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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-EFFICACY AND
BELONGINGNESS IN TRANSFER STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AFTER AN
INDIVIDUALIZED ORIENTATION AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of South Alabama
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Laventrice S. Ridgeway
B.A., University of South Alabama, 2011
M.S., University of South Alabama, 2013
December 2021

To my Grandmother

Ida Johnson Pritchett

who

Raised and developed the man I have become

and

Encouraged me to always pursue my dreams no matter how impossible things may seem,

keeping God first.

To my Mother

Francilla D. Ridgeway

Thank you for always supporting me and being the person I can run to.

To my Niece and Nephew

Napiece F. Dees and Tonnell Harris, III

You both are so full of life and love

I hope that I continue making you proud.

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Reflecting on this undertaking, I must acknowledge that it has been quite a journey and in doing so, I must give honor to those that have supported me and pushed me across the finish line.

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ABSTRACT

Ridgeway, Laventrice, S., Ed.D., University of South Alabama, December 2021. A Phenomenological Study of Perceptions of Self-Efficacy and Belongingness in Transfer Students with Disabilities After an Individualized Orientation at a Public University. Chair of Committee: Peggy M. Delmas, Ph.D.

This research explored the self-efficacy and sense of belonging in transfer students with disabilities after an individualized, one-on-one orientation with the Port City University's Office of Student Disability Services. This study employed a qualitative approach, specifically phenomenology, to collect data. The researcher obtained data through semi-structured interviews using a purposeful sample of transfer students with disabilities registered with the Office of Student Disability Services. Seven participants submitted responses concerning their experience with the individualized orientation as related to their perception of self-efficacy and belongingness. Moreover, data underwent an interpretative phenomenological analysis. The study investigator reduced interview transcripts into themes, highlighting the individualized orientation essence. The findings from the research show that the factors related to the individualized orientation with the most influence on participants' self-efficacy and belongingness were preparation for success, support of accommodations, virtual meeting options, tailored approaches, and knowledgeable and engaging disability services providers. The findings, considerations for future research, and limitations were discussed.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Earning a college degree in the United States has become almost essential to achieving middle-class socioeconomic status (Baber, 2012). Nearly half of all newly created job opportunities between 2008 and 2018 required a degree (Koch et al., 2014). Like other job-seekers, students with disabilities (SWDs) must also obtain a college degree if they are to receive entry into the middle class. Students at postsecondary institutions with disabilities considered invisible (or nonapparent) are more vulnerable than their visible counterparts due to the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic stressors related to their disability (Button et al., 2018). Although SWDs enrollment in postsecondary institutions is on the rise, approximately 84% of SWDs withdraw from higher education before earning their degree (Koch et al., 2014; Kranke et al., 2013).

Since the 1970s, there have been several policies developed to support SWDs in their postsecondary education pursuits, including the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 (ADA), the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA), and regulations in a 2012 mandated implementation of services (e.g., academic adjustments) to support the needs of SWDs (Button et al., 2018; Heyer, 2017). SWDs often struggle with the motivation, concentration, and social interaction fundamental to higher education and employment success (Boutin & Accordino, 2011; Button et al., 2018; Koch et al., 2014; Kranke et al.,

2013; Nasir & Efendi, 2019). Expanded advocacy initiatives and legislation providing for antidiscrimination coverage, disability diagnosis and treatment, and rehabilitative services have allowed more SWDs to seek higher education (Koch et al., 2014). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Titles I through III of the ADA require postsecondary institutions to create offices that specifically support disabled student advocacy (e.g., Disabled Student Services), equitable course access, and antidiscrimination. The site of this study (identified with the pseudonym Port City University; PCU) has approximately 515 SWDs registered with its Office of Student Disability Services, 20.4% ($n = 105$) of them transfer students.

Steady student enrollment decreases pose challenges for institutions to meet enrollment goals, making transfer students an essential source of students (Handel, 2013; Hussar & Bailey, 2013; Jacobson et al., 2017; Joncich & Henderson, 2016). Disabled students often begin their college education at the 2-year level, subsequently transferring to 4-year institutions for degree completion (Heyer, 2017). Students transfer for several reasons, including convenience, affordability, and best fit. Approximately 60% of college students have attended more than one institution (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). Additionally, 25% of students who transfer will do so more than once, which gives rise to a unique set of academic and social difficulties for disabled transfer students (Marling, 2013). Fearing stigma, many students with invisible disabilities do not disclose their disability or request academic adjustments to support their educational success, putting them more at risk of dropping out.

Problem Statement

Upon completing secondary education, approximately 25% of SWDs pursue higher education (Heyer, 2017; Vaccaro et al., 2015). SWD enrollment at the postsecondary level has steadily increased over the past decade (Heyer, 2017; Koch et al., 2014; Kranke et al., 2013). SWDs' desire to succeed in postsecondary education has garnered the attention of scholars. Because SWDs often begin their collegiate tenure at 2-year institutions (Heyer, 2017), they are frequent transfers. One of the common myths concerning transfer SWDs is that transfer student supports are not necessary due to students having prior collegiate experience (Harrick & Fullington, 2019; Jacobson et al., 2017; Marling, 2013; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). A majority (60%) of transfer students complete their degrees, with the others requiring school support to be successful (Marling, 2013). Transfer orientation is effective in easing the transition from 2-year to 4-year programs (Grites, 2013; Harrick & Fullington, 2019; Jacobson et al., 2017; Marling, 2013) and decreasing the impact of 'transfer shock,' defined as severely poor performance within the new institutional program upon transfer (Hills, 1965).

Researchers have since expanded the definition of transfer shock to reflect the influence of transition periods from one campus to the next and the student's social adjustment to new campus culture and norms (Ivins et al., 2016; Lakin & Elliott, 2016; Mobley et al., 2012; Stewart & Martinello, 2012). Despite significant discourse surrounding the influence of support for SWDs and transfer students, there is little research exploring the effect of an individualized, one-on-one orientation session on transfer SWDs. Research is needed to obtain transfer SWDs' voices and perspectives, as higher education institutions have not addressed this group's challenges (Harrick &

Fullington, 2019; Jacobson et al., 2017; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). Therefore, this study of transfer SWDs was necessary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceived influence of an individualized university orientation on the self-efficacy and sense of belonging in transfer SWDs at a public 4-year institution in the U.S. Southeast. Specifically, this study was an investigation of the effects of individualized, one-on-one orientation sessions on disabled college transfer students. PCU's website (2021c) notes that approximately 650 transfer students make up its annual enrollment. Moreover, PCU's office of New Student Orientation hosts six transfer orientation sessions over the spring and fall semesters. Transfer orientation sessions are highly condensed, being completed in three hours on one day. They are fast-paced, with brief overviews of institutional policies and services, an advisor meeting, course scheduling, textbook ordering, and a campus tour. The first transfer orientation session takes place in June, approximately six weeks prior to the first day of classes for the fall semester. The information from this study reveals the unique needs of transfer SWDs to successfully transition from one educational institution to the next. The findings add to the presently sparse scholarship related to college transfer SWDs.

This study's results could assist disability services practitioners in identifying departmental needs related to transfer SWDs and the SWDs population as a whole. Also, organizational administrators may draw upon the findings to develop institutional programs and initiatives that foster student persistence through self-efficacy and

belongingness. Findings may guide higher education leaders in modifying their organizational policies and practices to increase SWDs' access to both two- and 4-year institutions. Furthermore, the information from this study may help faculty members in developing student-centered course curriculum and learning outcomes

Research Questions

The researcher investigated the following:

Primary Research Questions

1. How were perceptions of self-efficacy influenced by transfer SWDs' experience with an individualized orientation?
2. How were perceptions of belongingness influenced by transfer SWDs' experience with an individualized orientation?

Sub-questions

1. What support practices within the individualized orientation did transfer SWDs view as helpful to developing self-efficacy?
2. What program practices influenced transfer SWDs' ability to persist throughout the semester?
3. What program practices shaped transfer SWDs' sense of belonging to the university?
4. What were the advantages of participating in an individualized orientation as a transfer SWD?

