage the changes and interpersonal issues that occurred during the transition. Staff also suggested that because students were accustomed to having the adults in their lives advocate and make decisions on their behalf, the students were unprepared for being responsible for themselves. The change in the nature of the student-teacher relationship was unexpected by students. They assumed that they would have closer relationships with their professors. Students were unprepared for the lack of intimacy between them and their professors. Finally, most of the comments about midterms related to the schedule and how scheduling impacted transition experiences and wellbeing. Several students, however, noted that they never had taken a multiple choice exam prior to university, and that they only became aware that most or all their exams would be multiple choice after they entered university. This lack of knowledge and experience with multiple choice exams also impacted their preparation for university academics.

6.10   Summary of Findings

This chapter presented the results of a grounded theory of the experiences of students transitioning from high school to Western University, as well as students' conceptualization of thriving. Two models were constructed to present the substantive theory. The core category of Knowledge/Preparation was a consistent theme throughout the data analysis process. The findings suggest that students' lack accurate knowledge and effective skills, and that they tend to be unprepared for the transition from high school to university. Students explained that during the Transition Stage, they encounter several challenges including; low connectedness, managing out-of-class-time, and inability to manage the demands of university academics. Institutional structures also play a role in students' transition experiences. Positive experiences with support services and faculty, and support from peer staff have a positive impact on students during the transition.

Although students reported several negative experiences during the transition the results indicate that various person-environment interactions and tensions lead to some of their negative experiences. The interactions and barriers with the person-environment system can play in role in thriving outcomes. The students' conceptualization of thriving indicated that being successful and thriving involves academic success, healthy behaviours, occupational participation, effective coping and connectedness. The six themes suggest that for students, thriving involves having a balanced life during their undergraduate years.

Chapter 7

7. Discussion of Model 1 Results

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret and discuss the research findings. This discussion is divided into two sections, the first section offers an interpretation of the findings presented in Model 1 – Model of Transition and Thriving at Western University. Model 1 is based on the first two research questions that guided this study: (1) how do students leaving high school experience the transition to university and how do they define thriving? and (2) what are the major factors that hinder or facilitate a successful transition to university? The research findings are synthesised and relevant literature is utilised to interpret the findings. The discussion also locates the study within the literature on the transition from high school to university and the first year university experience.

The second section of the discussion focusses on Model 2 – Transitions-Tensions/Interactions-Outcomes Model for Western University. Model 2 is based on research question three: how do the factors that hinder or facilitate a successful transition impact students' ability to thrive? The findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical frameworks chosen for this study: Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984), Magnusson's Holistic Person-Context Interaction Theory (1995), and Schreiner's Thriving Construct (2010). The strengths and limitations of this study, and the contribution of this study to research on university transitions are also discussed. Finally, the implications of these results for policy and practice are explored.

7.1.1 High School Preparation

The majority of students reported that they believed that high school did not prepare them for university academics, and that the lack of preparation resulted in a difficult academic transition. Only those students who were enrolled in baccalaureate programs, or who took Advanced Placement courses in high school stated that they were well prepared for university academics and they described their academic transition positively. Most students suggested that the amount of homework in high school was much less than in university and that they believed that the high school workload was an accurate reflection of the workload they would encounter at university. Students indicated that they felt that they did not have the skills and knowledge required for university level writing, and that their high school teachers did not require a high standard of work, but nonetheless rewarded them with good grades.

These findings are reflected in previous non-peer reviewed Canadian research. A Statistics Canada study found that high school students spend nine hours per week on homework compared to the 15 hours per week expected at university (Marshall, 2007). Another study found that first year students have poor writing and mathematical skills, but expect good grades for moderate effort (OCUFA, 2010). Other reports suggest that grade inflation occurs in Ontario's high school (Cote & Allahar, 2007; Saywell, 2008).

The role of grade inflation in high school students' preparation for university has received attention in recent years. The results of this study suggest that grade inflation is detrimental to students for numerous reasons. First, it creates unrealistic expectations about what will be required of students at university; second, it reduces accountability, and leads students to overrate their academic performance and the

quality of their work. Finally, it results in disappointment, confusion, lowered academic self-concept, and stress when students encounter lower grades at university. These emotional and academic issues affect students' ability to thrive at university, as academic success and psychological health are key components of thriving.

Participants in a US survey of college counsellors suggested that students' inability to meet the demands of college academics resulted from "generous" high school grading. They also concluded that students' inability to cope with what they perceived to be failure contributes to the mental health crisis on campus (Watkins et al., 2001). Addressing the issue of poor high school preparation for university academics therefore has larger mental health implications for the university and society.

The current study found that students who took advanced placement courses or attended schools with baccalaureate programs experienced less a difficult academic transition. These students also reported being involved in more extra-curricular activities, having more friends, having better time management skills, and experiencing lower levels of stress. They additionally reported that they were functioning well in all or most of the sub-categories of the Thriving Stage of Model 1. The findings relating to AP courses and baccalaureate programs merit further exploration. Studies conducted in the US suggest that students who take AP courses have higher college Grade Point Averages (GPA), and higher Bachelor degree completion rates (College Board, 2003; Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009). Those studies, as well as the findings from this study, indicate that there are academic and psychosocial benefits associated with rigorous high school programs. Canadian studies in this area would be useful to help determine

what needs to be included in high school curricula to ensure that all students are better prepared for university level academics.

7.1.2 Student Academic Expectations

Students indicated that their high school academic performance and what they perceived to be misleading high school preparation led them to believe that university academics would not be challenging. The inaccurate academic expectations affected students' academic and emotional adjustment during the transition to university. These results are consistent with previous research (Howe & Strauss, 2002). Academic performance is extremely important to students as many of them are accustomed to achieving high grades, for many students academic performance is also linked to thriving. Ensuring that students have accurate information can help to ensure that they enter university with realistic expectations. Having more realistic expectations may in turn help to reduce some of the confusion, pressure, and emotional distress that students experience when they transition to university and encounter lower grades. This assertion is supported by a US study that found that when students' expectations are accurately aligned with the reality of the first-year experience, students report better academic performance and less stress (Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Alisat, 2000).

An interesting finding in this study is that the majority of the students reported that they did not expect the heavy workload, the large volume of required readings, the need for independent study, or the effort that would be required to succeed. This finding is contrary to the results from other studies. A national review in Australia found that first year students are well informed about what to expect academically at university (James,

Krause, & Jennings, 2010). Similar studies with first year college students in the US have found that students expect academics to be the most difficult part of their transition to college, (Keup, 2007; Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). An earlier study found that incoming US students expected to spend 30 to 40 hours per week studying (Schilling & Schilling, 1999). Researchers have found that US students tend to overestimate the intensity of the effort required to succeed in college (Kuh et al., 2005; Lammers, Kiesler, Curren, Cours, & Connett, 2005).

Given the findings of other research, the finding in this study that university would not be academically challenging is somewhat puzzling. Perhaps this finding may be explained by examining how academic expectations are formed. Educational psychology researchers propose that academic expectations are based on an individual's interpretation of his or her past experiences (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Howard, 2005). Many of the students who participated in this study indicated that they achieved academic averages of high 80's or 90's in high school; consequently, they may have expected to achieve similar grades at university with similar effort. However, this speculation does not fully explain why this sample of Canadian students had such expectations, or why students in other studies outside of Canada had different expectations about university academics. Research on high school preparation for college shows that similar to Canadian students, US high school students have an academically undemanding final year in high school, and that almost half of high school students study three hours or less per week, receiving high grades for little effort. Nonetheless, US studies have shown that students have expect academic challenges in college (Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Kuh et al., 2005).

Another factor that may have contributed to the academic expectations reported in this study is a lack of pre-university counselling. Students articulated that their guidance counsellors and university recruiters simply disseminated information about different programs, but did not provide them with information about what to expect at university. Similarly, several US studies suggest that school counsellors are not providing students with the information that is necessary to help them form accurate expectations about university academic structures. Students are usually provided with information about application procedures, program and college choices, and funding (Alexson & Kemnitz, 2003; Kirst, Venezia, & Antonio, 2004; Rosenbaum 1998). A 1987 Canadian study by Holdaway and Kelloway also found that students were only provided information about with application procedures and program choices.

Rosenbaum (1998) argues that failure to adequately inform students about the demands of university academics can be detrimental to students as it can lead to unrealistic expectations. The potential harm caused by unrealistic academic expectations was evident in this study. Students who indicated that they came to university expecting a continuation of their high school academic experiences tended to describe experiencing stress, confusion, and lowered academic self-concept.

School counsellors have, however, reported that there are structural barriers, such as a high ratio of students to counsellors that prevent them from providing students with the information that they need. A 2008 study by the National Association for College Admission Counsellors (NACAC) reported that higher priority duties, such as counselling and psychometric testing, reduce the amount of time counsellors can dedicate to college preparation counselling (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2011). The

study also found that the ratio of counsellors to students is 250:1. In New York City, the

ratio is 316:1, and in some California schools the ratio is 900:1. In Canada the ratio is

750:1 (Malatest, 2009), while high schools in Ontario are only required to have 2.6

counsellors per 1000 students (Pearce, 2011). Canadian research examining the views

and experiences of guidance counsellors in relation to preparing students for university

would be helpful in identifying the possible barriers to effective pre-university

counselling.

7.1.3   Orientation Week

Orientation Week is a pre-university preparation process that was reported to

impact students' transition experiences and their preparation for university. The majority

of students reported that they did not enjoy O-Week; they suggested that it did not

prepare them for university, especially the academic aspects of university. Many

students expressed the view that orientation was too heavily focussed on social events

and this led them to believe that university would be "one big party". When classes

began the reality of university life was therefore surprising for some students. Students

stated that they would have preferred more information to help them overcome some of

the principal challenges they encountered during the first few weeks of university, and

that they wanted more information about what "support services actually do". Several

students also stated that they would have preferred more time to settle in and address

personal needs. The personal needs identified by students include getting their books,

getting their phone number changed, unpacking, resting, and having quiet time to reflect

on the change. Finally, students stated that they would have preferred more time to get to know other students.

Moving away from home to university can be a lonely experience, and students expressed a desire to create bonds and friendships during a period where they are surrounded by strangers. Spending quality time with other students is particularly important during this period, especially for students whose friends are not attending Western University. Forming attachments during the first few days is extremely important for reducing loneliness and homesickness. The current Orientation Week structure enables students to meet a large number of other students, but does not provide enough opportunities for students to develop a meaningful connection with one or two new friends.

The findings relating to Orientation Week are concerning given the role that orientation is intended to play in preparing students for the transition to university. Orientation is meant to serve a variety of functions, including creating foundations for academic success, promoting student-faculty interactions (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005), and familiarising students with services and extra-curricular activities (Fox, Zakely, Morris & Jundt, 1993). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) orientation programs can promote student success and development and should therefore provide relevant information for students.

Based on the participants' reports, Orientation Week at Western University is not providing them with the skills and knowledge that they need to successfully transition to university. Further, it creates inaccurate expectations about university life, adding to their pre-existing inaccurate expectations. When Orientation Week occurs, students

have already left home and moved to university; they are now depending on the university to provide them with the support and knowledge needed to navigate their new life, and to help them to thrive. Given the number of negative student responses about Orientation Week, it is advisable for the university to assess its current Orientation Week programming. It is not the researcher's interpretation that the participants were recommending an orientation program that restricts social activities and focusses solely on academic information. Rather, their comments suggest that there is a desire for a more balanced program that meets the academic, social, and informational needs of new students, and results in them being prepared for the new challenges and new routines they will encounter. Recommendations for reviewing O-Week programming are discussed in the Implications for Policy and Practice section of this study.

Another concern noted in the findings is the impact that the Orientation Week schedule has on students' physical health. Many students reported that the schedule of long and active days contributed to poor nutrition and exhaustion. The late night and early morning schedule is a new experience for many students as some noted they were not accustomed to late nights. Many of these students are only 17 years old and they may not have been previously exposed to such long schedules nor to the party atmosphere with which they characterize O-Week. Orientation Week should not result in exhaustion given that it immediately precedes the beginning of classes. As articulated by one student, being tired makes the transition more difficult as it adds to the stress and other emotions with which students are struggling. This student's assertion is supported by Schlossberg (1981) who notes that an individual's state of health is important during a transition, as illness can affect adaptation and increase stress.

Although one of the goals of Orientation Week may be to keep students busy to prevent them from focusing on home or getting involved in risky behaviours, this is a major life transition, and rest and relaxation are also important, particularly for students who may not be comfortable in busy, loud situations involving many strangers.

7.1.4   Bridge Period for International Students

The information presented in the previous sections highlights the importance of preparation in minimizing the adjustment issues experienced during the transition from high school to university. Bridging the gap may be of particular importance to international students who usually encounter additional transitional issues related to cultural changes and language-related challenges. Cultural and language barriers can affect the ability of international students to study and achieve academic success. The international students in this study indicated that they experienced difficulty understanding lectures because of the language barrier and this was their most difficult academic challenge. When international students were asked what they were finding most difficult so far, participant 002 a first year student replied "school, because it's the first year and I can't understand the whole of what the professor is saying". Participant 003 another first year student stated "studying…if I could understand English perfectly I don't think I would have this much difficulty".

The academic difficulties resulting from the language barrier lead to stress and distress for these students and affect their ability to fully thrive. Staff who participated in the study also commented on the academic difficulties faced by international students; they articulated that students who did not have a strong academic background

combined with English language difficulties faced greater challenges. It was noted that there are some programs where high numbers of international students faced difficulty and even academic withdrawal. Staff participant 007 stated that "at Western we've been finding that students who come in from elsewhere are really struggling". In addition, staff participants expressed the view that the international student body had been expanded without a sufficient increase in the requisite supports for international students. Staff participant 008 commented that "a lot of resources are being put into being global, but very little goes to what we do when these students get here to ensure they succeed". These issues point to some of the person-environment tensions that can affect international student development and thriving.