Overview of Methodology

The most appropriate methodology to answer the research questions was qualitative—specifically, a phenomenological approach. Lin (2013) and Tuffour (2017) describe qualitative studies as appropriate for uncovering less-readily identifiable meaning and exploring societal complexities through questioning the *what*, *why*, and *how* of lived experiences. Study participants, transfer SWDs registered with the Office of Student Disability Services, took part in a semi-structured interview, answering open-ended questions about their self-efficacy and sense of belonging following an individualized orientation with a disability services professional (see Appendix A). The researcher applied an interpretative phenomenological analysis to the data to indicate the essence of participant responses. Themes drawn from the recorded, transcribed, and coded interviews provided the study’s findings and answered the guiding research questions.

Study Rationale and Significance

Literature shows that transitioning from 2-year to 4-year institutions can create challenges for all students (Grites, 2013; Harrick & Fullington, 2019; Hills, 1965; Marling, 2013; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). However, there is little research specific to the challenges transfer SWDs experience or the support that would be beneficial to a successful transition. This study adds significant value to the available body of literature by addressing the challenges and potential support systems for transfer SWDs. Findings from this study may also be useful for the leaders of 2-year institutions as they seek to increase their transfer rate. Disability services providers might draw upon the findings to

strengthen their practices and services for SWDs. University administrators may also find the results valuable when developing policies and procedures that relate to the transfer student population. Additionally, institutional policymakers can draw upon this research when considering the ease of access granted to SWDs by institutional policies.

Assumptions

This study included the following assumptions:

1. All transfer SWDs registered for the summer 2021 term participated in this study.
2. All transfer SWDs were forthcoming and thorough during their interview sessions.

Limitations

The following limitations bounded the study:

1. This study was specific to the transfer SWDs at PCU who participated in the individualized orientation session; as such, the results are not generalizable to other orientation programs.
2. Given that this research concerns a specific student population, there were a limited number of available participants from the transfer SWDs population.

Delimitations

Two criteria served as delimitations for this study:

1. The participants had to be full-time transfer students registered with PCU's Office of Student Disability Services.

2. Participants must have been transfer SWDs who took part in the summer 2021 individualized orientation and remained enrolled for subsequent terms at PCU.

Definitions

Academic adjustments. Modifications that do not change a class or activity but allow the student to meet the class or activity's standards, academic adjustments give students equal access to the educational opportunities of the university (Button et al., 2018; Kranke et al., 2013).

Disability. According to the ADA (2008), disability "means, with respect to an individual-(A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such an individual; (B) a record of such impairment; or (C) being regarded as having such an impairment" (Sec. 12102).

Disabled transfer student. As operationalized for this study, a disabled transfer student (transfer SWD) is a student with a disability who has transferred into PCU from a 2- or 4-year college or university.

Nonapparent disability. Nonapparent disabilities include nonvisible physical disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, disabilities related to learning, and disabilities that are attentional in nature (Kranke et al., 2013).

Self-advocacy. Individuals practice self-advocacy when they can convey their needs and wants and adequately determine the necessary support for achieving them (Vaccaro et al., 2015).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacious individuals believe in their potential to accomplish specific tasks or achieve favorable outcomes in various situations (Bandura, 1977).

Students with disabilities. As operationalized for this study, SWDs are those who have completed PCU's interactive disability-related accommodation registration process to receive academic adjustments.

Transfer shock. Hills (1965) proposed the term *transfer shock* as a reduction in transfer students' grade point average after their first semester at the new institution.

Transfer student. A transfer student is a learner who, upon graduating from high school or completing a general educational diploma, attended a college, university, or vocational institution and has now transferred into a 4-year institution (Harrick & Fullington, 2019).

Summary

Chapter I provided an introduction to the study, including an overview of accessibility issues faced by SWDs and the importance of obtaining a college education for the individuals' overall livelihood. Several federal regulations, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA, require institutional accessibility through academic modification, adjustments, and auxiliary aids. Declining student enrollment increases the importance of transfer students as a source of undergraduate enrollment. SWDs frequently enter higher education at the 2-year level and transfer to 4-year colleges; thus, this population is a critical source of students.

Despite the phenomena of transfer students and SWDs, there was little existing literature concerning the unique experiences, needs, and voices of the transfer SWD population. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceived influence of an individualized university orientation on the self-efficacy and sense of

belonging in transfer SWDs at a public 4-year institution in the U.S. Southeast. The study is significant because it provided insight into the challenges and potential support systems for transfer SWDs, expanding upon the limited literature.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study was an exploration of the influence of an individualized orientation session for transfer SWDs on the students' perception of self-efficacy and sense of belonging. This chapter presents a review of the literature highlighting trends in persistence for SWDs and recommended best practices used by 2- and 4-year institutions to support disabled transfer students. This review is necessary to illustrate the relationship among disabled transfer students, the construct of persistence, and their academic performance. The literature review incorporates the theoretical framework, postsecondary access legislation, disabled student issues in postsecondary education, transfer shock, and best practices to support persistence and academic performance.

The theoretical framework comprised Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure and Tinto's (2017) reflections on student persistence. Critical disability theory (CDT) will serve as a secondary framework, allowing for the consideration of institutional policy influence on SWD accessibility. A discussion of the legislation regarding disabled students' access to postsecondary education includes a brief review of the G.I. Bill of Rights, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the ADA of 1990, and the ADAAMA of 2008. Disabled students' issues in postsecondary education include belongingness, academic success and persistence, and self-advocacy and self-efficacy.

The review will present the phenomenon of transfer shock as a construct in relation to the transfer student population, as there has been little to no research specific to this phenomenon and the transfer SWD population. As the effect of the novel coronavirus has been widespread, a review of the virus' weight on disabled student access will be presented. Finally, there will be a thorough literature review of recommended best practices to support the persistence and academic performance of SWDs.

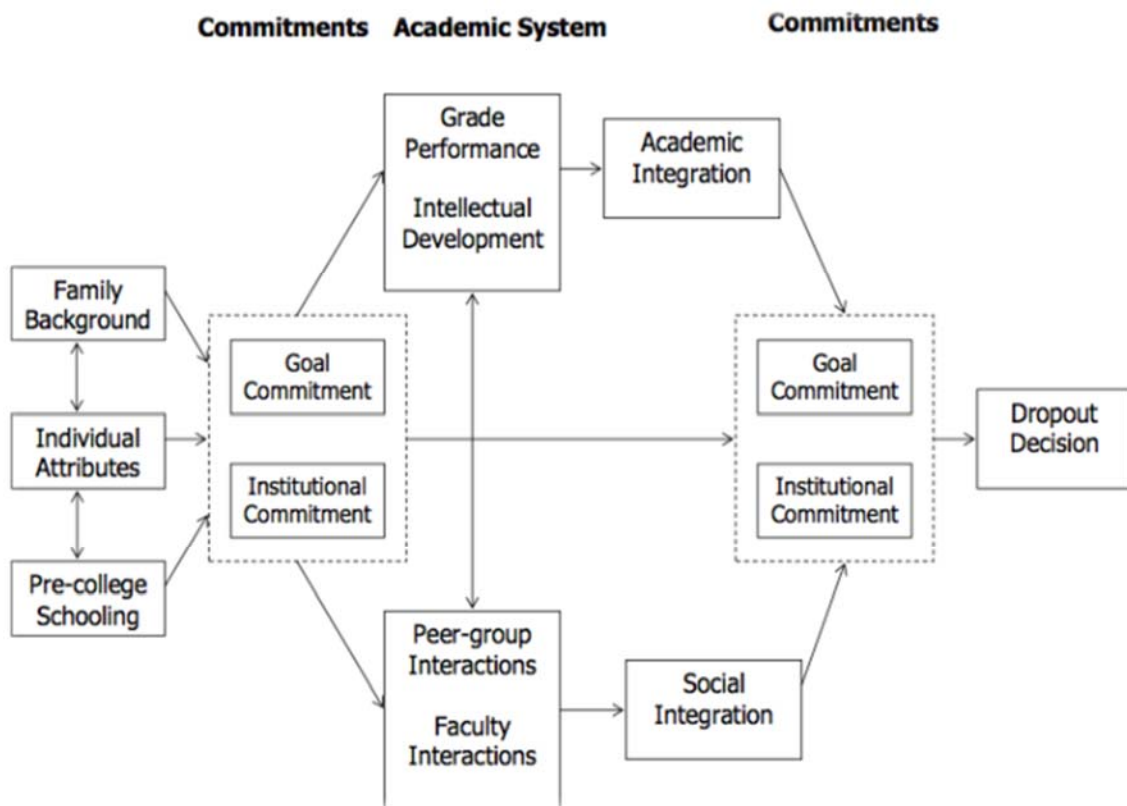
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study comprised the theory of departure (Tinto, 1975, 1988, 1993) and reflections on student persistence (Tinto, 2017). Because literature concerning the nature of the dropout process was nonexistent, Tinto began developing the theory of student departure in 1975. The scholar found insufficient development of long-term models to understand how students achieved college persistence or dropout. According to Tinto's theoretical model, established from Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide, dropout behavior results from inadequately integrating into society. Tinto posited that college campuses are their own societies; for students to persist to degree completion, they must have academically and socially integrated into the college's system.