Students who spent a significant period of time in Canada (four to twelve months) prior to the start of university reported that the experience reduced some of their language and academic difficulties when they entered university. These students indicated that it was helpful to move to Canada before entering university in order to become more proficient in English. Their experiences portray the importance of being prepared for the transition to university. One staff participant suggested that given the academic issues encountered by some international students, a bridge year may be advisable, especially in programs where large numbers of international students are currently experiencing academic difficulty. Many universities in the UK and a few in Canada offer what are known as foundational or pathway programs for international students. These programs require international students to spend a 'year 0' in university where they take university courses, English language programs, and learn study skills. No peer-reviewed studies evaluating the effectiveness of these programs were located,

but a review has found that these programs provide students with the academic and social skills to successfully transition to university (Murray & O'Loughlin, 2007).

The other issue identified by international students was the role of cultural and language differences in friendship development with Canadian students. Students who spent a bridge period in Canada reported that this did not improve their ability to communicate and socialize with Canadian students. These results are similar to those reported in other studies (Jiao, 2006; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). It is perplexing that international students continue to report that they do not achieve the friendship experiences with domestic students that they desire. The integration of international students into the general student body plays a significant role in their transition experiences and their ability to thrive, as connectedness is an important aspect of thriving. Western provides several programs to assist international students with their academic, social, and cultural transition. In addition, Western University offers an optional two week Academic Transition Program. Brescia College, an affiliate of Western University, has a mandatory one week bridging program for international students prior to the start of school. The university could also consider using Orientation Week as an additional opportunity to bridge the socialization gap by creating integration opportunities between domestic and international students.

Cameron (2006) suggests that universities need to encourage domestic students to get involved in activities organized for international students. He asserts that Canadian students should be sensitised to the loneliness and culture shock experienced by international students, as well as to how language and cultural barriers affect their communication with international students. Cameron's suggestions are

applicable to this study; international students reported that when they are in a group with domestic students and they are unfamiliar with the topic, they prefer to remain silent. If domestic students are unaware of the reasons why international students decline to engage in discussion, the silence of the international students may well be misinterpreted, resulting in loss of potential friendships.

Some of the international students in this study also recognized that attaining successful integration was a reciprocal process. Therefore, while domestic students should be informed about the challenges faced by international students, international students may need to be more assertive. They should also educate themselves about communication and socialization norms of the society in which they have chosen to study. It must also be considered that as domestic first year students seek friendships in their transition to university, they are likely to be drawn to students with whom they communicate easily, inadvertently increasing the challenges of international students seeking to develop friendships with domestic students.

In January of 2014 the Canadian Federal Government announced plans to double the number on international students studying in Canada by 2022 (Advisory Panel on Canada's International Education Strategy, 2012). Plans to attract more international students must include methods to help students overcome the challenges they encounter, as being unprepared for these challenges can impact students' psychological, social, and academic wellbeing. The results from this study suggest that increasing the level of preparation for international students can be achieved before university begins; however, the preparation period may need to be long term and must also pay attention to the students' interpersonal needs.

7.1.5   Friendships

Developing friendships was one of the major issues that affected students' transition experience. The majority of students reported that they experienced difficulties developing friendships, and because friendships play a major role in social support and emotional wellbeing, several students reported feeling lonely, depressed, and confused about their inability to make friends. Many students indicated that prior to entering university they did not anticipate that developing friendships would be difficult, as there would be a large number of first year students with whom to engage. First year students expressed that they were confused about why it was so difficult to develop friendships. Upper year students however suggested that factors such as large classes, personality, and size and type of residence affected friendship development during the transition to university. These factors highlight some of the person-environment tensions that exist within the university environment. Other research has found that students also encounter problems developing friendships due to lack of preparation and inaccurate expectations. A recent US study of high school seniors found that only 26% of high school seniors indicated that social adjustments at college was a major concern (Hark, 2012).

Although the majority of students indicated that they encountered problems developing friendships, off-campus students suggested that developing friendships was more difficult for them because they are separated from the larger body of first year students who live on campus. They also believed that Faceboook "rez group" allowed students who live in residence to be more informed of social activities. They further suggested that the separation of off-campus and students living in residence during

Orientation Week played a role in them feeling separate from an early stage, and prevented them from connecting with students they referred to as "rez kids".

The perceptions held by off-campus students are consistent with other research findings (Stuber, 2011; Tinto, 1993). Of note, however, is that although some of students in this study who live(d) in residence spoke of living on very active, close-knit floors, and of organised residence events that facilitated developing connections, many other students indicated that living in residence does not guarantee friendship development. Students spoke of living on floors where other students appeared anti-social and shut themselves off in their rooms.

The difficulties faced by off-campus students were acknowledged by staff participants who noted that there are many programs to help off-campus students socialize, but that students did not always take advantage of the opportunities. However, off-campus students seemed to be suggesting that in addition to experiencing difficulty developing friendships because they lived off-campus, they also felt left out of campus activities and disconnected from the campus community. This speaks more to a sense of belonging as opposed to specific connections.

Similar to other studies (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991; Buote, 2006) the findings from this study show that whether students live on campus or off-campus, friendship development and a sense of belonging are extremely important to them, and play a major role in their transition experiences and their ability to thrive. Harke (2012) suggests that students try to circumvent low connectedness during the transition to university by trying to make friends before they arrive on campus. He suggests that students' search the university's Facebook pages for other incoming students in their

program and try to make contact with these students during the summer. He also recommends that after students arrive on campus they need to take risks and initiate contact with other students in their classes and residence, as other students are also 'friendless' during this period. These suggestions may be useful for future Western University first year students.

7.1.6 Alcohol Use

An important issue identified by the students in this study is the role of alcohol use in friendship development among first year students. Students reported that engaging in alcohol use often results from the desire to make friends and to avoid being seen as an outsider. As one student noted, "no one wants to be in rez doing homework while everyone else is out drinking" (student participant, 009, 2nd year). Although there are health and academic consequences associated with drinking, particularly excessive drinking, the desire for friendships, and the importance of friendships to first year students may outweigh their perceptions of the possible negative consequences.

A few studies have linked peer pressure and friendship development to alcohol use. Those studies note that although peers provide social networks for students and help them to cope during the transition to university, peer interactions and the desire to develop friendship may increase the peer pressure to drink (Borsari & Carey, 2001; Crawford & Novak, 2007). This was articulated by several students who suggested that students who drank alcohol were more accepted than students who did not drink. For example, one first year student noted, "I was walking by, and this guy had a bottle of rum, and he asked me to hold it. I was walking around (with it) and everyone was like,

'whoa, good for you'. So I can see how it would be difficult to make friends, and how you would be excluded if you don't drink" (student participant, 042, 1st year). The issue of alcohol use and friendship development also highlights aspects of the developmental transition that students encounter when they enter university. Students are faced with various lifestyle decisions that they may not have the coping skills to address in a healthy and safe manner.

As noted in the Results section, coping with other students' alcohol use is challenging for some students. Two concerns raised by students in the study are the impact alcohol use has on their ability to study and sleep, and the impact of alcohol use on the cleanliness of the residence. Students reported incidents of individuals urinating in the hallway, students being drunk on the stairs, and having drunk people knock on their doors during the early hours of the morning. For students who come from quiet homes, who have never been exposed to these types of behaviours, these situations can be difficult to manage. These situations can also add stress to their adjustment process by affecting comfort with the living environment, and disrupting study habits and sleep patterns. Equally concerning is students leaving their residence to study at the library and returning at late night or early morning hours. This presents a safety issue especially for young female students who are living away from home for the first time.

Residence environments are known to play a significant role in student adjustment and development. The higher education literature suggests that first year students living on campus experience higher levels of peer support, perform better academically, and are less likely to withdraw from college than those living off-campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Thompson, Samiratedu, & Rafter, 1993). Residence life

has also been associated with students' general well-being in college. However, several factors, such as sense of community, perception of safety, and level of noise, can impact students' satisfaction with their residence settings, and their wellbeing. Research has found that students who felt respected, and who could study in their residence reported lower stress levels (Beeler, Bellandese, & Wiggins, 1991; McCluskey-Titus & Oliver, 2001; Murphy, Arnold, Hansen, & Mertler, 2001).

The data from this study and other research suggest that residence environments can affect students' transition experiences. Ensuring that students live in environments that are comfortable and nurturing can help with academic success, connectedness, and coping, three of the components of the thriving model. The experiences described by the students in this study also highlight the role of person–environment interactions on student thriving suggest that the "university environment has the potential to shape students' experiences, social choices, and health behaviours by facilitating or discouraging certain behaviours" (Howard, 2005, p.75), such as alcohol use.

Both staff and students in this study commented on the negative effects of alcohol use on the residence environment. It would be easy to suggest a ban on alcohol use in residences as one US study found that students who attend colleges where there is a ban on alcohol consumption are 30% less to likely engage in heavy drinking (Wechsler et al., 2001). However, as noted in the literature review other research suggests that stricter enforcement of campus alcohol policies, stricter disciplinary actions, and more intensive training for RAs are more effective (Evans-Whipp et al., 2013; Knight et al., 2003). Furthermore, since it was suggested by staff participants that

some students engage in substance use to cope, students could be provided with information about healthy coping strategies during Orientation Week. In addition, although this part of the discussion focussed on alcohol use, warning students about the potential dangers of taking ADHD medications which are not prescribed to them is also advisable. Subsequent reminder messages about healthy coping strategies and information about on campus support resources may be useful, especially during high stress times such as examination periods.

7.1.7   Time Management

The category of time management describes the role that time management plays in students' transition experiences and their ability to thrive. Time management was commented on extensively by students. This issue is particularly important because it affects five of the six sub-categories of the thriving model. This is depicted below.
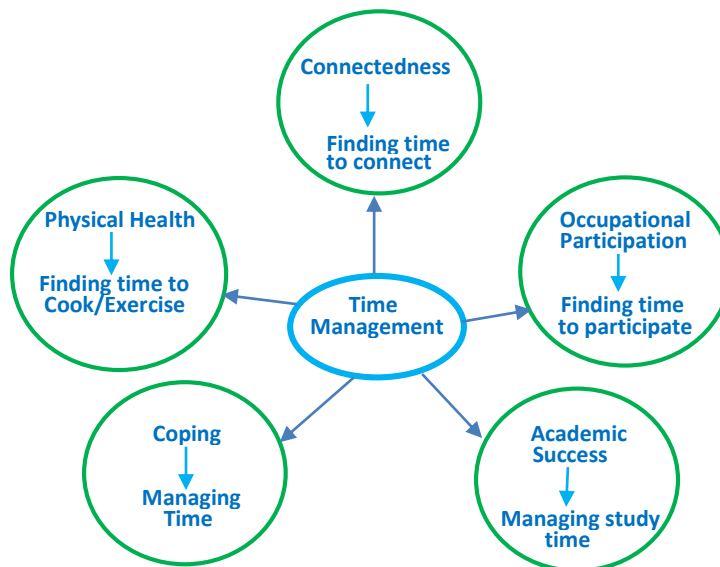
Figure 11. Relationship between time management and thriving factors

Time management has been identified as a challenge for students in other studies on students' transition from high school to university (Clark, 2005; Holdaway & Kelloway, 1987; Urquhart & Pooley, 2007). In this study, students reported that managing their time was extremely difficult, and that this contributed to the stress they experienced during the transition from high school to university. Unlike other studies that discuss time management in a very general manner, the students in this study specified that it was the large amount of "free time" that was most problematic for them. Moving from a structured high school system to a flexible university system resulted in many students feeling overwhelmed about deciding how to spend their out-of-class-time. As students were unaccustomed to having so much unstructured out-of-class-time, it is not surprising that they experienced difficulty managing their time. It is important to note that students who were involved in various extra-curricular activities in high school reported less difficulty with time management. This corroborates research that found that it is better when time management skills are developed at an early age (Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996).

The stress that results from poor time management may be compounded by not seeking formal help to assist with time management difficulties. Coyne and Racioppo (2000) found that most students do not take the time to attend time management workshops. Both staff and students in the current study commented on students' low service use patterns. However, finding time to develop and practice time management skills may be difficult for students, as it represents yet one more new thing to be learned, and may often not be recognized as a need until students find themselves in difficulty due to deadlines and time pressures. Most students in this study indicated that

they did not learn how to manage their time until the 2nd year of their studies. If this is

the typical time frame in which most students develop time management skills, it is not

surprising that first year students experience stress and difficulty in meeting their

academic, social, and personal needs.

However, as evidenced from the reports of students in this study, time

management skills can be developed. For the majority of student participants, using a

personal planner, and setting goals seemed to be the most common and most effective

methods for managing their time. These students also reported a reduction in stress

once they had learned to manage their time. Studies that have assessed the effect of

time management interventions on college students found that the benefits include

lower levels of stress, higher levels of academic performance, and better health (Britton

& Tesser, 2008; Nonis, Hudson, Logan, & Ford, 1998). Since time management affects

students in almost all aspects of thriving, including a time management seminar during

Orientation Week would appear beneficial.

7.1.8   Finances

In addition to the multiple transitions that students experience when they enter

university, financial pressure is an additional stressor faced by some students that can

reduce psychological and physical wellbeing, and negatively affect thriving. One quarter

of the student sample in this study reported that they work part-time during the school

year. The majority of research on university/college student finances focuses on credit

card debt and the impact of employment on academic success. Those issues were not

raised by the students in this study, but some students explained that having to work

while studying full-time impacts their mental and physical health; aspects of thriving.

Staff also commented on the role of financial stressors on students' mental health. The

effect of financial pressure on university students' mental health has been reported in

other studies (Carney, McNeish, & McCall, 2005; Tyrell, 1992). Some studies suggest

that financial burden may be a cause of depression, anxiety, stress, and psychosis for

undergraduate students (Kadison & DeGeronimo, 2004; Watkins et al., 2011). Financial

pressure may therefore be contributing to the increasing number of students seeking

university mental health services (Ross, Cleland, & McCleod 2006).

Having a part-time job can also impact thriving by affecting connectedness and

occupational participation, as research shows that students who work have less time to

engage in leisure activities and associate with friends (Chen, 2005; Robatham, 2012).

These effects were reported by four students in this study who noted that most of their

out-of-school- time is consumed with work. As one student who works part-time noted,

"my friends think I no longer exist and I kinda don't". Some studies have found that

engaging in part-time work and full-time study has positive effects; such as better time

management and increased ability to manage stress, but these effects only occur if

students work less than 20 hours per week (King, 2006; Manthie & Gilmore, 2005;

Robatham, 2012). One study suggested that as students become more accustomed to

the demands of university, the potential effects of having a part-time job are reduced

(Robinson, 1999). In this study, the upper year students who worked part-time spoke of

the continued negative effects of working and studying, noting concerns such as long

days, stress, and fatigue.