Tinto (1975) found that weak interactions with others and poor fit (e.g., values and behaviors) with the campus community decreased the likelihood of developing a commitment to the institution and increased the risk of dropping out. A student can integrate socially into the institution and not academically (or vice versa) and still drop out because of inadequate integration or commitment to either element. The process of

dropping out happens over time. Students' interactions in the college's academic and social systems ultimately change their commitment to the institution, affecting their ability to persist and reach degree attainment. Students enter college with past experiences and unique personalities; the more significant the level of integration into and fit with the institution, the higher their commitment, which directly relates to college persistence. Figure 1 is a pictorial description of Tinto's schema for the process of college dropout.

Figure 1
A Conceptual Schema for Dropout from College.



Note. Permission from "Drop-out from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research," by V. Tinto, 1975, *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125, p. 95. (<https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543045001089>)

In 1988, Tinto expanded the theory of departure, drawing upon social anthropology-based research on the rites of passage in tribal societies. Tinto asserted that over time, students face varying difficulties persisting in college. These students experience distinct stages in the process of departure from their institution. Tinto argued that a student's college career experience happens in three stages of institutional departure: separation, transition, and incorporation. In the separation phase, students physically and socially dissociate from membership in past communities (e.g., high schools, other institutions, place of residence, past habits, and patterns of affiliation) to fully integrate into university or college communities. Almost all students find the separation stage stressful, if not severe enough to inhibit collegiate persistence. The stress of this stage is strongest for students who have moved away from home or enrolled in institutions drastically different from what they knew in their family or home communities.

Following the separation process, students then move into the transition phase (Tinto, 1988). New students are not yet cognizant of the new college's appropriate behavior patterns and community norms. These students have not yet established the personal ties to create a sense of belonging to or membership in the college communities. The transition into college invokes heightened feelings of confusion and a sense of loss that, if left without support and assistance, decreases the ability to persist, leading to early withdrawal.

Students integrate into the new college community in the third stage of institutional departure (Tinto, 1988). Their tasks in this stage include finding and adopting the campus community's social and intellectual norms and securing

membership in the community, both socially and academically. Because social interaction is the principal method of association, students' failure to find meaningful relationships with peers and faculty could lead to their departure from the institution.

Tinto (1993) improved upon the theory of student departure with *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*. In the book, Tinto combined the 1975 and 1988 assertions to create a theory of institutional departure from higher education. Tinto posited the idea of "educational suicide" (p. 104), modeled after Durkheim's (1951) suicide theory, to underscore the power collegiate social and intellectual communities have on students' willingness to remain at the institution. Tinto suggested that higher education institutions comprise academic and social systems with unique traits, structures, and communities. Academic systems center around formal educational activities with faculty and staff primarily functioning in relation to the students' classroom education. Tinto recognized that social systems often remain outside of the classroom, surrounding the student's daily life and personal needs; staff members' roles include enriching the student's social activities.

For students to persist in college, they must integrate into both academic and social systems (Tinto, 1993). Integration into one system does not mean equal integration into the other. Student departure is possible if they cannot establish a connection with one system. In line with Durkheim's (1951) theory of individual suicide, college students have goals and motivations that, when inappropriately integrated with an institution's social and academic systems, can lead to departure or educational suicide (Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, when students' goals and commitments are adequately ambitious, they could be more able to persist and reach degree completion even with poor interactions

with the college. This is especially the case if students' educational objectives are clearly linked with their career aspirations. Tinto returned to the ideas of student departure and persistence, suggesting that classrooms are communities of learning (Tinto, 1997), expanding upon the classroom's influence on learning (Tinto, 2012), and providing students' perspectives of persistence (Tinto, 2017). Excellent information.

Tinto's View on Classroom Success and Persistence

Tinto (1997) asserted that classrooms are communities of their own, the epicenters for educational activity in colleges and universities that become a key part of student life. The researcher sought to determine colleges' strategies and their influence on strengthening student learning and persistence. Tinto used a mixed-methods approach to explore whether a community college's coordinated studies program (CSP) affected student learning and persistence, and if so, how much of a difference it made. The longitudinal panel comprised 287 first-year student participants (121 treatment, 166 control); the qualitative case study consisted of CSP student observation; student, faculty, and staff interviews; and program document reviews. Observation occurred over three site visits, with 101 semi-structured interviews conducted as both informal and scheduled conversations (in-person and telephone) using open-ended questions. The reviewed documents were course syllabi, schedules, and materials, as well as institutional publications.

Quantitative data indicated that CSP participants had more academic and social activity involvement and a greater perception of developmental gains over their year in the course (Tinto, 1997). CSP participants also reported increased engagement with

course activities and classmates and more positive views of their institution, classes, and sense of involvement in learning versus non-CSP participants. The CSP participants exhibited greater persistence in the subsequent spring semester and even more in the following fall term.

Qualitative results yielded three themes of the CSP that shape first-year student persistence: (a) building supportive peer groups, (b) shared learning, or bridging the academic-social divide, and (c) gaining a voice in the construction of knowledge (Tinto, 1997). Tinto (1997) concluded that classroom learning communities allow students to develop a support network and bond to the institution's overarching social community. In addition, students in CSPs can connect their experiences to the course content, adding to the classroom's intellectual richness and diversity. Finally, the programs are effective in promoting student engagement in otherwise unreachable settings. Theories of persistence indicate the importance of bridging the academic-social divide within the first year of college. Students' increased engagement in shared learning with their peers can lead to greater involvement in their own learning, shaping education and persistence over their collegiate tenure.

Finding that classrooms promote student persistence, Tinto (2012) argued that enhancing the classroom could enhance student success. Tinto proposed that for most first-year students, especially those attending community colleges, the classroom is their only form of engagement with faculty, staff, or other students. Based on this premise, institutions should turn their attention to the classroom and enact mechanisms that heighten students' likelihood to succeed. A good classroom includes high student expectations, support, and performance assessments with frequent feedback. Faculty

should hold high student expectations, clearly communicated through syllabi, assignments, and rubrics. Moreover, academic support is critical with high expectations, especially for first-year students who may be more receptive to institutional interventions.

Additionally, Tinto (2012) argued that students were more likely to achieve classroom success when provided frequent and timely feedback on their assessments. Feedback facilitates changing student, faculty, and staff behavior to promote learning. After laying out the basis of what a successful classroom looked like, Tinto recommended institutional improvements to enhance classroom effectiveness. These were: (a) contextualized academic support; (b) automated classroom assessment, feedback, and early warning, (c) promoting classroom engagement; and (d) enhancing instructional skills.

Contextualized academic support from an accelerated learning program or first-year learning community links developmental and educational skills to a college-level course (Tinto, 2012). In this way, the institution can align academic and social support for concurrent skill and support acquisition. Automated classroom assessment, feedback, and early warning rely on the use of technology and web-based platforms. With this information, academic advisors and faculty members can capture, analyze, and utilize data more effectively to reach students earlier implementing supportive resources. Tinto (2012) encouraged faculty to move toward pedagogies that allow for greater student engagement with course material and involvement in team-based learning, which promotes learning through social and intellectual engagement. Finally, Tinto suggested building effective classrooms to enhance faculty's instructional skills, implement programs that develop pedagogical skills for new academic staff, improve student

success, and lead to student persistence. However, this position and Tinto's previous conclusions leave out the students' voice regarding what persistence and success look like, which the researcher later addressed in a 2017 reflection of student persistence.

Tinto's Reflections on Student Persistence

Tinto's (1975, 1988, 1993) theory of departure focuses on students' processes in leaving educational institutions. Initially, Tinto highlighted the realities of students who depart from institutions and the lack of social interaction among faculty and peer students. Tinto (2017) attested to the importance of viewing retention through both university and student perspectives. From the students' point of view, retention becomes a construct comprising three subconcepts: self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and curriculum.

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as individuals' belief in their capacity to achieve a specific undertaking in a particular situation; thus, self-efficacy develops from previous encounters, self-perception, and the ability to exert control over the surrounding environment. Tinto (2017) expanded this idea, proposing that self-efficacy is neither inborn nor genetic but a learned trait. A stable sense of self-efficacy promotes growth, shaping how individuals tend to goals, tasks, and challenges, which is critically important during a student's first year.

Tinto (2017) viewed belonging as equally crucial to self-efficacy. For persistence to take place, students must feel they matter to the surrounding environment. Persistence develops from student belonging through engagement with the surrounding environment, seeing themselves as valued by other members of the campus community. Most importantly, students who identify as belonging to a smaller community group with

shared experiences have increased odds of persisting, culminating in higher levels of motivation and connecting with others in ways that promote persistence.

Tinto (2017) argued that the institution's curriculum also influences students' persistence within higher education. Persistence is greater when students perceive the educational material is sufficient in quality and applicable to their current and future interests; this perception is the driving force behind students' motivation to engage in meaningful material and persist.

Critical Disability Theory

Critical disability theory was a secondary component of the present study's framework due to the consideration of institutional policies, practices, and procedures shaping students' experience. CDT pertains to the lived experiences of persons with disabilities, providing the means to alter the conditions causing critical, intersectional oppression (Hall, 2019). Schalk (2017) identified CDT as based on the methodological dissection of social norms that define physical and mental impairments and the social conditions that cluster stigmatized properties within one population over another.

Hosking (2008) created the foundation of Schalk's definition, asserting that CDT stemmed from the following ideas:

- (1) disability is a social construct, not the inevitable consequence of impairment,
- (2) disability is best characterized as a complex interrelationship between impairment, individual response to impairment, and the social environment, and
- (3) the social disadvantage experienced by disabled people is caused by the physical, institutional, and attitudinal (together, the "social") environment which fails to meet the needs of people who do not match the social expectation of "normalcy." (p. 7)

Moreover, Goodley et al. (2018) described CDT as a dialogue that is always emerging with new work and rooted in emancipation from the effect of ableism. According to Procknow et al. (2017),

Ableism is invisible, epistemic violence is experienced by the disabled, ableism creates a binary view (able vs. unabled) when it is more accurate to consider a continuum, disability is a socially constructed phenomenon, the disabled have the right of autonomy and self-determination, and the medical industry commodifies the disabled. (p. 365)

Rocco and Collins (2017) described ableism as fortifying the marginalization of persons with disabilities (PWDs), depicting them as lazy, incompetent, or dishonest about their disability. Fine (2019) defined ableism as structural, social, institutional, and interpersonal violence that has become so commonplace within work, policy, school, the justice system, and welfare environments that it is even more challenging to identify and name. Hall (2019) suggested that CDT is increasingly important, arguing that disability is a direct expression of power understood from political and social standpoints. Disability is a continuum of variation in humans, leading to people with disabilities labeled as “the other” (Hall, 2019, p. 364) and isolated from mainstream society (Procknow et al., 2017). Procknow et al. (2017) stated that the context in which individuals with a variation live determines which label they receive: disabled or unusual. Furthermore, despite the label of disability, there are various manifestations of disability presentation across individuals.

Hall (2019) suggested that researchers who subscribe to CDT do so to describe the sociopolitical interpretation of disability, following its oppressive effect on those attached to the concept of disability. Hall proposed that CDT followers are activists who commit to social justice work and do not intend their knowledge to apply only in the academic setting; this assertion supports Procknow et al.’s (2017) argument of refitting

society to allow for a continuum of abilities. The following section presents legislation and federal regulations enacted to support empowering persons with a continuum of abilities.

Postsecondary Access Legislation

Access to higher education in the United States has long been an issue for many underrepresented and minority populations. Federal legislation, such as the G.I. Bill, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the 1990 ADA, have increased access to higher education for persons with disabilities as a protected class of citizens. Signed into law in 1944, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, better known as the G.I. Bill of Rights, provided financial support to qualifying veterans contingent upon their length of service (Madaus, 2011). This legislation had an immediate effect on postsecondary education, as campuses saw enrollment increases in veteran students and SWDs. The American Council on Education's (2008) study of disabled veterans in postsecondary education indicated,

For the first time in the history of American higher education, student bodies are composed of a sizable number of disabled veterans, ranging in types of disability from minor ailments to almost total physical disability. These disabled veterans, as well as other handicapped students, required, in many instances, particular services to enable them to achieve maximum progress in academic work. (as cited in Madaus, 2011, p. 6)

Disabled veterans enrolling in higher education programs had a significant and profound influence on the early development of disability services work; however, the civil rights legislation and legislation in the K-12 arena served as a catalyst for expanding the work in disability services (Madaus, 2011). Signed into law in 1973, the Rehabilitation Act stated, in part,

No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any programs or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. (34 C.F.R. Part 104.4)

Specific to higher education institutions, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) requires that both public and private universities or colleges consider applications of qualified students regardless of their disability status, implementing any necessary disability-related accommodations and/or auxiliary aid (Madaus, 2011). The ADA's subsequent passage provided for increased programming development, access to higher education, and enhanced awareness of disability rights.

In 1990, then-President George H. W. Bush signed the ADA into federal law, legislation that has become one of the most expansive support systems of antidiscrimination within the civil rights law (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, n.d.). As a population, persons with disabilities have historically faced discrimination through societal ostracization and lack of access to education, employment, housing, and public accommodations without avenues of legal assistance for such discrimination (Rozalski et al., 2010). The ADA prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability, giving any person with a disability the chance to “enjoy opportunities,

to purchase goods and services, and to participate in State and local government programs and services” (para. 1). In essence, the ADA created a legally recognized obligation to equal opportunity for persons with disabilities (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, n.d.).

The ADA comprises five regulations, or titles, specific to public and private employment, telecommunications, and other provisions (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, n.d.). As interpreted, Titles I through III govern access to postsecondary institutions that are either public or private. ADA Title II, known as Public Entities (and public transportation), is the regulation most interpreted in relation to public postsecondary institution operation; in comparison, Title III is the most applicable to private postsecondary institutions.

Title I required that employers accommodate disabled persons with an equal opportunity to fully gain the range of employment-related opportunities also available to those without a disability (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, n.d.). Title I also barred employers from inquiring about a person’s disability before making a job offer. Although ADA Title I is specific to employers, it prohibits a university or college from inquiring about a student’s disability before acceptance (Simon, 2011). Title II required that “State and local governments give people with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from all of their programs, services, and activities (e.g., public education, employment, transportation, recreation, health care, social services, courts, voting, and town meetings)” (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2020, para. 7). Public institutions of higher education are required to offer any student with a disability reasonable academic “modifications to policies, practices, and procedures

where necessary unless doing such would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity being provided” (para. 8).