First year students in this study reported that concerns about finances led them to skip meals, a practice that can have an effect on their ability to thrive. Skipping meals has been reported in other research. In a 2010 survey conducted at 25 large public universities in the US 46% of students reported that they skipped meals to reduce their personal expenses (Chatman, 2011). Skipping meals is associated with negative health effects, such as weight loss, erractic blood glucose changes, and feeling unwell (Farshchi, Taylor, & Macdonald, 2005) some of these effects were reported by the students in the study. The practice of skipping meals is more worrying when it is considered that these were probably not behaviours that students engaged in when they were living at home a few months ago. Students reported that they were aware that there is a foodbank for undergraduate students, but that they had not yet utilised it. Having a financial management session at orientation where this issue is discussed, and students are advised of alternative options may help to prevent these types of behaviours and allow students to fully thrive.

7.1.9   Help Seeking

When students leave high school and go to university, they encounter multiple transitions and new situations for which they are unprepared and do not have the coping skills to manage. Seeking assistance to help them navigate their new life and its new tasks, roles, and routines is extremely important. Research suggests that university support services are even more important than before because of the Canadian government's policies to increase access to underrepresented students, such as first generation students, immigrants, and Aboriginal youth. Some of these students have

higher levels of what are referred to as entering student risk factors. These include poor socialization skills and low writing scores (Malatest & Associates, 2009), necessitating additional assistance.

Western University provides an extensive array of support services to help students. In this study, many students acknowledged that they do not seek help and staff suggested that often when students do seek help, their problem has reached the crisis stage. This finding is similar to data from other studies, which show that only a small percentage of university students actually seek help (Clary & Fristad, 1987; Raunic & Xenos, 2008; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Students, however, reported that there were several factors that prevented them from seeking help, including schedule conflicts, being unaware of services, and inability to find information. In addition, both students and staff reported that long wait times, being waitlisted, and inability to get emergency appointments impacted help seeking behaviours. The problems point to the resource-related issues and information dissemination challenges faced by many universities. They also highlight person-environment tensions that can impact thriving outcomes.

In this study, long wait times led students to feel somewhat disaffected and unsupported by the university. One student who was waitlisted expressed, "it's like they're there, but they're not". Students in this study reported other negative effects associated with long wait times, including decreased motivation for help, poorer adjustment, and prolonged emotional distress. What is additionally troubling is the revelation that some students are refusing to seek help because they have heard about long wait times. As stated earlier, the staff participants in this study acknowledged that

long wait times affect access to services; however, they also pointed out that they encounter a high number of no shows for appointments that are booked weeks in advance. A high number of no shows has been identified as a problem for other universities (University of Toronto, 2013; University of Connecticut, 2014) and empirical studies have found that failure to keep initial appointments wastes clinic resources, and clinician time, and contributes to longer wait times (Lowman, DeLange, Roberts, & Brady,1984; Sherman, Barnum, Buhman-Wiggs, & Nyberg, 2009). Resolving long wait times at Western University will require creative solutions as the problem is paradoxical; a high number of no shows leads to long wait times, yet long wait times increase the likelihood that individuals will miss their appointment (Foreman & Hanna, 2000; Williams, Latta, & Conversano, 2008).

An interesting finding in this study relates to the role of culture in help seeking behaviours. Other studies have reported that students from East Asian and Chinese backgrounds may be less inclined to seek help (Shwalb & Sukemune, 1998; Wright & Lander, 2003). In this study six of the seven international students who participated were from China. Of those six Chinese students, only one student reported that she was unlikely to ever seek help from campus staff. The other five students reported that they had already sought help from support services, or that they were intending to seek help. Staff also commented that they have noticed a larger number of international students attending programs and seminars.

The findings related to help-seeking behaviours suggest that there are various issues that impact students' help seeking behaviours during the transition to university. Research shows that early intervention for academically weak or unprepared students

and those with mental health problems can improve through counselling (Fike & Fike, 2008; Grubb, 2003). In addition, help seeking is extremely important for student adjustment and thriving, as academic success and coping are components of the thriving model. Possible solutions to the problems identified by students and staff will be discussed in the Implications on Policy and Practice section.

7.1.10   Relationships with Faculty/TAs

When students leave high school and enter university, they are in a potentially vulnerable state. Students are accustomed to having close relationships with their teachers, and studies show that many students enter university expecting extensive guidance from professors (Arzy, Davies & Harbour, 2006; Vandermeer, Jansen & Torenbeek, 2010). Some students expect that their professors will get to know them personally (Krallman & Holcomb, 1997). In this study, most students reported that their interactions with faculty were pleasant and that they found them to be helpful. Students' interactions with faculty were usually related to academic success; primarily, students sought assistance with understanding course material or assignment requirements. Interactions with faculty can also be important for emotional adjustment and even support. One student reported that her professor's open door policy, accompanied by the fact that the professor remembered her by name, made her feel that her professor cared. Other studies investigating the influence of faculty-student interaction on student outcomes have found positive effects, such as persistence, academic self-confidence, satisfaction with the college experience, and a greater sense of belonging (Lamport, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991)

Students in this study reported less pleasant and less helpful interactions with Teaching Assistants (TAs). This is disconcerting considering that TAs can play a significant role in academic engagement and success. O'Neal, Wright, Cook, Perorazio, and Purkiss (2001) found that TA enthusiasm, communication, grading practices, and behaviour are factors that influence whether students feel welcome. They also found that if TAs are engaging, interactive, and passionate, they can encourage and facilitate learning.

Positive interactions with faculty and TAs can help students thrive by assisting with their academic outcomes. Positive interactions can also help students feel more comfortable and improve their satisfaction with their university experience. This is evidenced by the students who reported more satisfactory interactions with faculty. Barefoot (2000) has suggested that there is a need for first-year programs to increase faculty-student interaction however; as many first year courses at Western University have large classes, faculty-student interaction may be difficult. Given the role that it can play in student outcomes, methods to improve and increase faculty-student interaction, and student-TA interactions where possible, should be considered.

7.1.11   Peer Staff Relationships

The students in this study reported relationships with peer staff to be one of the most helpful resources during their transition to university. Assistance from sophs was especially highly regarded by students. According to the Western University website, sophs' duties include helping first year students with essays, midterm exams, final

exams, assisting with questions, concerns, and problems that first years may have, and guiding incoming students through their first year (http://publish.gaul.csd.uwo.ca/lreid/examplesforta/major/student3/responsibilities.html). Some students reported that their sophs, dons, and residence assistants (RAs) checked in with them on a regular basis either in person or via text messages. Having someone check in on first year students on regular basis can be particularly helpful during the first few weeks of school when students have not made any friends and are still struggling with the multiple transitions that they encounter. Students in this study were especially appreciative of the academic tips and tutoring provided by sophs, demonstrating that sophs can play a role in helping students to cope and to achieve academic success, two components of the thriving model.

Although most students reported that they had good experiences with peer staff, there were a few students who reported less satisfactory relationships. Off-campus students in particular reported having less contact with their sophs. They believed that this was because they were not on campus full time. Students from smaller programs also reported that their Faculty soph was often not from their department and was unable to help them with Faculty related questions. One student from a small program noted that during O-Week when she asked her Faculty soph to help her find her classrooms, he was unable to help because he was unfamiliar with the buildings where most of her classes would be held. Introverted and shy students suggested that because of the extroverted nature of sophs, it was difficult for them to connect with their sophs during O-Week and even after. They suggested that the current criteria for soph positions prohibits introverted students who could make a contribution to the adjustment

of other students, particularly other introverted students, from assuming a soph role. Staff participants also suggested that greater ethnic and religious diversity among sophs might be useful and more reflective of the needs of a diverse student body. They also noted that it was important for sophs to represent the Faculties in which they enrolled.

No studies on the impact of peer staff or peer advisors on first year students' adjustment were found in the peer reviewed literature. Studies on peer mentoring programs in college have, however, found that effective peer mentoring relationships can provide emotional and academic support (Jacobi, 1991; Nora & Crisp, 2007). These positive effects were evidenced in this study and it is clear that peer staff impact student adjustment and possibly thriving by assisting with academic success and coping. Ensuring that off-campus students are more connected with their sophs, and that smaller programs have an opportunity to have their own Faculty sophs can help to ensure that all students have the same opportunity to benefit from peer staff relationships.

7.1.12   Midterm Exams Schedule

The other issue related to institutional structures that impacts thriving and students' transition experiences is midterm exam scheduling. Students reported a variety of experiences; some students stated that they experienced having all of their midterm exams, as well as assignments, due in the same week, while others reported that their midterm exams were spread over a four to six week period because some courses have more than one midterm exam. Students who had all of their midterms in one week with no extra assignments due reported having a less stressful experience

than students who had all of their midterms in one week plus assignments, or students who had midterms spread over a longer period.

The experience of midterm exams without a fixed schedule may be too much pressure for students who have only been in university for four to six weeks. Students reported that when their midterm exams spread into November, with their final exams less than a month away, they felt as though they had little time to relax before preparing for finals. They also reported that they fall behind in other classes when preparing for midterm exams. A search of the literature found no information on the impact of exam scheduling on students; however, a report from Queen's University (Canada) on students' mental health, concluded that at Queen's University "compressed and close-to-conflicting midterm exam schedules may impose unreasonable pressures on students, especially in first-year" (Walker, Turney, Clapham, Medves, & Jahcan, 2012, p.16). The authors of the Queens University report additionally noted that the current schedule affects student health and wellbeing, and they even suggested a solution that would eliminate midterm exams.

The impact of Western University's midterm scheduling on students' health was reported in this study. Students indicated that they experienced sleep deprivation, and extremely high levels of stress. One first year student reported falling asleep during an exam because of lack of sleep due to studying. Even students who reported having good time management skills expressed that they experienced extremely high levels of stress when they had compressed exam schedules in combination with assignments. It is acknowledged that there are multiple factors affecting exam scheduling, but in light of

the potential impact of midterm exam scheduling on student wellbeing, perhaps

consideration of the scheduling is warranted.

7.1.13 Student Clubs

Students expect that student clubs will play a significant role in their lives during

their transition to university. Many students reported that they had heard about the large

number of clubs at Western University and that this was one the reasons that attracted

them to the university. They also reported that they were looking forward to joining

many clubs prior to beginning university. Several students indicated that they, or other

students that they knew, joined several clubs during Western's Clubs Week. Although a

few students reported that they had good experiences with clubs (these students were

part of the executive team of the clubs they were members of), the majority of the

students reported that they did not get the opportunities or experiences that they were

seeking from student clubs. Students reported that clubs often did not meet, or did not

have any activities. This caused many students to feel disillusioned and cheated

because they had paid their money to join clubs. Their experiences also left them

feeling wary about joining other student organisations.

The issue of students being excluded from club events due to religious or ethnic

biases is a serious issue. First year students are vulnerable because of the multiple

transitions and stressors they are experiencing. Students look to clubs as a source of

social support and friendship development; being discriminated against and/or

disappointed by the lack of activities can affect self-concept and sense of belonging.

Such experiences can also create negative attitudes towards engagement in extra-

curricular activities, as well as negative attitudes towards the university. These effects were reported by some of the students in this study.

The role that involvement in student organisations can play in students' lives has been documented in research. Studies show that involvement in student organisations facilitates involvement with the social aspects of college life, provides greater opportunities for student interaction, and affects overall satisfaction with the college experience (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Tarenzini, 1991; Williams & Winston Jr, 1985). In this study it was evident that involvement in student organisations can affect thriving by reducing or increasing connectedness and occupational participation. It is therefore important to ensure that student clubs function effectively and that students are aware of and feel comfortable using mechanisms to report unsatisfactory or discriminatory experiences.

7.2   Thriving

Since the Thriving Model developed for this study is related to Schreiner's thriving construct (2010), Schreiner's construct and this study's Thriving Model will be discussed together. The first part of the discussion will focus on the Thriving Model created from the findings of this study, while the second part will compare the model to Schreiner's thriving construct. This will be followed by a discussion Schlossberg's (1981; 2012) Transition Theory and Magnusson's Holistic Person-Context Interaction Theory (1998).

Schreiner's thriving construct is grounded in positive psychology. Schreiner defines thriving as optimal functioning. The Thriving Quotient was developed by

Schreiner to measure thriving, the measure has five constructs; engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, diverse citizenship, and social connectedness. Although the current study was guided by Schreiner's definition of student thriving as optimal functioning, the goal of the current study was not to measure the constructs of the Thriving Quotient, but to let students identify what factors define thriving in their university life.

7.2.1   Thriving Model Derived from the Current Study

The categories and sub-categories of the Thriving Model developed from the data collected in this study differ somewhat from Schreiner's findings of what constitutes optimal functioning for students. This study's Thriving Model consists of six components: connectedness, effective coping, academic success, healthy behaviours, positive perspective, and occupational participation. Connectedness was an important component of thriving for almost all of the students in this study. A large body of previous research also highlights the positive role that friendships play in the lives of university/college students. The students who participated in this study identified various environmental barriers to friendship development including, large classes, type of residence, and student club efficiency. Given that friendships can impact thriving it is important that the university environment is conducive to friendship development. Overton (1997) suggests that there are several factors that determine whether a school setting is a friendship building environment; these factors include providing in-class opportunities for students to get to know one another, encouraging interaction, and providing fun activities that allow for peer interaction. Western University offers

numerous extra-curricular activities and programs. These programs and activities are potential sources of friendships for students, and staff participants reported that students are invited and encouraged to participate in activities via e-mails. Some students however noted that student clubs (which many students in this study looked to as a source of support and friendships) often do not function efficiently, as they fail to organize activities and therefore reduce students' opportunities for socialization and friendship development.

Devising strategies to resolve these barriers is advisable. If an effective monitoring system is not already in place for student clubs, implementing such a system would be useful. A very brief questionnaire that allows students to provide feedback on clubs may be a useful tool for improving efficiency. Such a tool may also capture incidents of discrimination and bullying, and allow these matters to be addressed. In relation to class size, encouraging group work where possible in tutorials can provide opportunities for first year students to get to know each other.