Title III of the ADA governs privately operated places of public accommodation—such as private universities and colleges—offering specific courses and examinations, privately operated transportation services, and commercial entities (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2020). Title III has some implications for public institutions, such as mandating effective communication for individuals with disabilities of the senses and removing barriers to existing buildings affecting those with a physical disability (Simon, 2011).

Under the ADA (1990), an individual with a disability has a “(a) physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities; (b) record of such an impairment; or (c) [can be] regarded as having such an impairment” (Sec. 12102). Almost 43 million Americans meet the criteria for having one or more physical or mental disabilities (Rozalski et al., 2010). As such, the ADA became a national mandate to eliminate discrimination against the disabled, enforcing a specified level of quality when addressing disparities. However, since the 1990 enactment of the ADA, the U.S. Supreme Court has often ruled in a manner that narrowed the scope of ADA protection and set a precedent that not all individuals with a disability are disabled. This interpretation has placed the 1990 ADA under significant scrutiny, as it protects just 13.5 million Americans (Madaus, 2011; Rozalski et al., 2010; Simon, 2011).

In 2008, then-President George W. Bush signed into law the ADAAA. This amended legislation maintained the 1990 definition of a disability while providing a broader scope of disability protection under the ADA to clarify the rules within the

legislation (Madaus, 2011; Rozalski et al., 2010; Simon, 2011). According to the ADA, qualifying disabilities can be in accordance with limitations in a single major life activity. Disabilities episodic in nature (or in remission) also qualify as a limitation, and mitigating measures (other than regular eyeglasses or contacts) are not considerations in determining disability status (ADA, 2008). With this 2008 revision of the ADA, the government (and disability advocates) continued to support persons with disabilities by offering a wider range of protection in a meaningful manner.

Disabled Student Issues in Postsecondary Education

SWDs' access to higher education is fraught with barriers, as evidenced by regulations to increase equitable access. Although federal regulations have been in place for many years, SWDs continue to face disability-related discrimination and diminished access to physical campus locations. These students also encounter barriers to engaging academic curricula and course material, socioeconomic factors, and accessing resources in the campus community (Toutain, 2019). The following sections present research on students' sense of belonging, academic success and persistence, faculty perceptions, self-advocacy and self-efficacy, transfer shock, coronavirus impact, and best practices.

Sense of Belonging

In education, belongingness is "the students' connectedness to the institution, staff, and other students, as well as the discipline being studied" (Kahu & Nelson, 2017, p. 1268). Sense of belonging in postsecondary education is closely associated with academic motivation, success, and persistence (Vaccaro et al., 2015). Given the relation

between belongingness and academic success, institutions of higher education often research their campus climate to examine the marginalization or treatment and experiences of at-risk groups within the campus community (Harbour & Greenberg, 2017). Known as an at-risk population, SWDs can experience discrimination rooted in being disabled (Harbour & Greenberg, 2017), resulting in a sense of isolation. One third of students with mental health disabilities reported struggles with collegiate social life, feelings of isolation, inability to make friends, and experiences of stigma and discrimination (Megivern et al., 2003). Common among the literature concerning sense of belonging is the student's perception of fitting in, feeling accepted, and finding support from a group or community (Strayhorn, 2012).

Evans et al. (2017) compared nondisabled students and disabled students using a sample size of 51,452 participants. Disabled students consistently reported being less comfortable on campus and in their classes and academic departments. Aquino et al. (2017) presented relevant findings in a study of 13,844 undergraduate students, 16% of whom self-identified as SWDs. Using survey data from the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Aquino et al. examined students' perception of the campus climate, interactions with faculty and staff, and institutional practices. Almost 23% of the participants reported witnessing discrimination, and another 22% experienced offensive verbal remarks.

Fleming, Oertle, et al. (2017) investigated the importance of belonging for disabled students pursuing college degrees. The researchers surveyed 325 undergraduate students across three large, public 4-year universities who were receiving disability services. The findings showed significant correlations between belonging and

satisfaction, belonging and self-advocacy, belonging and campus climate, self-advocacy and satisfaction, and campus climate and satisfaction. Fleming, Oertle, et al. suggested that disabled students with a higher sense of belonging are more satisfied due to having self-advocacy, leading to improved perceptions of the campus climate.

Like Fleming, Oertle, et al. (2017), Vaccaro et al. (2015) explored what contributed to SWDs students' perception of belonging. Using a grounded theory approach, Vaccaro et al. conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight individuals with disabilities. Findings showed SWDs' sense of belonging was intricately tied to self-advocacy. As the students' feelings of belonging increased, their ability to master the student role, achieve self-advocacy, and develop social relationships improved.

Adams and Proctor (2010) compared attributional style (the measure of a person's optimism or pessimism in the reasoning of events) and differences between SWDs and students without disabilities to adapt to college. Participants were 230 undergraduate and graduate students across five U.S. Southeast institutions. Results showed that disabled student participants had less adaptation to the college experience, social adjustment, and institutional attachment. SWDs were more likely to report thoughts of dropping out, feeling they did not fit in well.

Kahu and Nelson (2017) supported Adams and Proctors' (2010) findings, asserting that belongingness is a fundamental human need. Kahu and Nelson also proposed that the "sense of alienation may create anxiety, which then inhibits participation in classroom discussions hampering both behavioral and emotional engagement" (p. 1269). Overall, belonging or perceiving to have a place in the

overarching community is vital to existence and the human experience, as suggested by Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Furthermore, belongingness is pivotal to a student's success; students might experience academic underachievement and ultimately withdraw from their institution without a sense of belonging.

Academic Success and Persistence

The challenge to obtain gainful employment without postsecondary education is of concern; as such, individuals with disabilities face difficulties with maintaining a standard of living (Fleming, Plotner, et al., 2017). Despite changes in household income over the past 4 decades, earning a bachelor's degree has consistently remained a key to upward social and economic mobility. In a longitudinal study of adults ages 18 to 25 years, the U.S. Department of Labor and Statistics (2013) showed that a college degree offered an ability to maintain employment, work additional hours, and remain in the workforce. Despite growth in the proportion of disabled students on college campuses, SWDs overall do not show the same academic success levels as their nondisabled counterparts (Fleming, Plotner, et al., 2017; Shepler & Woosley, 2012).

Academic achievement is a measure of student success based on classroom performance and GPA across various subjects (Fleming, Plotner, et al., 2017; Lakin & Elliott, 2016). York et al. (2015) defined academic success as "a student's academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational outcomes, and post-college performance" (p. 4). Research indicates that SWDs exhibit increased emotional and psychological distress, placing them at greater risk of poor

academic performance and low success, including early departure from educational pursuits (Fleming, Plotner, et al., 2017; Smedema et al., 2015).

Kimball et al. (2016) found that academic achievement can predict both persistence and completion but is significantly valuable in and of itself. Adams and Proctor (2010) conceptualized achievement as a student's ability to adapt to college. The researchers found that disabled students had lower average GPAs than their nondisabled counterparts. In a national longitudinal transition study by Fleming, Plotner, et al. (2017), 34% of SWDs in college took almost 8 years to complete their degree work; in comparison, all other students' completion rates were in the middle range of degree completion as expected.

The U.S. Department of Education (2012) reported that 58% of nondisabled students obtain 4-year degrees. In comparison, graduation rates for disabled students range between 21% and 34% (Herbert et al., 2014). Mamiseishvili and Koch (2011) examined "the characteristics of college SWDs and the factors influencing their first-to-second year persistence in U.S. postsecondary institutions" (p. 95). The researchers used data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study of 1,910 students who initially enrolled in higher education during the fall 2003 term. Results from the study showed significant associations between persistence and disability, persistence and type of services received, and persistence and academic and social integration. Disabled students showed a first to second-year persistence rate of 76.4%.