While there are environmental tensions that influence friendship development there are several person factors such as openness for friendships, shyness, and non-engagement in activities that affect friendship development opportunities. Magnusson (1995) notes that the individual is also a source of their development, and must be active, and engage in behaviours that facilitate positive interactions. Friendship development and associated strategies should to be promoted to first year students at the earliest possible stage. Harke (2012) suggests that where possible students should try to become acquainted with other first year students prior to entering university.

Allowing students more time during O-Week to socialize in smaller groups may also help them to secure friendships during the early stages of the transition.

In the Thriving Model the sub-category of effective coping emphasises the importance of managing stress and maintaining psychological well-being. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources" (p. 141). It is important to note that coping skills can be healthy, (for example exercise), or unhealthy (for example drug use or denial of problems). Coping skills would be especially important to the students in this study and their ability to thrive because of the amount of stress they described experiencing. For most students, effective coping was related to time management. Students noted that effectively managing their time reduced their level of stress. One student suggested that including a time management seminar during Orientation Week would be helpful. Since time management plays such an important role in effective coping, as well as the other sub-categories in the Thriving Model (e.g. connectedness, occupational engagement, academic success), providing students with time management education before school begins may help to reduce some of their time management difficulties, and increase their ability to thrive.

Using psychological and emotional self-care strategies are also components of effective coping. Students reported that engaging in strategies such as self-reflective writing and self-affection (defined by them as not being too hard on themselves) helped them to effectively cope with the stressors they encountered in university. Of note is that all of that students who reported engaging in such strategies were students who were

either currently seeing a psychologist or had undergone psychological counselling in the past (half through Western's Psychological Services). This points to the impact that counselling services can have in helping students to develop effective coping skills and to thrive. The results of this study, however, indicate that students are not always able to access psychological support services, finding ways to expand access to on campus psychological services is necessary. The Psychological Services department at Western University offers a psycho-educational lecture series and a variety of psychological groups for issues such as distress, emotional regulation, and anxiety. The lectures and groups are often limited to a small number of students and students in this study reported being waitlisted for some of the groups. Having video recordings of the lecture series available as an online resource for students could be considered, this would allow more students to be able to access the information shared in these sessions in a timely manner. Scripted videos (using student actors for confidentiality purposes) of the group sessions which have the highest demand should also be considered. The videos would allow students to gain information about employing effective coping skills and strategies.

Academic success was extremely important to thriving. It was the most frequent response provided by students. As noted previously, academic success is linked to self-concept for many students; however, students additionally explained that getting good grades made them feel as though they were able to conquer what at times seems like a very demanding academic system. Academic success therefore also contributed to their self-esteem.

The healthy behaviours sub-category describes the health behaviours identified by students as being important for thriving. There is large amount of literature on poor eating habits and reduced physical activity among university and college students. In this study eating habits and physical activity were affected by time management, finances, and guilty feelings about taking time off from studying. Helping students recognize the importance of time management before they enter university is important as it may assist them in engaging in healthy behaviours and thriving when they reach university. Stressing the importance of balance is also necessary to reduce some of the feelings of guilt students reported experiencing for taking time off from studying to cook and exercise.

Positive perspective refers to the manner in which students view difficult situations. Students who had a positive perspective did not experience academic setbacks and disappointments as crises, but instead saw them as learning experiences. These students also reported experiencing less stress. Although the importance of themes in qualitative research is not dependent on the number of people who identify the theme, it is noted that only a small number of students were identified as having a positive perspective. Perhaps the fact that 42% of the sample consisted of first year students who are less likely to have developed positive perspectives in the early stage of their university careers accounts for this. Teaching students how to reframe what they perceive as negative experiences (for example receiving a low grade) during the early stages of the transition may help to reduce some of the stress they experience and enable them to thrive.

Occupational participation relates to having a social life and engaging in activities that are enjoyable. Students suggested that they felt that school consumed too much of their time, and they had a strong desire to engage in non-academic social activities that were important to them. It was not surprising that students identified occupational participation as key to thriving given the high levels of stress they described. In addition, many students reported that after coming to university, they stopped participating in many of the activities in which they engaged in during high school, including spending time with their friends. Stressing the importance of balance to students during Orientation Week and throughout the semester could play a role in increasing occupational participation. Effective time management strategies are also necessary.

It is important to note that although some students identified most of the six sub-categories of the Thriving Model, all of the sub-categories of the model were not identified by each student. However, each student identified at least three sub-categories. This suggests that the pathway to thriving may be different across students. For example, physical activity was not identified as being important by many of the Asian students in this study. In addition, many first year students did not identify occupational participation, and positive perspective as components for thriving. It may be that academic success, connectedness, and effective coping are key issues at this stage of their university life, and that their pathway to thriving may change as they become more accustomed to university life. Although this model represents a balance of social, emotional, physical, psychological, academic, and occupational aspects, a student does not need to function highly in every area to thrive.

7.2.2   Comparison to Schreiner's Thriving Quotient

Schreiner's Thriving Quotient	Related to thriving in this study
Engaged Learning	X
Academic Determination	X
Positive Perspective	✓
Social Connectedness	✓
Diverse Citizenship	X

Schreiner's Thriving Quotient has five constructs: (1) engaged learning, (2) academic determination, (3) positive perspective, (4) diverse citizenship, and (5) social connectedness. Only two of the constructs from Schreiner's model emerged in this study. Engaged learning measures the degree to which students are energized by what they are learning, are meaningfully processing what happens in class, and continuing to think about it outside of class. When learning was discussed by the students in this study the conversation usually focused on learning material in order to be academically successful and obtain good grades. There were a few students who reported that academic success involved learning new and interesting material, but they did not indicate that they continued to think about the material outside of class.

Academic determination measures students' goal directedness, investment of effort, regulation of their own learning, and use of time. Most students in this study believed they invested a great deal of effort in their work and regulation of their time was important to them, although many students experienced difficulty with time management especially in first the year. Many 2nd to 4th year students indicated that they set goals as part of their time management strategy to complete course readings and assignments. Students also identified other academic goals such a getting good grades, or being

accepted to medical school. The other elements of goal directedness such as monitoring their behaviours, thoughts, and emotions, and decision making based on acquiring accurate knowledge (Bandura, 1986; Boekarts, de Koenig, & Vedder, 2006) did not appear to be present for some students, especially first year students. It was not clear from this study if students are self-regulated learners.

Positive perspective measures students' optimism, positive outlook on life, and optimistic way of viewing the world. There were a few students in this study who had a positive perspective and their perspective impacted on how they viewed their transition experiences. Having a positive perspective helped these students to overcome academic and social challenges.

Social connectedness measures students' involvement in healthy relationships and social support networks, whether on or off campus. Social connectedness was related to thriving for students in this study. Diverse citizenship measures students' desire to make a difference in the community around them, as well as their openness to differences in others. Diverse citizenship did not emerge as a significant issue in this study. Perhaps students are so focused on their academics that this is not a high priority for them. In addition, Canada is a multi-cultural society so some students may have been exposed to many different cultures and ethnicities before coming to university.

7.3   Other Theoretical Perspectives

7.3.1   Schlossberg's Theory

Nancy Schlossberg's theory of adult transitions served as another theoretical framework for this study. Schlossberg (2012) defined transitions as events or non-events that result in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. Schlossberg defined 3 types of transitions: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event. Anticipated transitions are events that individuals expect and can prepare for, while unanticipated transitions are unexpected and are typically experienced as negative and chaotic. Non-event transitions are events the individual expected to occur that did not transpire.

Schlossberg's theory provides an effective theoretical framework to analyse some of the findings of this study. The first layer of the Transitions -Tensions/ Interactions-Outcomes Model (found on page 90 of this thesis) was based on Schlossberg's theory. The results from this study confirmed many of the assumptions of Schlossberg's theory relating to the different types of transitions; however, not all of the assumptions were confirmed in this study. In addition, Schlossberg's theory is based on single transitions, while the data from this study suggest that students actually experience multiple transitions, an aspect that is not addressed by Schlossberg. The findings from the current study suggest that students experience three anticipated transitions, two non-event transitions, and ten unanticipated transitions during their first year at university. Many of the transitions occur within the first few weeks of entering university. These transitions are listed in Table 5.

Table 5.

Multiple transitions experienced by students when they transition to Western University

Anticipated Transitions	Unanticipated Transitions	Non-event Transitions
Leave high → Enter University School	Low difficulty → High requirements Low workload → Heavy workload 'A' student → Low grades/failure Teacher led → Independent study Teacher attachment → Distant relations Study habits → New learning skills Career decided → New career path Parental control → Self advocacy Quiet home study → Noisy residence Friends network → Loneliness	Active/Satisfying social life Large friend network
Leave home → Move to University		
Leave family → Independent Support Living		

The two non-event transitions were identified as not developing an active and satisfying social life, and not achieving a large friend network. Several students reported that they had envisioned themselves having an active social life when they entered university. They assumed they would be attending many parties, that they would go downtown to bars frequently, and that they would have many friends. For many students, these events did not occur and it resulted in disappointment and disillusionment. Victor et al. (2006) note, that college students who are not able to accomplish or achieve something that they desire often experience anxiety and feelings of loss. The realization that the expected transition did not, and likely will never occur, alters the way the students see themselves, and might also alter the way they behave. The students in this study did not articulate that they felt anxiety about the non-event transitions; however, they intimated that they experienced disappointment and confusion about why the events did not occur. The disappointment and confusion was articulated by one student who stated that not having a large friend group in first year was "a big setback", she had a large number of friends in high school and elementary

school, but she was unable to connect with other students including her roommates at university. She noted that during her first year she only had "one good friend".

The three anticipated transitions were defined as leaving high school to enter university, leaving home to enter the university community, and moving away from family support to independent living. According to Schlossberg, when transitions are anticipated, they are planned, self-initiated, and made with enough time to consider multiple options. The students in this study reported that they prepared for the transition of moving away from home, through shopping for items they would need at their new place of residence. It must be noted, however, that several students reported that they arrived at Western's student residence without many of the items they needed such as sheets for their bed. These students stated that they did not have a copy of the residence handbook which contains a list of all of the items students should bring with them. Students who had older siblings at university reported that they had all of the items they needed as their parents knew what was required based on previous experience. Western University's residence handbook which contains valuable information for students is available online, this should be communicated to students in admissions materials and follow up e-mails, if this is not already done.

Students reported varied experiences in relation to preparing for independent living. About half of the students in the study reported that they did not know how to do their own laundry when they moved away from home. Money management was also an issue for some students, a few students reported shopping excessively, but the most problematic area was tracking how much money they were spending on food. This issue was more prominent for students living in residence, who had a large sum of

money available through their residence meal plan. Studies have recommended that universities provide advising and programs relating to financial management. Studies have additionally found that students who discuss financial issues with their parents prior to entering university/college have better money management skills (Cude et al., 2006; Shim, Barber, Card, Xiao, & Serido, 2010). Such findings highlight the role that parents can play in helping to prepare their children for independent living.

The students in this study reported making some preparations for university life (shopping, preparing to move), their behaviours were congruent with Schlossberg's assumptions about anticipated transitions. However, there are areas where more attention is needed, to reduce some of the difficulties that students face when they move away from home to independent living at university.

Students experienced several unanticipated transitions. Students were unprepared for the transitions of moving from teacher led studies to independent study, from having a structured day to less structure, and various other unanticipated transitions. Students often experienced the unanticipated transitions as negative, disruptive, and sometimes crisis-like. According to Schlossberg, an important aspect of a transition is the manner in which it impacts the individual, specifically the individuals' roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. Schlossberg notes that the greater the impact, the longer it may take to move through the transition. Perhaps this explains why many students do not move from the Transition Stage to the Thriving Stage until the third of fourth year of university, and why some students never reach the Thriving Stage.

Many of the unanticipated transitions students experienced resulted from a lack of preparation and lack of knowledge about the reality of university life. Increased knowledge about the true nature of university life, and acquiring necessary life skills and some coping skills prior to entering university may help to reduce some of the unanticipated transitions students' experience, and may consequently reduce some the stress they experience. It is not possible to remove all of the stress associated with the transition to university, nor should that be a goal. As noted in the literature review, transitions are the part of life course, and significant growth and positive development can occur from addressing and coping with these life events.

7.3.2   Schlossberg's 4S System

All of the aspects of Schlossberg's 4S system (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) were affirmed in this study. *Situation* refers to how an individual views the transition, whether they view it positively or negatively. Those students who had a positive perspective and were able to reframe their experiences described experiencing less psychological distress. *Self* refers to the strengths and weaknesses the individual brings to the transition. Students who entered university with good time management skills and a more rigorous academic background reported having a less difficult transition. *Support* refers to the sources of support available to the person in transition*.* Schlossberg stated that interpersonal support systems are essential to successful adaptation. Support could be from a spouse or partner, family members, or institutions. In the current study, support systems that helped with student's adjustment also included friendships, sophs, and university support services. *Strategies* refer to the

methods individuals use to cope. Students who lack the ability to manage their emotions and reactions to the stress of the transition appear to have more difficult transitions.

7.4 Magnusson's Holistic Person-Context Interaction Theory

Magnusson's theory (1998) was utilised as the theoretical framework for the second layer of the Transitions-Tensions/Interactions-Outcomes Model. Magnusson proposes that development is driven by the interaction between the mental, biological, and behavioural person factors and the social, cultural, and physical factors of the environment. According to Magnusson, individual development cannot be understood without knowledge of the environment, while the environment cannot be assessed without knowledge of the individual. He also noted that changes within one system can impact the functioning of the other system.

Magnusson's theory that development is facilitated by interaction between the person and environment was affirmed in this study. The data from this study provide several examples of how interactions between the person and the environment can affect thriving outcomes and student development. Two extensive examples describing how the interactions between student organisations, large classes, residence environment, and personality type can affect connectedness, coping, and occupational participation were presented in the explication the model on page 94 of this thesis. Other data from the study suggest that interactions between students and support services can impact whether students access help or seek future help. In addition, interactions between students and residence environments have the potential to impact academic success.