Herbert et al. (2014) examined the persistence of disabled college students at one postsecondary institution over 10 years. The researchers utilized information from a larger composite data set of 3,945 student records from the Registrar's Office, Office of

Financial Aid, University Housing, Office of Educational Equity, and Disability Services Office from 1980 through fall 2011. Data analysis showed that disabled students who received disability services had a graduation rate of 66.5% compared to nondisabled students' rate of 86.7%. Underscoring Herbert et al.'s results, Vaccaro et al. (2015) suggested that, as students gain a sense of belonging through developing relationships with peers, faculty, and staff, they master the student role (persistence), working together to develop strategies for self-advocacy and academic success. These studies showed that SWDs reach degree attainment at a significantly slower rate than their nondisabled peers. With supports in place, however, SWDs can master the student role and achieve academic persistence, having a better opportunity to reach degree completion within the same time frame as their nondisabled peers. Without interventions, however, SWDs could continue to have significantly lower rates of academic success and persistence.

Faculty Attitudes and Perceptions Toward Students with Disabilities

Higher education institutions are the principal avenue of accessing knowledge; as such, faculty are directly responsible for understanding the student population (Baker et al., 2012). Sniatecki et al. (2015) identified faculty members' appreciation for and comprehension of the issues faced by SWDs as one of the most significant contributing factors to the challenges influencing SWDs. Faculty members who lack knowledge of disability issues could create a challenging climate for these students. Research concerning postsecondary education and disability indicates the importance of campus and classroom climate to SWDs' success (Baker et al., 2012; Markle et al., 2017; Skeens, 2020; Sniatecki et al., 2015). The literature supports that faculty members' attitudes

toward and compliance with providing academic accommodations to SWDs significantly shape student success.

Baker et al. (2012) employed a quantitative design to examine the difference between faculty and student perceptions of SWDs, differences in faculty and students' classroom perceptions of SWDs, and SWDs' perceptions of treatment received from faculty and students. The researchers collected data from surveys of approximately 400 faculty members and college students at a small Eastern Pennsylvania women's liberal arts college. The findings showed that 72.7% of faculty members had little to no experience with SWDs in a classroom setting, and 24.6% expressed a belief that SWDs were not as capable as their nondisabled peers. In addition, faculty participants understood the term *disability* but lacked familiarity with the regulations governing disability-related accessibility. Even so, 68% of the faculty participants were willing to implement academic adjustments for SWDs and desired to participate in more disability-related training, as less than 20% of them had ever done so.

Banks (2019) sought to determine whether professors at historically Black colleges and universities could develop a constructive academic environment and curricula to support the learning achievement of African American students with learning disorders. Using a quantitative approach, Banks surveyed 149 faculty members at a midsized, mid-Atlantic HBCU during a mandatory campus-wide professional development for teaching and learning. The study showed that SWDs and their improved workshop academic outcomes depended significantly on professors' perceptions and understanding of disabilities—specifically, learning disorders—and their responsiveness to implementing accommodations.

Participants were willing to provide modifications for exams, knowledge of disabilities, enthusiasm for supporting SWDs, and adjusting teaching practices (Banks, 2019). However, they were less inclined to make major academic modifications or accommodations due to concern for maintaining curriculum integrity. Banks concluded that although faculty members intend to find common ground between significant accommodations and academic integrity, they are not experts in disability services and might ultimately not offer the appropriate support required to meet students' disability-related needs.

Similar findings came from Sniatecki et al. (2015), who examined professors' attitudes and knowledge at a midsized, Upstate New York public liberal arts college toward college students with varying disability types. The researchers hypothesized that faculty members might perceive the provision of disability-related accommodations as obstructing academic freedom, with accommodations lessening academic rigor and integrity. Utilizing a qualitative approach, Sniatecki et al. surveyed 123 faculty members to explore three areas concerning SWDs: (a) current faculty attitudes, (b) faculty knowledge level, and (c) faculty interest in disability-related professional development.

The findings showed that 96.7% of participating professors held a generally positive attitude toward SWDs, believing this student population could be both successful and competitive (Sniatecki et al., 2015). However, attitudes about allowing disability-related accommodations were negative. Moreover, some respondents believed that allowing accommodations would create an edge among SWDs over non-SWDs. Findings also indicated a gap in professors' knowledge concerning SWD policies and procedures

and the services provided by institutional disability services offices. Further, 12.2% of participants had advised SWDs to change their majors due to disability limitations.

Markle et al. (2017) continued the discussion of professional development for faculty members to understand SWDs' access issues. Markle et al. examined the benefits of a volunteer mentorship program developed to support SWDs during their transitional year by pairing the student with a faculty member. In this program, faculty mentors offered students guidance on academic success and campus integration with campus resources referrals (Markle et al., 2017). The program included a professional development luncheon as an orientation to mentoring SWDs in which faculty discussed why SWDs encounter rough transitions and issues within higher education. Students and faculty mentors determined the parameters of their relationship (e.g., meeting frequency and style). Markle et al. analyzed quantitative data from 611 individuals (300 faculty mentor program participants, 311 nonprogram participants) who were full-time SWDs students enrolled from 2006 to 2014. The quantitative data showed that 82% of SWD program participants returned for their second year, with a 40.4% 4-year cumulative graduation rate and 67.8% 6-year cumulative graduation rate. The findings indicated the importance of faculty members and their roles in the educational success of SWDs, helping them develop the necessary skills and confidence to persist through higher education.

Skeens (2020) shared similar findings concerning faculty members' influence on the academic performance of SWDs. Skeens conducted a case study at a small, Midwestern regional college to explore not only "the experiences and perceptions of college SWD" but also "the modifications, adjustments, and/or implementations

perceived to aid in their success” (p. 146). The researcher followed three female participants with disabilities that encompassed sensory impairments, attentional and language processing disorders, psychiatric disorders, and physical mobility disorders. The findings suggested ~~that~~ academic success requires positive relationships with faculty members, as faculty understanding of accommodations and disabilities is the most effective intervention driving students’ perceptions of their ability to manage their disability in college. Skeens (2020) contended that positive relationships with faculty and student peers create a sense of belonging and higher self-esteem.

Despite federal regulations on classroom and curricula accessibility and growing socioeconomic demand for a sufficiently educated workforce, the professoriate remains challenged in providing a supportive atmosphere that encourages SWDs’ academic success. Thus, faculty members could subscribe to stereotypes that influence their perceptions of SWDs (Baker et al., 2012). Researchers have offered explanations, such as (a) faculty lacking the necessary sensitivity toward the needs of students labeled as having a disability (Baker et al., 2012); (b) unaware and ill-prepared professors questioning the legitimacy of accommodations or modifications if a student’s disability does not fit the faculty member’s idea of disability, especially with invisible disabilities (Sniatecki et al., 2015); (c) and faculty believing they are the gatekeepers of knowledge responsible for ensuring that academically underprepared students do not advance within the institution (Banks, 2019). Such beliefs, combined with concerns for the integrity of accommodations, the ease of implementation, and modification type, ultimately guide professors’ willingness to make academic adjustments (Banks, 2019). Thus, SWDs must become self-advocates to combat this barrier.

Self-Efficacy and Self-Advocacy

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as individuals' belief in their capacity to achieve a specific undertaking in a particular situation. Expanding upon this definition, Kahu and Nelson (2017) identified that self-efficacy influences motivation, learning, and persistence; thus, higher self-efficacy levels have a reciprocal effect on engagement and success. As a phenomenon in higher education, self-efficacy is a complex intersection between student and institution factors. As a result, a lack of efficacy could cause students to be less engaged.

van Dinther et al. (2011) investigated the literature concerning the role of students' self-efficacy in education to discover the factors influencing self-efficacy in postsecondary education. The study was a narrative review of 39 empirical studies published between 1993 to 2010. van Dinther et al. suggested the possibility of influencing student self-efficacy, with 80% of reviewed works revealing significant relationships between intervention programming and self-efficacy—specifically, programming offering enactive mastery experiences or the ability to perform a task while applying relevant knowledge and skills. Adams and Proctor (2010) identified self-determination (i.e., self-efficacy, decision-making skills, perceptions of control) and self-advocacy as critical student characteristics for persistence.