An interesting dynamic that emerged within the study was that some staff placed the responsibility on students for managing their own development, while some students tended to suggest that responsibility for their development rested with the university's structures. Magnusson's theory, however, clearly states that development is dependent on both the person and the environment. The university must provide opportunities for students to develop and thrive through a variety of accessible services and activities, but the intensity with which students take advantage of the opportunities will determine the level of their development and thriving. The goal of both the university and the students must be to balance and resolve the tensions that impact thriving outcomes. The university must resolve the barriers within its environment, while the students' role must be clearly communicated to them at the beginning of university and throughout their student life. The opportunities to connect with other students, and learn from the support systems within their environment must be clearly outlined, and the skills to do this must be developed (Benson & Scales, 2009).

7.5 Future Considerations and Limitations

7.5.1 What This Research Adds to the Literature

The aim of this study was to examine the transition experiences of students, to determine the factors that hinder or facilitate the transition to university and to understand how students' conceptualize thriving. This study shows that there are important interrelationships among many of the issues that affect first year students. In addition, this study calls for a conceptualisation of the transition to university from a single transition to a multiple transition life event. The concept of multiple transitions has

been previously explored by Meleis, Sawyer, Im, Hilfinger, and Schumacher (2001), who created a middle range theory for nursing and health conditions. The authors concluded that when people experience ill health, they experience multiple transitions at the same time as opposed to just a single transition. Reframing the transition to university from a single transition to simultaneous multiple transitions more adequately captures the multiple challenges that students encounter. This may help universities to evaluate their programs to determine if they are optimally addressing students' needs.

Most other studies which examine the transition to university use Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), as the sole theoretical framework, this study, however, uses multiple theories to analyse the data. A person-environment theoretical framework was used to analyse how person-environment factors can hinder or facilitate student development, specifically thriving. Examining the interaction and interrelationships between person factors, student experiences, and organisational factors allows both the university and the students to develop solutions to reduce or eliminate the tensions that exist, thus ensuring that the interactions between the person and the environment facilitate thriving.

This research also adds to the relatively small body of research on thriving in university transitions. Although Schreiner's (2010) Thriving Quotient was not utilised, two constructs from the Thriving Quotient (positive perspective and social connectedness) were identified as factors that contributed to thriving for the students in this study. The students however also identified academic success, physical health, and occupational participation as being important to them. The results indicate that, for

some students, thriving (optimal functioning) includes more than psychological and interpersonal functioning.

Finally, this research adds to the very small body of Canadian research on students' university transition experiences. This research provides further insight and understanding about the first year transition experience for high school students, and it is particularly timely given the changes in the demographics of university students and the mental health crises on some Canadian campuses. Although there are many similarities with findings from US research, having a uniquely Canadian perspective is important as the two educational systems, cultures, and university environments are somewhat dissimilar.

7.5.2   Future Research

The sample for this study was large and diverse within the context of qualitative research. The majority of the students in this study reported experiencing negative transitions. A more specific qualitative study targeting students who had positive transitions could provide greater insight into the characteristics of those students, the nature of their person-environment interactions, and the factors that facilitated their transition experience.

The results of this study suggest that students are not well prepared for university. There are currently no measures of university readiness. Such a measure may provide information to help high school guidance counsellors, high school students, and university support services staff determine areas of particular importance for individual students and the general incoming student body. A readiness measure may

also help those students who are not ready for university (and their parents) to take steps to better prepare for the transition. A few students in this study indicated that they knew they were not ready for university, but felt pressured by their parents to attend.

Finally, the participants in this study made many noteworthy remarks about Western's Orientation Week. A mixed methods study to explore orientation programming and to pilot test a new or modified program merits consideration.

7.5.3   Strengths and Limitations of This Study

This study included a diverse sample of students from varied backgrounds: 43% Causcasian, 31% Asian, and 14.5% South East Asian, students' family income was also varied. The student participants were from six different Faculties, but only a small number of students from smaller Faculties such as Information and Media Studies, and Music, participated in the study. This study also sought the views of staff members who work in a variety of campus support services and this added further insight into students' transition experiences and person-environment tensions and interactions. Limitations to this study must also be acknowledged. This study was conducted at one institution with the unique characteristic of being a university that attracts high achieving students. The entrance requirements for the university may well be an important factor that defines the nature of the study sample and their academic expectations. Further, given the size of Western University and other characteristics such as being a research intensive, and medical and doctoral university, the findings may be less applicable to smaller universities, or universities that only offer undergraduate programs.

The data collected for this study are self-reported and the possibility of bias must be entertained. Self-selection bias must also be considered. This occurs in non-random samples where individuals voluntarily participate in research and the 'sample chooses itself'. When this occurs certain characteristics may be over-represented. It is taken into consideration that this study may have appealed to students who had negative transition experiences as it provided an opportunity to discuss their experiences.

Chapter 8

8.   Implications for Policy and Practice

This section will recommend possible solutions to address the major challenges to transition and thriving identified by the sample of students of staff who participated in this study. It is recognised that additional research with a larger representative sample is needed to confirm the results and allow for generalization, the recommendations are therefore offered within the context of this study's sample and results. As noted in the Results and Discussion section tensions and interactions between the person and the environment affect thriving and account for many of the transition issues encountered by students. It is therefore recommended that a whole systems analytical approach be undertaken to devise solutions to the problems identified in this study. It is further suggested that aspects of the Healthy Universities Initiative (HUI) be considered, as that initiative applies a whole systems approach to health and wellbeing in universities.

The whole systems approach involves identifying the various components of a system and assessing the interrelationships between them. According to whole systems proponents, a narrow focus on one system ignores the impact of the systems on each other, and can lead to solutions that inadvertently create more problems. Alternatively, examining the interrelationships between components allows for more inclusive solutions (Reid, Compton, Grossman, & Fanjiang 2005). The whole systems approach has been adopted by the Healthy Universities Initiative (Dooris & Doherty, 2010) which originated in the United Kingdom. The aim of the initiative is to help universities become more supportive of health and wellbeing. Within the framework of HUI, universities are viewed as dynamic, complex systems that have inputs and outputs that impact

interconnectedness. The HUI proposes that integration between elements within the university system is necessary to create effective interconnectedness. A key aspect of the Healthy Universities Initiative is that in order for health and wellbeing (or thriving) to become a natural part of university life, it must be connected to the university's view of its principal agenda. Health and wellbeing must therefore be embedded within the university's policies and strategic plan.

Following the tenets of the whole systems approach, the recommendations are framed within the context of the micro, meso, and macro systems. Micro refers to individuals; meso focuses on small to medium groups, such as schools and neighbourhoods; and macro refers to changes within large systems, such as advocating for changes in government policy. Figure 13 below provides a visual representation of the systems and interrelationships within this study that will be explored.
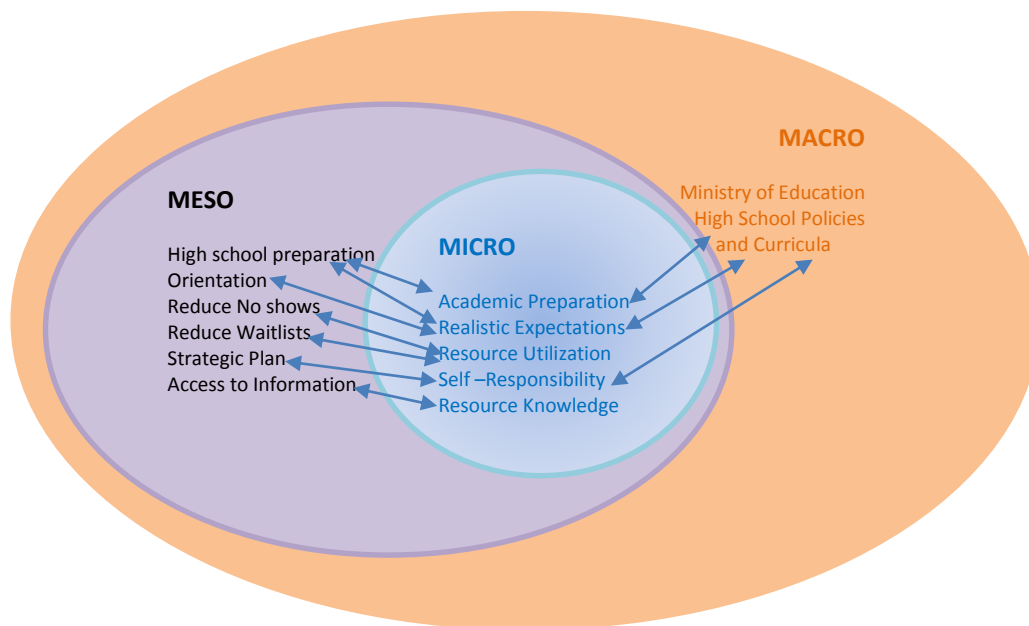
Figure 13. Interrelationships between the micro, meso, and macro systems that impact transition and thriving.

8.1 Macro System: Ministry of Education - High School Policies and Curricula

The results from this study confirm the findings from other studies that suggest that high schools are not requiring students to engage in the academic activities that would effectively prepare them for university level academics. This lack of preparation results in students being stressed from trying to adapt to an unfamiliar academic environment and culture, while trying to maintain the grades they attained in high school. Several studies examining college and university professors' views of high school preparation show that professors are highly critical of the high school system (OCUFA, 2010; Saddler & Tai, 2000). Research by Kirst and Bracco (2004) suggests that the root of the problem lies in poor collaboration between high schools and universities. Kirst and Bracco (2004) concluded that the two systems operate independently, leaving students to negotiate preparation on their own. The results from Kirst and Bracco (2004), as well as the results from this study suggest that universities must move beyond frustration and complaining to solution-focussed action if changes are to be made that help the high schools, the students, and the universities. Greater collaboration and consultation between high schools and universities about the high school curriculum and grading practices is needed. Universities also need to engage with high school boards and government officials, and present evidence of the implications of the current high school system on educational and mental health outcomes among university students. In addition, since many high school teachers have also indicated that they are frustrated with the high school curriculum and other policies

and structures such as no zero policies (Fushell, 2013; Zwaagstra, Clifton & Long, 2010), presenting a united voice to lobby for changes may produce the desired result.

Engaging in a discussion about high school curricula is not a task for Western University alone, professors at universities across Ontario and Canada have commented about high school standards and poorly prepared first year students (OCUFA, 2010). Efforts to start a committee to review the Ontario high school curriculum may be a productive step towards reducing the academic gap between high schools and university. The committee would need to consist of high school teachers, university professors, and representatives from the Ministry of Education.

Macro level changes often require long term efforts before change is apparent. In the interim, allowing students to visit universities and sit in on classes could be helpful. The Western Initiative for Scholarly Excellence, which allows high school students to take one university course without paying tuition, is good exemplar of such an opportunity, but is limited to 100 students. Collaborating with high schools to introduce students to university course outlines would familiarize them with the expected workload, including the amount of reading, and impress upon them the importance and value of time management.

8.1.2   Meso: High School Preparation - Pre-University Counselling

Other issues that should be jointly addressed by universities and high schools are self-advocacy and guidance counsellor pre-university preparation. The current ratio of guidance counsellors to students in Ontario is 2.6 per 1000 students. This ratio could

well result in guidance counsellors being constrained in the amount of time they can dedicate to individual counselling for the transition to university. It would be easy to suggest that universities and high schools join together to advocate for an increase in the number of guidance counsellors in schools; however, given the current economy and government constraints, a positive outcome is unlikely. Collaborating with high schools to help guidance counsellors design workshops and programs that can help large numbers of students from different high schools would reduce the need for individual counselling. Working with guidance counsellors on topics to be addressed and having staff from the university make presentations or be present for a question and answer session at a workshop could be helpful. Perhaps this could be an Ontario-wide initiative where Western would target schools in London, and other universities would work with high schools in their surrounding areas. Self-advocacy skills and self-responsibility should also be included in these programs as they were highlighted as issues that affect help seeking behaviours among university students.

An Ontario wide initiative involving the developing workshops and programs for high school students would require significant coordination. Reaching schools that are located a significant distance away from a university could also be problematic. Another alternative is educational transition planning. This is usually used to help students with disabilities plan for post-secondary life, including independent living, and the transition to university. Assessments are used to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses, and to help identify transition related skills needed for success in post-secondary education. As the data in this study suggest that students have knowledge gaps and skills gaps that impact their level of preparation for university, transitional

planning should be considered for all high school students who plan to enter university.

As the ratio of students to guidance counsellors is low, an online program with

assessments in areas such as time manage, conflict resolution, and coping skills could

be utilised. The program would also include interactive skill-based sessions to help

students improve in their areas of weakness.

8.1.3   Micro/Meso System: Improve Access to Support Services Information, Reduce No Shows, and Wait Lists

8.1.3.1   Improve Access to Support Services Information

Both students and staff suggested that creating one central website where

students can find all of the information related to support services would reduce the

difficulty students experience when they are trying to find formal support. The website

could contain a list of all support services under separate headings, such as physical

health, mental health, and academic support, with links that would take the students to a

specific website with more detailed information. The information on the website should

clearly outline the purpose of the service as students indicated that they were often

unsure of "what the services do". They therefore made several calls before finding the

service that they needed, or did not contact any of the services. This millennial

generation relies heavily on technology, consequently, technology should be used to its

fullest capacity as a tool for facilitating access to information. Reducing the amount of

printed materials provided to students when they enter university and replacing the

materials with effective web-based resources can reduce the confusion, and feelings of information overload students experience.

8.1.3.2   Reduce Wait Lists

Many first year students who reported being waitlisted were either trying to attend anti-anxiety workshops or wanted to see a counsellor for homesickness related issues. What was noticed throughout the data collection period is that many students were lonely and homesick, but they believed that they were the only individual who was experiencing these feelings as everyone else seemed happy. Several students expressed gratitude for the focus groups as an outlet to discuss their experiences and for helping them to normalize their feelings. Through the focus groups they were able to discover that most other students encountered similar issues. Having trained residence advisors conduct at least one group session on their floor could help first year students to discuss their feelings and transition experiences. Sophs should also share their experiences in these group sessions to normalize the experience and encourage sharing. Having such sessions may possibly reduce the number of students seeking appointments with Psychological Services during September and October for minor issues that do not necessarily require professional psychological intervention.