As defined by Vaccaro et al. (2015), self-advocacy is “the ability to communicate one's needs and wants and to make decisions about the support necessary to achieve them” (p. 673). Literature shows that self-advocacy is a key component in transitioning to and persisting in higher education (Adams & Proctor, 2010; Daly-Cano et al., 2015; Vaccaro et al., 2015). However, some disabled students are ill-prepared to self-advocate

upon their entry to postsecondary education due to a lack of standing up for themselves in secondary school. Janiga and Constenbader (2002) revealed widespread dissatisfaction with disabled students' preparation to succeed in postsecondary learning, finding ineffective self-advocacy skills development before college as a particular weakness. Self-advocacy is a student characteristic highly important in transcending the transition confusion with service access changes from secondary to postsecondary education (Morningstar et al., 2010). However, there is little to no literature exploring or examining the transition of disabled students in their transfer from one institution of higher education to another.

Transfer Shock

The U.S. Department of Education (2016) reported that nearly 10 million students are educated by community colleges annually and that public 2-year institutions enroll 49% of all undergraduate students in the United States. Community colleges function as mass-access organizations (Dougherty et al., 2017) and are often the mode of entry to higher education for many low-income, first-generation, and traditionally marginalized students (Topper, 2019). Given the rising cost of tuition for 4-year programs, students are choosing to enroll in community colleges because of the affordable tuition rates, the evening and weekend course offerings, broad admission policies (Dougherty et al., 2017), and as a means of learning new job skills (Gauthier, 2019). Topper (2019) described the overall mission of community colleges as delivery of remedial, career, and continuing education; acting as a community gathering space resource; awarding short- and long-term certificates and diplomas; and student preparation for transfer to 4-year colleges or

universities. However, despite the mission of community colleges to prepare its students for transfer to 4-year programs, upon their entry to the receiving institution, transfer students experience a phenomenon described by Hills (1965) as “transfer shock.”

A review of the literature to find research concerning disabled transfer students and transfer shock showed a dearth of prior investigation. Most of the available research concerned the transition from secondary to postsecondary education at the 2-year college level. A search for literature on transfer SWDs returned two articles by Burgstahler et al. (2001) and Ponticelli and Russ-Eft (2009). For this reason, much of the discussion in this section pertains solely to the transfer student population.

Disabled students who seek higher education often enter at the 2-year level, with few going on to 4-year degree completion (Burgstahler et al., 2001; Heyer, 2017). Burgstahler et al. (2001) discovered a lack of literature concerning how higher education institutions could support disabled students in their transition from two- to 4-year schools. Accordingly, they designed a study to explore disability services providers’ perceptions of challenges faced by SWDs and SWDs’ concerns in transferring from a 2-year to 4-year institution. The authors surveyed 119 (53% female, 46% male) undergraduate students from 20 two- and 4-year colleges in Washington. To explore disability services providers’ perceptions, Burgstahler et al. also completed focus groups with Washington State University’s Disabled Student Services staff members and surveyed 351 providers across the United States. Disabled transfer students identified their most significant concerns as program cost, adjustment to changes in student disability services offerings, self-advocacy skills, access to technology, and working through the transfer process. Moreover, disability service providers presented similar

findings regarding adjusting to the academic requirement difference, self-advocacy skills, and transferal process as significant challenges for students moving from 2-year to 4-year institutions.

Whereas Burgstahler et al. (2001) focused on what participants believed to be the most significant challenges for SWDs moving from two- to 4-year colleges, Ponticelli and Russ-Eft (2009) sought to identify markers leading to community college SWDs' transfer to 4-year institutions. Over 12 years, beginning with the 1995–1996 academic year, the researchers examined a cohort of 31,590 California community college students using 12 independent variables to predict transfer to a 4-year institution. Results showed the strongest predictors of SWDs' transfer from a community college to a 4-year institution were “proportion of transfer courses in which student enrolled” and “proportion of units student completed out of the total number in which student enrolled” (Ponticelli & Russ-Eft, 2009, p. 171). Ponticelli and Russ-Eft concluded that transferring from a 2-year to a 4-year institution is a good measure of persistence and success for SWDs, both isolating variables that strongly predicted the likelihood of transfer. However, they did not explicitly study self-determination factors that shape a student's ability to persist after transfer.

As proposed by Hills (1965), transfer shock is a drop in transfer students' GPA after their first semester at the new institution. Researchers, such as Ivins et al. (2016), Mobley et al. (2012), and Stewart and Martinello (2012), have since expanded upon Hills's definition of transfer shock. Ivins et al. described transitions as “periods between moments of stability, initiated by the move between two socio-cultural systems, and in which a person is aware of changes in their environment that cause an internal re-

adjustment” (p. 245). Students find themselves in periods of transition after transferring from one institution to another, influencing their progress toward degree attainment.

Lakin and Elliott (2016) explored student and context factors affecting shock, seeking to understand the function of shock in persistence and retention of general and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors. They identified persistence as comprised of student adjustment, assimilation, and social and academic integration in relation to the transfer experience. Guided by transition theory, Lakin and Elliott (2016) analyzed the academic records of 14,159 transfer students who first enrolled between 2004 and 2013 to ascertain student characteristics. Results from this study showed that transfer students had an average GPA drop of 0.6 points at the end of their first semester, with transfer STEM majors experiencing a decline of up to 1.2 GPA points.

Lakin and Elliott (2016) identified race, gender, number of transfer credits, and entry GPA factors associated with greater shock levels. Like Burgstahler et al. (2001), Lakin and Elliott sought to investigate disabled students’ concerns when transferring, the challenges faced by disabled transfer students perceived by postsecondary staff, and ways postsecondary institutions can support disabled transfer students to transition successfully. However, this study, along with others referenced in this section, did not fully account for the disabled transfer student experience.

Influence of COVID-19

Globally, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has had a considerable effect on the world of higher education (Crawford et al., 2020). The World Health Organization

(WHO) classified COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 12, 2020, due to the overwhelming spread of the virus across countries and the daily increase in new symptomatic cases (Viner et al., 2020). In March 2020, WHO (2020a) reported 697,244 new confirmed cases of COVID-19, with approximately 33,257 cases resulting in death. By August 2020, the number of COVID-19 cases globally exceeded 17 million, and the number of COVID-19-related deaths was approximately 680,894 (WHO, 2020b). The top 10 countries with the highest reported cases of COVID-19 were China, Italy, Spain, Germany, Iran, France, South Korea, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Crawford et al., 2020).

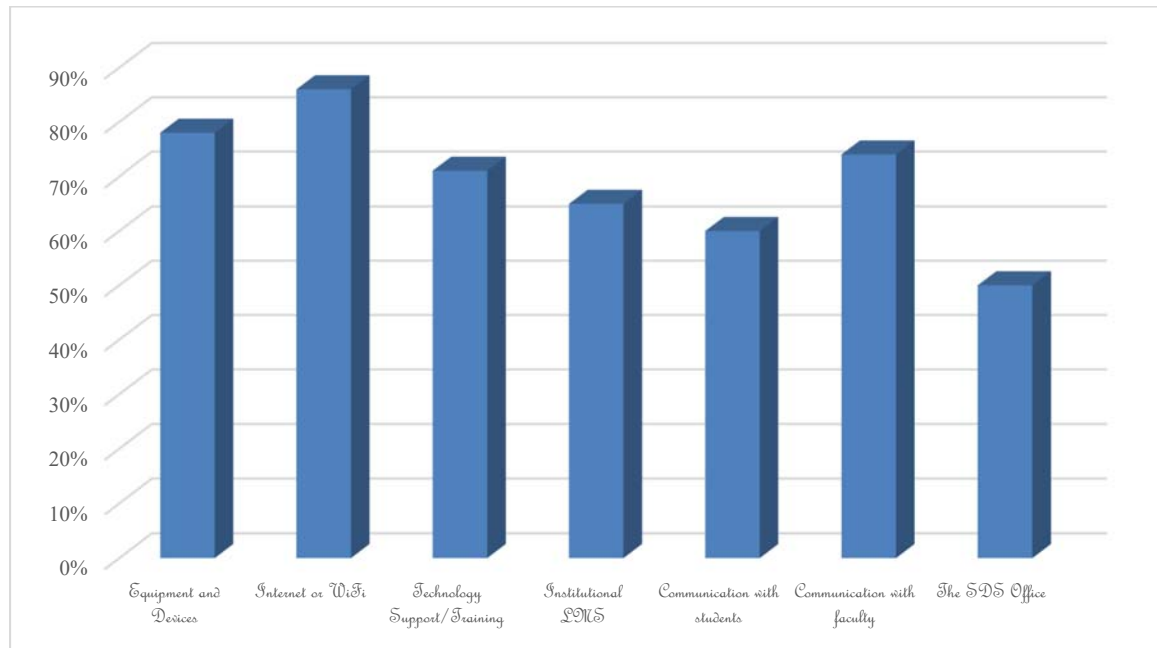
In April 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; 2020) reported that COVID-19 spread through person-to-person contact of people who are within 6 feet of each other. The CDC identified COVID-19 as a respiratory droplet formed and expelled when infected individuals (symptomatic or not) cough, sneeze, or talk. The expelled droplets can then come into contact with others through entry into the mouth and nose or inhalation into the lungs. The CDC's recommendations for limiting the spread and risk of exposure were to avoid close contact with others and place distance between individuals who have contracted the virus. In response to the threat of COVID-19 and under the CDC's social distance guidance, institutions of higher education globally began to transition their programs to online formats (Crawford et al., 2020; Viner et al., 2020).