Another possible solution could be to increase part-time time staff during peak periods and allow part-time staff to provide evening services to reduce the scheduling conflicts that students highlighted. However, the limits to university funding are acknowledged. Consequently, strategies must focus on the most efficient and cost-effective efforts. An additional option is web-based intervention, some universities in the

UK, Australia, and a few in the US, provide mental health intervention via online courses. A systematic review by Farrier et al. (2013) has found that online interventions for certain mental health problems are helpful for students in university settings, although more high research quality trials are needed to substantiate this finding.

8.1.3.3   Reduce No Shows

To help reduce no shows at Psychological Services and Learning Skills, the method used by Western's Student Health Services and other medical facilities could be employed. Most medical facilities require 24 hours notice for appointment cancellation; this allows individuals who are waitlisted to be called to fill the cancelled appointments. Studies show that effective cancellation policies (Huang & Zuniga, 2014) and telephone reminders, (by a person rather than automated) (Hashim, Frances, & Fiscella, 2001) are the most effective methods of reducing no shows and increasing fill rates. In addition, several universities and colleges in the US have implemented text message alerts, email reminders, and tracking software which allow students to cancel their counselling appointments online. Universities in Canada (e.g. University of New Brunswick, Concordia University) and the colleges in US have also implemented penalties for missed counselling appointments such as no show fees, and 3 strike policies which temporarily suspend the provision of counselling services to students who miss 3 appointments or require them to use drop in services. Some universities and colleges have a 1 or 2 strike policy. Such penalties are not being recommended at this time, however, a review of their effectiveness could be considered.

An issue raised by first year students in thus study was that they were offered the option to seek mental health services off-campus, but because they were unfamiliar with London, they were not comfortable taking the bus to attempt to find services. Consequently, they preferred to be waitlisted. Collaborating with off-campus services so that off-campus services have a presence during Orientation Week may help students feel more comfortable seeking off campus services. Providing students with bus information (a common complaint in this study) through a session from London Transit Commission would be a helpful compliment to such a session.

8.1.4   Orientation, Expectations, and Academic Preparation

As noted in the Results and Discussion chapter, Orientation Week impacts students' social and academic expectations, in ways that are not entirely positive. Given the number of negative comments from students about the content and functioning of Orientation Week consideration of a process-based, an outcomes-based, and a goals-based evaluation of orientation are recommended. Process-based evaluations focus on the implementation process, while outcomes-based evaluations address whether an organization is utilizing appropriate activities to address identified needs and outcomes. Goal-based evaluations examine the extent to which programs are meeting pre-determined goals or objectives. Examining the goals of Orientation Week is extremely important as program goals are key to the development of a successful program. Program goals describe what the program intends to accomplish and what problems it will resolve; the goals should be specific, measureable, and, achievable.

In addition to Orientation Week, Western University may also consider implementing a semester long orientation/transition course. Such courses are common at many US colleges and universities; in Canada, Simon Fraser University and Queen's University have implemented similar courses. Research has found that first-year seminars can facilitate students' academic and social integration into college life (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Using the results from this study, an orientation course was developed by the researcher; an outline for the course can be found in Appendix M. It is acknowledged that Western University accepts over 4,000 new undergraduate students every year and that it may not be feasible to offer such a course to all first year students. An interactive online version of a first year seminar course could be also be useful, as studies have found positive effects of online courses in time management (Chiauzzi et al., 2008) and binge drinking prevention (Chiauzzi, Green, Lord, Thum, & Goldstein, 2005) among college students. Offering online modules that address balanced living, time management, and friendship making strategies can even be taken prior to starting university.

8.1.5   Meso System/Micro System: Strategic plan, Self Responsibility, Active Engagement

As stated earlier, a key aspect of the Healthy Universities Initiative (HUI) is the inclusion of health and wellbeing policies in a university's strategic plan. The HUI suggests that addressing health in the strategic plan must go beyond a statement about health and wellbeing. The plan should include assessment of needs and capacities, contributions from the whole university community, a list of priorities, goals for

implementation and evaluation, and methods to include student health and wellbeing in research and course content. The designers of the HUI assume that including health and wellbeing in the strategic plan will ensure high-level leadership, and high visibility of student health-related projects.

Western University's strategic plan does not include this level of detailed information in any area. Rather, the university's strategic plan is complemented by the strategic plans of individual Faculties and units, which may include more detailed information about student health projects. Including goals and priorities that are related to creating an optimum environment that facilitates successful transitions to university within the relevant unit strategic plans would be appropriate. This would acknowledge the importance of student health and wellbeing during the transition to university at the institutional level. The goals and priorities could also specify that creating an optimum environment not only includes the provision of necessary services, but also encourages students to take an active role in their health and wellbeing during the transition. The HUI also recommends that a committee should be put in place to develop and implement plans based on the goals and priorities outlined in the strategic plan.

8.2   Summary

The National College Health Assessment (2014) shows that student health and wellbeing is continuing to decline as students struggle to manage increasing levels of stress. This study suggests that a variety of factors in the micro, meso, and macro systems affect students' health and wellbeing, and their ability to thrive when they enter Western University. A whole systems approach is recommended to identify, implement,

and support effective resolutions. A possible whole systems framework to create an enhanced health and wellbeing environment at Western University is provided below in Figure 14.

MACRO

- Collaborate with community health partners
- Collaborate with Ministry of Education/high schools

OUTCOMES

- Increased collaboration across institutions
- Resource sharing
- Orient students to public services
- Reduce burden on university services
- Increased academic preparation

MICRO

- Identify key issues (include student input)
- Review current programs and services
- Create plan for student wellbeing/successful transition (with student input)
- Develop committee to implement, oversee, and evaluate plan
- Increase health and wellbeing information in curricula
- Secure external funding for health initiatives
- Partner with students to expand health prevention efforts

OUTCOMES

- Create an environment that influences wellbeing and thriving
- Facilitate student empowerment
- Timely access to support services
- Improve access to support services

MESO

- Acknowledge personal responsibilities
- Increase effective resource utilization
- Increase coping skills

OUTCOMES

- Develop skills and capacity that facilitate thriving and well-being
- Student empowerment
- Increase in pro-active behaviours

Figure 14. A whole systems framework for improving thriving and health and wellbeing at Western University

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Appendices
Appendix A Western University Non-Medical Research Board Approval

Western Research

Research Ethics

Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Linda Miller
File Number: 104022
Review Level: Delegated
Approved Local Adult Participants: 128
Approved Local Minor Participants: 0
Protocol Title: A Transition Needs Assessment of Students Transitioning from Secondary Education to Post Secondary Education at Western University
Department & Institution: Health Sciences\Occupational Therapy, Western University
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: August 16, 2013 **Expiry Date:** August 31, 2014
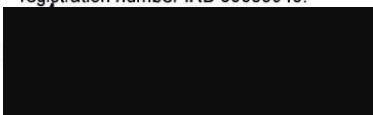**Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:**

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol		2013/07/05
Other	Key informant list	2013/08/08
Other	Staff focus group schedule	2013/08/08
Other	Student focus group schedule	2013/08/08
Other	Staff demographics questionnaire	2013/08/08
Other	Student Demographics questionnaire	2013/08/08
Recruitment Items	Recruitment Advertisement	2013/08/08
Recruitment Items	Recruitment poster	2013/08/08
Recruitment Items	Email script staff	2013/08/08
Recruitment Items	Student Email script	2013/08/08
Letter of Information & Consent	Consent Form	2013/08/08
Revised Letter of Information & Consent	Letter of information	2013/08/08
Revised Letter of Information & Consent	Letter of information	2013/08/08

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Health Sciences Research Involving Human Subjects (HSREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the Health Canada/ICH Good Clinical Practice Practices: Consolidated Guidelines; and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has reviewed and granted approval to the above referenced revision(s) or amendment(s) on the approval date noted above. The membership of this REB also complies with the membership requirements for REB's as defined in Division 5 of the Food and Drug Regulations.

The ethics approval for this study shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the HSREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the University of Western Ontario Updated Approval Request Form.

Members of the HSREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the HSREB.

The Chair of the HSREB is Dr. Joseph Gilbert. The HSREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000940.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

Erika Basile	Grace Kelly	Vikki Tran	Shantel Walcott

Appendix B - Western University Non-Medical Research Board Approval Revision

Appendix C Student Letter of Information

Western HealthSciences

Letter of Information – Student Participants

Western Research

Research Ethics

Use of Human Participants - Revision Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Linda Miller
File Number: 104022
Review Level: Delegated
Protocol Title: A Transition Needs Assessment of Students Transitioning from Secondary Education to Post Secondary Education at Western University
Department & Institution: Health Sciences\Occupational Therapy, Western University
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: October 25, 2013 **Expiry Date:** August 31, 2014
Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Recruitment Items	Revised Student Email Script for Recruitment	

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Health Sciences Research Involving Human Subjects (HSREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the Health Canada/ICH Good Clinical Practice Practices: Consolidated Guidelines; and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has reviewed and granted approval to the above referenced revision(s) or amendment(s) on the approval date noted above. The membership of this REB also complies with the membership requirements for REB's as defined in Division 5 of the Food and Drug Regulations.

The ethics approval for this study shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the HSREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the University of Western Ontario Updated Approval Request Form.

Members of the HSREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the HSREB.

The Chair of the HSREB is Dr. Joseph Gilbert. The HSREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000940.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

Erika Basile	Grace Kelly	Vikki Tran

Study Title: A Transition Needs Assessment of Students Transitioning from
Secondary Education to Western University

Researchers: Lisa Cossy, PhD Candidate, Health and Rehabilitation Sciences
Graduate Program
Linda Miller, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences,
Janice Miller-Polgar, Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences,
Angela Mandich, Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study examining undergraduate students' experiences of the transition from secondary education to university. The purpose of this study is to gather information on: (1) the transition experiences and needs of students, (2) the issues that impact undergraduate students' transition to university life, (3) the transition services offered by the university to support students and (4) gaps in support services and information. Data will be collected through staff and student focus groups; the data collected will be utilised to inform the development of a measure to evaluate transition preparedness from secondary education to university. This study is a part of Lisa Cossy's doctoral dissertation and is supervised by Dr. Linda Miller.

Study Background

Previous research has revealed that the transition from secondary education to university life has been difficult for many students as they are moving away from their childhood home and from an established network of friends and other social supports. The transition requires students to adapt to a new environment where they must cope with daily challenges, such as making new friends, living with strangers and managing a higher academic work load and assuming responsibility for their personal care The experience can lead to stress and physical and mental health concerns. This topic has been studied extensively in the U.S, but, there is little Canadian research on the issue. Through this study we hope to make a significant contribution to Canadian literature on the transition from secondary education to university; More importantly, however, we hope to provide universities with information to assist them in providing even better transition support services for their students. In addition, the information acquired in the study will inform the development of a measure to evaluate students' readiness for the transition from secondary education to university life.

What Does Participation in this Study Involve? Where Will this study Take Place?

As a participant, you will complete a brief demographics questionnaire, where you will provide information such as your first name, faculty, and year of program. The demographics questionnaire will provide us with basic information about you that will be useful for our data analyses and interpretations. Sample questions include from the focus group include "Think back to when you first entered university, what was most challenging or stressful for you"? "What did you find to be most helpful in adjusting to university life"? "How did you manage stress, did this work well for you"? "Tell me about orientation, did you find the information to be useful"?

Participant Initials _____

 "What information was most useful and what was not useful in helping you adjust to university"?

The focus group will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes (a 10 to 15 minutes break will be provided). It will be conducted in the Qualitative Methodologies Research Lab at Elborn College (UWO). Focus groups will consist of 5 to 10 participants. All interviews and focus groups will be conducted in English. Each focus group will be audio-taped and transcribed into a written format for further data analysis. The transcribed data will not contain any personal information that could identify you. **If you do not wish to be audio taped, you should not participate in this study.**

After the focus group is complete, we may contact you by email only to ensure that our interpretations of the information collected from you are accurate. However, you are not required to agree to be contacted afterwards in order to participate in the focus group. In the consent form attached, please indicate if you prefer to be contacted or not contacted after your participation in the focus group.

Who is Eligible to Participate in this Study?

We are interested in having up to 60 to 80 student participants in this study. Any undergraduate student between the ages of 17 to 24 is eligible to participate in this study.

Confidentiality and Informed Consent

Focus group participants will be asked to keep everything that is discussed within the focus confidential. All of the information collected by the researchers will remain confidential. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used and no information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your explicit consent to the disclosure. Only individuals directly involved with this study (that is, the researchers identified above) will have access to any information that could reveal your identity. The one exception is where the representatives of the University of Western Ontario Health Sciences Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

Data Storage and Security Measures

The recorded focus group session, transcribed information, and any identifying information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Miller's research laboratory in the School of Occupational Therapy at the University of Western Ontario. The transcribed data and any identifying information will be maintained in separate, secure locations. Any electronic data or files will be stored on password protected computers. The recordings and corresponding transcripts will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the study through a professional shredding company. If you agree to participate, we request that you sign the attached consent form. If you would like a copy of the summary of results upon completion of the study, please indicate this to one of the study investigators. We will record your name and contact information on a page separate from other information we collect.

Participant Initials _____

Are There any Benefits or Risks Associated with Participating in this Study?

There are no direct benefits to you for your participation in this research. Refreshments will be provided and your participation in the study may help reveal information that may help the university better understand the transition needs of students and address any gaps in service provision.

There are no known risks, harms or discomforts associated with participating in this study. However you may experience emotional reactions during the discussion if you or other students recount difficult transition experiences. At least one facilitator will be present at all times before, during and after the focus group to address any potential concerns. You will be provided with printed information about on campus counselling services and you will be referred to appropriate counseling resources should you become distressed.

Will I receive compensation for this study?
Each student will be given an honorarium of $10.00 for participating, you will also be automatically be entered into a draw to win $200.00 worth of gift cards from Western bookstore (e.g. 4 draws of $50.00 gift certificates)

Study Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future academic status. If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact Dr. Linda Miller at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or by e-mail at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact the Office of Research ethics at 519-661-3036 or by email at ethics@uwo.ca.

This letter is for you to keep

Participant Initials _____

Appendix D Staff Letter of Information

Western
HealthSciences

Letter of Information – Staff Participants

Study Title: A Transition Needs Assessment of Students Transitioning from
Secondary Education to Western University

Researchers: Lisa Cossy, PhD Candidate, Health and Rehabilitation Sciences
Graduate Program
Linda Miller, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences
Janice Miller-Polgar, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences
Angela Mandich, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences

<u>Introduction</u>

You are invited to participate in a research study examining undergraduate students' experiences of the transition from secondary education to university. The purpose of this study is to gather information on: (1) the transition experiences and needs of students, (2) the issues that impact undergraduate students' transition to university life, (3) the transition services offered by the university to support students and (4) gaps in support services and information. Data will be collected through staff and student focus groups; the data collected will be utilised to inform the development of a measure to evaluate transition preparedness from secondary education to university. This study is a part of Lisa Cossy's doctoral dissertation and is supervised by Dr. Linda Miller.

<u>Study Background</u>

Previous research has revealed that the transition from secondary education to university life has been difficult for many students as they are moving away from their childhood home and from an established network of friends and other social supports. The transition requires students to adapt to a new environment where they must cope with daily challenges, such as making new friends, living with strangers and managing a higher academic work load and assuming responsibility for their personal care The experience can lead to stress and physical and mental health concerns. This topic has been studied extensively in the U.S, but, there is little Canadian research on the issue. Through this study we hope to make a significant contribution to Canadian literature on the transition from secondary education to university; More importantly, however, we hope to provide universities with information to assist them in providing even better transition support services for their students.

Participant Initials _____

In addition, the information acquired in the study will inform the development of a measure to evaluate students' readiness for the transition from secondary education to university life.

What Does Participation in this Study Involve? Where Will this study Take Place?

As a participant, you will complete a brief demographics questionnaire, where you will provide information such as your first name, department and number of years working with providing undergraduate student services. The demographics questionnaire will provide us with basic but non-identifying information about you that will be useful for our data analyses and interpretations. Sample questions include from the focus group include "Based on your experience (in your specific area of work) what are the major problems students experience when transitioning from secondary education to university? Tell me about the services you provide here to help students with transition? Given the issues you see students experiencing do you think that there are other services that need to be provided within your department?

The focus group will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. It will be conducted in a office in your department. Focus groups will consist of 6 to 8 participants. All interviews and focus groups will be conducted in English. Each focus group will be audio-taped and transcribed into a written format for further data analysis. The transcribed data will not contain any personal information that could identify you. **If you do not wish to be audio taped, you should not participate in this study.**

After the focus group is complete, we may contact you by email only to ensure that our interpretations of the information collected from you are accurate. However, are not required to agree to be contacted afterwards in order to participate in the focus group . In the consent form attached, please indicate if you prefer to be contacted or not contacted after your participation in the focus group.

Who is Eligible to Participate in this Study?

We are interested in 36 to 48 staff participants in this study. We are specifically seeking, residence managers, residence dons, residence advisors, residence counsellors, academic leadership programmers, program coordinators, psychologists, counsellors, learning skills counsellors, orientation counsellors, counsellors from international and exchange student services and indigenous services, nurses and doctors. These individuals must have continuous contact with undergraduates (providing services) or with designing support services and should be employed in their department or in a similar capacity at another university or college for at least one undergraduate academic year (8 months).

Confidentiality and Informed Consent

Focus group participants will be asked to keep everything that is discussed within the focus confidential. All of the information collected by the researchers will remain confidential. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used and no information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your explicit consent to the disclosure. Only individuals directly involved with this study (that is, the researchers

Participant Initials _____

identified above) will have access to any information that could reveal your identity. The one exception is where the representatives of the University of Western Ontario Health Sciences Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research

Data Storage and Security Measures

The recorded focus group session, transcribed information and any identifying information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Miller's research laboratory in the School of Occupational Therapy at the University of Western Ontario. The transcribed data and any identifying information will be maintained in separate, secure locations. Any electronic data or files will be stored in password protected computers. The recordings and corresponding transcripts will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the study through a professional shredding company. If you agree to participate, we will request that you sign the attached consent form. If you would like a copy of the summary of results upon completion of the study, please indicate this to one of the study investigators. We will record your name and contact information on a page separate from other information we collect.

Are There any Benefits or Risks Associated with Participating in this Study?

There are no direct benefits to you for the participation in this research. Refreshments will be provided and your participation in the study may, however, help reveal information that may help the university better understand the transition needs of students and address any gaps in service provision.
There are no known risks, harms or discomforts associated with participating in this study. However you may experience emotional reactions during the discussion if you recount difficult student transition experiences that you may have witnessed. At least one facilitator will be present at all times before, during and after the focus group to address any potential concerns. You will be provided with printed information about on campus counselling services and you will be referred to appropriate counseling resources should you become distressed.

Will I receive compensation for this study?
No, but by participating, you will automatically be entered into a draw to win $200.00 worth of gift cards from Western's bookstore (i.e. 4 draws of $50.00 gift certificates).

Study Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future employment status. If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact Dr. Linda Miller at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or by e-mail at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact the Office of Research ethics at 519-661-3036 or by email at ethics@uwo.ca.

This letter is for you to keep

Participant Initials _____

Appendix E Consent Form

Consent Form

Study Title: A Transition Needs Assessment of Students Transitioning from
Secondary Education to Western University

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participants Name (Please Print):

Signature: Date:

Person Obtaining Signature:

Signature: Date:

Please check one of the following:
- ❑ I agree to be contacted once the study is completed to ensure information is accurate
- ❑ I do not agree to be contacted once the study is completed to ensure information is complete

Appendix F Student Recruitment E-Mail

<u>Email Script for Recruitment – Student</u>

Subject Line: Study Invitation: Tell us about your transition from high school to Western

You are being invited to participate in a study that Lisa Cossy, (PhD candidate) and Dr. Linda Miller, (supervisor) are conducting. The study involves participating in a focus group discussion where students will discuss their experience of transitioning to university and their opinions on the transition support and information provided to them. The focus groups are expected to last 60 to 90 minutes and will be conducted on campus at Elborn College (UWO). We will also be conducting a limited number of individual interviews for students who wish to participate but are unable to participate in a focus group. Refreshments will be provided. All students who participate will be given an honorarium of $10.00 and will also be entered into a draw to win one of four $50.00 Bookstore gift cards

If you would like more information on this study or would like to receive a letter of information about this study, please contact the researcher using the contact information below.

Lisa Cossy B.A, MSc. PhD candidate
Health and Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Program, UWO
E-mail :
Phone :

Appendix G Staff Recruitment Email

Email Script for Recruitment - Staff

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research on the transition from secondary education to university

You are being invited to participate in a study that Lisa Cossy, (PhD candidate) and Dr. Linda Miller, (supervisor) are conducting. The study involves participating in a focus group discussion where your expert information on student transition and transition support services provided by Western University will be discussed. The focus groups are expected to last 45 to 60 minutes and will be conducted on campus. Refreshments will be provided. All staff members who participate will be entered into a draw to win one of four $50.00 Bookstore gift cards

If you would like more information on this study or would like to receive a letter of information about this study please contact the researcher using the contact information given below.

Lisa Cossy B.A, MSc. PhD candidate
Health and Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Program, UWO
E-mail :
Phone:

Appendix H Student Demographic Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE - Students

First Name:

Age: Faculty:

Program: Year of Study:

Student Status: ☐Full Time   ☐Part Time

In which subject area(s) is your major or specialization? _____

☐I do not have a major at this time

Civil Status: ☐ Single   ☐ Married

I am an international student: ☐Yes   ☐No

I am registered as a student with a disability? ☐Yes   ☐No

During your first year, did you (do you) live: ☐ On campus   ☐ Off campus alone
☐ Off campus with roommates ☐ Off campus with parents/guardians
☐ Off campus with spouse/partner

I commute to Western from outside of London?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Are you the first among your siblings to attend university?
☐Yes   ☐No
☐I do not have siblings

Did your parents or guardians attend a university?
Mother ☐Yes   ☐No
Father ☐Yes   ☐No
Female Guardian ☐Yes   ☐No   ☐N/A
Male Guardian   ☐Yes   ☐No   ☐N/A

How are your tuition expenses paid for? Tick all that apply
☐Family   ☐Loans   ☐Scholarship   ☐Self funded

How are your living expenses paid for? Tick all that apply
☐Family   ☐Loans   ☐Scholarship   ☐Self funded

How are your personal expenses paid for? Tick all that apply
☐Family ☐Loans ☐Scholarship ☐Self funded

What is your family's total yearly income? (Canadian dollars)
Less than $50,000 ☐up to $50,000 ☐$50,000 to $100,000
☐$100,101 to 150,000 ☐above $150,000

During your university studies have you ever been placed on academic probation?
☐ Yes ☐ N o

Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental health problem?
☐ Yes before coming to Western ☐Yes after coming to Western ☐ Never

Have you ever been diagnosed with a chronic health problem (e.g. diabetes, asthma)?
☐ Yes before coming to Western ☐Yes after coming to Western ☐ Never

Have you ever sought professional help for school related difficulties (academics/stress)?
☐Yes before coming to Western ☐Yes after coming to Western ☐ Never

With which category do you most identify?
☐Asian ☐Black ☐Latino(a)/Hispanic ☐Middle Eastern
☐Indigenous ☐White ☐Multiracial ☐Other _____
☐I prefer to not respond to this question.

What is your current gender identity?
☐Man ☐Woman ☐Transgender ☐Other ☐I prefer not to respond to this
Question
Which term best describes your sexual orientation?
☐Asexual ☐Bisexual ☐Gay ☐Heterosexual ☐Queer ☐Questioning
☐Other ☐I prefer not to answer this question

Appendix I Staff Demographic Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE - Staff

First Name:

Department Program:

Job Title:

Number of years working in this position _____

Number of years working at Western_____

Appendix J Student Focus Group Schedule

Focus Group Schedule

Lisa Cossy
Angela Mandich (Student Focus Groups Only)
Helper

A. Introduction to focus group

Lisa will introduce herself, Dr. Mandich, member of the research team and helper.

The focus group we are conducting today is part of my PhD studies. I am interested in the transition experiences of undergraduate students and their opinions on the transition support services and information the university provides. After completing these focus groups I hope to use the information to create a survey that will help to in determining the needs of students transitioning from secondary education to university.

Other people, such as those in university administration, psychologists and parents have many opinions on what they think students need in order to adjust well when they transition to university, but, we thought that it was best to get your perspective since you are the individuals who have experienced the transition more recently and during a time when students are living in a constantly changing social and technological world.

I know that you have read the letter of information but I want to address a few important issues.

Confidentiality. Please ensure that anything we discuss stays in the room. As stated in the letter of information this session audio recorded but only me and the researchers of this study will have access to the recording and the transcription of the recording.

Sharing – In order to stay within the timeframe of finishing the focus group in 60-90 minutes, I may ask you to expand or hold certain comments. This will also ensure that everyone gets a fair chance to speak. I also ask that we all be respectful of each other's comments. Remember there are no right or wrong answers so please feel free to share, relax and enjoy the session.

Before we begin I want to let you know that refreshments are available and you are free to get something to eat and/or drink before, during, and after the session. There are also washrooms down the hall if you need to use the washroom.

Finally to avoid interrupting others while they are speaking please turn off your cell phones before we begin.

Does anyone have any questions before we begin? If there are no other questions we can begin

B. Focus Group Discussion

1) Ask each person to introduce themselves by first name only, year, and area of study.

2) Today, we are going to be talking about your experiences of transitioning from secondary education to university, we will also discuss your opinions about the transition support and information provided by the university or others. I know sometimes it is difficult to express yourself around strangers so even though I did not obtain my undergraduate degree from Western I will begin by telling you about my transition experience coming from another country to begin a Masters program at Western.

Ok, that's my story would anyone else like to begin to share their experience, when you think back to when you first came to university.

The bullets are prompts to stimulate discussion

- What was it like for you?
- Were you scared, excited or both? (why?)
- What were your expectations? What did you hear about Western before coming?
- What did you find most challenging or stressful during the first few weeks and the entire first year? (residence issues, roommate problems, class schedule, work load, making friends, loneliness, etc, time management, laundry, grocery shopping, is this the first time you were doing some of these activities for yourself?)
- Did you have an experience that was particularly challenging for you during your transition e.g. a break up? How did you cope manage with this challenge?
- What did you find to be most helpful in helping you adjust to university life?
- What methods did you use manage stress, did they work well for you?
- Looking back now what skills do you think are necessary for all students coming to university in order to lessen stress?
- Did you have these skills when you came?

Tell me about orientation (summer academic vs September)
- Did you find the information and activities to be useful? (Why/why not?)
- Did you ever use any of the information when you experienced difficulty?
- What types of information were most valuable to you as a new student?
- Did you think that the orientation week activities helped you adjust to the university? If so, in what specific areas?
- If not, what needs to be changed?
- If you had to design an orientation week or an orientation course what topics and activities would you include and what you leave out that based on your orientation week information and activities?
- Is there anyone who did not attend orientation? Why
- Western in considering implementing a semester long transition course for first year students? What do you think about that idea? What types of information should be included?

Residence/Off Campus Living:
- Describe your residence/housing experience?
- Did you experience problems? If so what types of problems?
- Did anyone have a great experience living in residence or off campus?
- What was most stressful?
- What information, skills, resources are needed to help alleviate the problems experienced living in residence or off campus?
- If you remained in residence beyond first year, what influenced this decision?
- Did you experience problems after leaving residence? What type of problems (finding a roommate, landlord issue, lease/rent negotiations, cable/internet company problems)

Health
- Did you experience any health problems during the transition to university (physical, emotional, stress etc)
- Did you attribute any of these problems to parental pressure, academic pressure, pressure you placed on yourself to do well etc?
- How did you cope with these problems?
- If you experienced health problems, who did you turn to for help first (family, friends, roommate, profs, student services
- How do you incorporate self-care and health into your daily life?
- What are your primary health concerns?
- Do you find it easy to access the health care services and information you need on campus?
- Have you ever used the health services on campus (counselling, physical health etc)
- Did you find them to be helpful?
- Think back to the last time you considered using healthcare/mental health services/learning skills services on campus. What went into your decision-making process to use or not use services?

I want to talk a little about the other student services on campus, e.g. writing support services, learning skills.
Students will be given a list of all support services on campus they will be asked to tick in the appropriate box whether they are aware of the service and if they have ever used it.
- Do you know that these services exist?
- Did anyone ever use any of these services during their first year
- Did you ever think about using the service but decided not to? If yes why?
- Can you think of other services that you would have found helpful?

Did you receive support for your transition for from sources other than Western (peers, parents, guidance counsellor)? What type of information or support did you receive? Was it helpful?

Final Question
　　　Thinking back again, describe what a successful first year at university looks like? What would s successful 1st year achieve or lead to?

C. Session summary and debrief

1) Based on the notes I have taken throughout the focus group, I would like
to follow up on….
2) Is there anyone in the group that thinks we have missed any other important things that we need to think about or things when helping students transition to university?

Before you leave I want to ask everyone about how they are feeling. The Research Ethics board at Western requires that we ensure that participants do not leave feeling distressed and without proper information about where you can seek help. (Each person in the group will be given the opportunity to express their feelings) If you are experiencing any feelings of distress now that this session is over please feel free to let me know before you leave if you would like to speak to me privately about how you are feeling, please stay after the others have left. I also want to give each of you a card with information on counselling resources and I encourage you to use those resources if you need them now or in the future.

Appendix K Staff Focus Group Schedule

Focus Group Discussion – Staff

Lisa Cossy
Helper

Lisa will introduce herself and helper

The focus group we are conducting today is part of my PhD studies. I am interested in the transition experiences of undergraduate students and the transition support and information the university provides. After completing these focus groups I hope to use the information to create a survey that will help to in determining the needs of students transitioning from secondary education to university.

I know that you have read the letter of information but I want to address a few important issues.

Confidentiality - Please ensure that anything we discuss stays in the room. As stated in the letter of information this session will be audio recorded but only me or the researchers of this study will have access to the recording and the transcription of the recording.

Sharing – In order to stay within the timeframe of finishing the focus group in 60-90 minutes, I may ask you to expand or hold certain comments. This will also ensure that everyone gets a fair chance to speak. I also ask that we all be respectful of each other's comments. Remember there are no right or wrong answers so please feel free to share, relax and enjoy the session.

Before we begin I want to let you know that refreshments are available and you are free to get something to eat and/or drink before during and after the session.

Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

If there are no other questions we can begin

Ask each person to introduce themselves, by first name position and number of years working in that position.

Explain how I became interested in the topic

- Based on your experience (in your specific area of work) what are the major challenges students experience when transitioning from secondary education to university?
- Tell me about the services you provide here to help students with transition?

- In relation to student transition services what do you think works well in your department/area?
- What does Western do well in relation to transition services and where do you think we need to improve?
- We know that students coming to Western are well prepared academically. Do you think they are well prepared in other ways (e.g. personal care, independence; life skills, social skills etc...)
- Given the issues you see students experiencing, do you think that there are other services that should be provided within your department/area?
- If you were to receive further training in the area of student transition in what areas would you like to receive information?
- What is the most important thing that could be done to better prepare/support students in their transition from secondary school to university?

Appendix L Student Recruitment Flyer

Western HealthSciences

Tell Us About Your Transition to Western

We are seeking undergraduate students ages 17 to 24 to participate in our study on the transition from high school to Western University.

The purpose of this study is to gather information on:
(1) the transition experiences and needs of students
(2) the issues that impact undergraduate students' transition to university life
(3) perceptions of the support provided to students transitioning to university

Participation in the study requires being a part of a focus group. The focus group sessions will take place at Elborn College (UWO)and will last 60-90 minutes, each focus group will consist of 6 to 8 students. Snacks will be provided. If you are unable to take part in focus groups but would like to participate, there is an option to have individual interview.

 Each student who participates will be given an honorarium of $10.00 and will also be entered into a draw for one of four $50.00 gift cards from Western Bookstore.

If you are interested in participating please contact Lisa at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or at ▮▮▮▮▮▮
▮▮▮▮▮

Appendix M Newspaper Advertisement

Ad for Western Gazette Newspaper

Research Participants Needed

A research team at Western University is conducting a dissertation study about the transition from secondary school to Western university. We are recruiting full time undergraduate students ages 17 to 24 to participate in focus groups where they will share their transition experiences and their opinions on transition services and information provided by Western University.

Each participant will be given an honorarium of $10.00 and will also be entered into a draw to win one of four $50.00 gift cards from the Western Bookstore.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Lisa at ██████████

Appendix N Course Outline

Course Name: Health and Wellness in University Transitions

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to help first year undergraduate students with their personal and academic transition to university. Students will be provided with information and strategies to help them overcome the health and wellness issues that are commonly experienced by first year students. In addition, students will gain experience applying the strategies through a series of assignments and classroom activities. This course approaches health and wellness from a broad framework. In this course health is defined as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO p.76), while wellness is defined as an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a healthy life. There are many dimensions of wellness; physical, emotional, academic, spiritual, social, environmental, and occupational, and each dimension is equally important for achieving optimum health. The majority of the wellness dimensions identified on UWO's Student

Health Services website (see figure above) are incorporated into this course. In the first half of the course students will be provided with information to help them gain the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve academic success. The second half of the course will focus on knowledge and skills related to personal life issues such as money management, physical health, and mental health.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
 As a result of this course students should be able to:

(1) Identify their learning style(s) and devise and apply learning strategies that match their learning style(s).
(2) Identify academic strengths and challenges and apply strategies to improve areas of weakness.
(3) Understand the importance of time management to academic and personal success and apply strategies to effectively manage their time.
(4) Articulate the most common physical and mental health issues that affect university students and identify and apply strategies to stay healthy.
(5) Describe campus resources and opportunities that contribute to their educational experience and extra-curricular campus engagement.
(6) Clearly articulate how the course content has impacted their previous knowledge and their future intentions

Course Texts, Readings and Materials

Gardner, J., Jeweler, A. & Barefoot, B. (2008). *Your College Experience: Strategies for Success (Eighth Edition).* Wadsworth Cengage Learning, Boston MA, USA

 Recommended Text
Downing, S. (2012). On Course: Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life (Fifth Edition). Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York

Course Topics and Class Activities

Date	Topic and Class Activities
Week 1	**Topic:** Course Orientation and Introduction **Reading**: Randel & Randel (2010) The Skinny on College Success, Chp. 1, Making the Transition – **Available on Sakai** **Tutorial Activities** 1. Using the discussion questions from the chapter students will work in groups of 4 to identify the differences between university and high school. They will also discuss any similarities and differences between their expectations of university and their experience so far. Each group will present their responses to the class.
Week 2 **Week 3**	**Topic**: Time Management **Reading**: Gardner et al., Chp. 2 pgs. 17-33 **Class Activities:** 1. Students will be introduced to key aspects of successful time-management as well as various time management tools. **Guest speaker** - upper year student who overcame time management issues. **Tutorial Activities** 1. Students will work in small groups to discuss student based time management scenarios and a case study and will identify possible solutions based on the time management tools presented in lecture and the reading. **Topic:** Making Friends/Social Life **Reading**: Chapter 8 Navigating Freshman Year **Available on Sakai** **Class activities**: Video, Discussion of reading and student experiences **Guest Speakers**: Upper year students, USC representatives

Week 4	**Topic**: Your Learning Style
	Reading: Gardner et al., Chp. 3 - Complete the learning styles questionnaire available on Sakai before coming to class, bring a copy of your results to class.
	Class activities: No Tutorial this week
	1. Students will be grouped according to their learning styles and will explore teaching styles that may match their learning styles. Students from each group will then direct the instructor to place check marks and X marks on a map on the projector screen to provide a visual of matched learning and teaching styles. Other students will use clickers to agree or disagree with the choices. The results will be discussed.
	2. Students will learn techniques to make their learning styles work well for them, as well as techniques to overcome conflicts between learning styles and teaching styles
	This class will cover material in depth. To ensure that students understand the material a Classroom Assessment Technique (muddiest point) will be utilized to clarify any concerns. Questions will be addressed at the beginning of the next class.
Week 5	**Topic**: Learning and Study Strategies
	Reading: Complete the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) Available on Sakai
	Guest Lecturer: Learning Skills Counsellor UWO
	Class activities: No tutorials this week
	1. Students will bring copies of the LASSI and their scores
	2. Students will learning how to apply their strengths and will learn strategies to improve areas of weakness identified in the LASSI. This class will cover a large amount of material. To ensure that students understand the material a Classroom Assessment Technique (muddiest point) will be utilized to clarify any concerns. Questions will be addressed at the beginning of the next class.

Week 6	**Topic**: Goal Setting/Personal Responsibility **Reading**: Downing S. (2010). On Course. Chapter 2 - pgs 23-38. **Available on Sakai** **Complete the victim/creator questionnaire on Sakai and anonymously post your results on Sakai** **Class activities:** 1. Students will learn the principles of setting SMART academic goals. 2. The online results from the victim/creator questionnaire will be pooled. The results will be discussed and analyzed. **Tutorial activities:** 1. Using discussion questions and a case study students will work in groups to discuss realistic and unrealistic goals and find solutions to cases. 2. Students will analyze a case study related to victim thinking and will discuss strategies to overcome the situation.
Week 7	**Topic:** Preparing for Exams/Test Taking/Test Anxiety **Reading:** Gardner Chapter 8 **Class activities: No tutorial** 1. Students will learn about strategies that are proven to be effective to improve exam preparation and reduce test anxiety. 2. Students will work in groups to discuss what they do before during and after an exam, they will identify what works and what does not work for them. 3. Using TopHat technology each student will add at least one personal test taking strategy to the projector screen from their laptops. This is intended to provide a visual of various strategies students employ. The results will be discussed **Guest Lecturer: Learning Skills Counsellor UWO**

Week 8	**Topic**: Mental Health- Managing stress/ anxiety - Drug and alcohol use
	Reading: Gardner et al chp 14 pgs 281-284
	Guest Lecturer: Psychologist, Student Development Center
	Class Activities: TBA **No Tutorials**
Week 9	**Topic**: Mental Health
	Subtopics
	1. Managing parental expectations/high self-expectations
	2. Can I still have a great life if I don't get all As or get into medical school?
	3. Ways of viewing the world, learned optimism.
	Guest Lecturer
	Class Activities:TBA **No Tutorials**
Week 10	**Topic**: Physical Health - Nutrition, Sleeping, Exercise
	Reading: Gardner et al., Chapter 14 - pgs 287-302
	Guest Speaker – Student Health Services
	Class activities: 1. This lecture will focus on common health issues and will provide strategies to maintain their physical health.
	2. Health Jeopardy- students will use clickers to participate
	Tutorial activities: Students will be given a health issue (eg. poor sleeping/eating habits) and discuss in small groups how they think it would impact student health and performance. Student will present their discussion points in class
Week 11	**Topic**: This Course is Finished - So Now What?
	Strategies to stay on course

Course Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment	Value
Class Attendance	10%
Class Participation	20%
Weekly Reflections	25%
Campus Resource/Activities assignment	15%
LASSI completion	10%
Time Management Paper	20%

Course Assessment

Participation

In Class Participation: This involves contributing to small and large group discussions and participating in the other class activities.

Online Participation: Students are required to post 2 questions based on the readings by 12:00pm on Sunday nights**. If no readings are assigned for class students are not required to post questions.** Please note that your participation mark will not be based on the quantity of your contributions but rather the quality.

Weekly Reflections

Students are required to write a weekly reflection based on course readings, lectures, and/or other class experiences. **The reflection is not intended to be a summary of what occurred in class**. Students are expected to discuss how the class material impacted their thinking, perceptions, and knowledge about the topic, and should discuss how they intend to apply new knowledge to their academic or personal life. They should also discuss why they believe any strategies or tools taught in class may or may not be effective for them. Sample reflections will be posted on Sakai. Reflections will be based on the previous week's class content and will be returned with feedback the following week. Each reflection can be awarded a maximum of 4 points.

Campus Resources and Activities Project

Extensive research shows that students who participate in campus and community activities have a better university experience. Research also shows that students who seek help and utilize student services are more likely to and succeed. Many first year students do not participate in activities and often do not seek out services because they are unaware of what is

available, and/or they become overly consumed with academics. Each student will be required to obtain and present information on one campus resource and one organization. Students can choose whether they wish to present this assignment using a video presentation, oral presentation, poster, or a write up. This assignment is not intended to be purely descriptive, students must discuss the potential importance of the resource/organization to the campus community, and student health, and wellness. Additional information and guidelines about the assignment will be provided on Sakai.

Time Management Assignment

Students will keep a time log for 5 days. **Using the time log posted on Sakai** you should fill in the chart to account for what you did each hour (**no extremely personal information in required**). At the end of the 5 days please complete a 2-3 page write up describing what you discovered about your time use during the exercise. Please also indicate if you intend to make any changes, why you will make these changes, and what strategies you intend to use based on course material or any other relevant literature.

Since this activity is designed to assist you, be as honest as possible about your time use, do not try to impress the professor. If you spent 4 hours on Facebook note this, an honest representation of your present use of time can assist you in making better future time management decisions

Curriculum Vitae

Lisa S. Cossy, PhD Candidate

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND DEGREES

PhD Candidate - Health and Rehabilitation Sciences 2010-Present
Child and Youth Health Field
University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario

Master of Science in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences 2007-2010
Child and Youth Health Field
University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario

Bachelor of Arts – Psychology 2000-2003
University of the West Indies-Cave Hill Campus, Barbados

ACADEMIC HONOURS AND SCHOLARSHIPS
Commonwealth Scholarship 2007-2009

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant: HS 2700 – Health Issues in Childhood and Adolescence
The University of Western Ontario
September 2013 - December 2013

Research Assistant – Sun Life Financial Employee Wellness Programs Project
The University of Western Ontario – Ivey Business School
June 2011- August 2013

Teaching Assistant: Course: OT 9542 – Evaluating Occupation in Context
The University of Western Ontario
January 2012- May 2012

Teaching Assistant: OT 9542 – Evaluating Occupation in Context
The University of Western Ontario
January 2011 – May 2011

Teaching Assistant: OT 9512 – Foundations of practice in Occupational Therapy
The University of Western Ontario
September – December 2010

PUBLICATIONS
2013 - Cossy, L., & Miller, L. A Descriptive Study of Primary Health Care Practices in Ontario's Youth Custody Facilities. Paediatrics and Child Health, Vol 18 (10) 523-528