Some in the United States minimized the severity of COVID-19, which, coupled with most schools observing spring break during the virus' onset, delayed higher education's response to COVID-19 and its transition to online education (Crawford et al.,

2020). By mid-March 2020, several postsecondary institutions had declared their transition to online instruction in response to the public health threat. Viner et al. (2020) reported that school closures were “based on evidence and assumptions from influenza outbreaks that they reduce social contacts between students and therefore interrupt the transmission” (p. 397). Postsecondary institutions did not previously have a plan for managing such a crisis (Crawford et al., 2020). As a result, colleges and universities rushed to reshape their educational programming into curricula provided through an online domain. This rapid restructuring exposed the limitations of poorly resourced schools and disadvantages in learners’ ability to engage in online instruction due to little to no access to technology and the Internet.

The Association of Higher Education and Disability began gathering data in spring 2020 related to the influence of COVID-19 on individuals with disabilities, determining some best practices for higher education to remove disability-related barriers created by the virus. In May 2020, Scott and Aquino (2020) collected survey data from disability resource professionals (95%), faculty (4%), and graduate workers in disability services (1%) across the United States to examine the status of accessibility in postsecondary education due to COVID-19. The data showed that SWDs experienced an array of challenges and barriers in the transition to remote education. The difficulties faced by SWDs pertained to equipment and devices (78%), Internet or Wi-Fi (85%), technology support and training (71%), the institutions’ learning management systems (65%), communicating or collaborating with other students (60%), and communicating with instructors (74%; see Figure 2).

Figure 2
 Areas of Access Difficulty for Students with Disabilities in the Transition to Remote Education.



Note. Graph created with data from “COVID-19 transitions: Higher education professionals’ perspective on access barriers, services, and solutions for students with disabilities,” by S. Scott, & K. Aquino, 2020, *Association on Higher Education and Disability*. (<https://www.ahead.org/professional-resources/coronavirus-resources>)

Moreover, 50% of respondents reported that SWDs experienced difficulties accessing their institution’s disability services office, delaying the implementation of accommodations (Scott & Aquino, 2020). The researchers recommended diversifying communication methods with SWDs (teleconference) to increase access to disability-related services as a best practice. Scott and Aquino’s Association of Higher Education and Disability update showed the many barriers shaping academic and social integration that SWDs faced throughout the transition to online instruction and will continue to encounter during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the researchers provided no information on the unique barriers related to the virus’s influence on transfer SWDs.

Best Practices for Increasing Student Academic Success and Persistence

Jackson and Laanan (2015) suggested that transfer students' success is not solely the responsibility of the student but also the institution's obligation. As such, university personnel (i.e., faculty, staff, and administrators) need to be aware of the transfer student's adjustment experience, as this population is not monolithic. Jackson and Laanan (2015) supported the recommendation of Ivins et al. (2016) and Gawley and McGowen (2006), suggesting that postsecondary institutions offer unique services for college transfer students, specifically highlighting tailored orientations. This proposal is also in line with Burgstahler et al.'s (2001) recommendations for postsecondary institutions to (a) implement separate orientation for disabled students transferring to the new campus, (b) have 4-year disability services staff present at 2-year college fairs, and (c) offer professional development for faculty and staff concerning disability and transfer issues to ease SWDs' transition.

Considering recommendations from Burgstahler et al. (2001), Garrison-Wade (2012) conducted a qualitative case study to examine the challenges faced by disabled students and offer effective strategies to support SWDs' transition from secondary to postsecondary education. Participants were 59 disabled students and six disability services coordinators across five 2-year colleges and three 4-year universities. The findings of the study yielded three themes: capitalizing on student self-determination skills, implementing formalized planning processes, and improving postsecondary support. Capitalizing on student self-determination included increasing self-efficacy, faculty understanding, and student self-awareness. Discussing earlier transition planning is a necessary part of implementing the formalized planning processes. Improving

postsecondary support indicated the need for a better understanding of accommodations, buildings accessibility, financial assistance, and mentorship.

The foundation of Garrison-Wade's (2012) research was Barnard-Brak et al.'s (2010) assertion that academically successful disabled students tend to use three common strategies when seeking accommodations by registering their disabilities with the disability services office and their professors. Barnard-Brak et al. postulated that these strategies could ensure the learning experience meets their needs to become academically successful. These effective accommodation-seeking strategies include (a) scripting, rehearsing, and mentally mapping out the process of disclosing their disability along with self-acceptance of the disability; (b) developing a process of negotiating accommodations with faculty who may be opposed to the idea of providing accommodations; and (c) abandoning attempting to pass as an able-bodied person.

Stein (2013) expanded upon Barnard-Brak et al.'s (2010) accommodation-seeking strategies, exploring how college students with psychological disabilities utilized and perceived accommodations and disability services assistance to attain educational goals. Using a grounded theory research model, Stein completed intensive interviews with 16 students registered with a disability services office. The findings indicated that having accommodations mitigated challenges, with testing accommodations, preferential seating, disability-related absence consideration, priority registration, and note-taking the most influential. Participants reported that registering with the disability services office was an integral part of their positive academic achievement and ability to remain in school. Moreover, disability services provided a sense of belonging by offering the assistance

(e.g., one-on-one advising and goal setting, time management, and organization skills) necessary for academic achievement.

Stein (2013) suggested that a universal design (UD) for instruction would help enhance SWDs' academic achievement. UD began in the field of architecture, with later adaptation to education for learning and instruction (Saha-Gupta et al., 2019). UD has seven principles: equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and size and space for approach and use. Nondisabled students could face learning challenges similar to SWDs; UD allows increased access to all students through curriculum adaptation (Wilson, 2017). UD acknowledges a fundamental inequity in using a one-size-fits-all approach to instruction, curricula design, and assessment. According to Saha-Gupta et al. (2019), UD challenges faculty to think creatively and critically regarding if lesson objectives and activity purposes yield actual learning outcomes for students. Essential to UD are academic accommodations, which are a resource for access to educational content.

Timmerman and Mulvihill (2015) sought to better understand disabled students' experiences and their use of accommodations and academic modifications. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, the researchers observed and interviewed two disabled students, one with a recognizable impairment and the other with an invisible disability. Timmerman and Mulvihill found that faculty mentorship has significant power on disabled student success and persistence. Similarly, Garrison-Wade's (2012) participants reported that disability services staff acted as mentors, advocates, and guides. This finding shows that disabled students can experience a range of difficulties and barriers during their undergraduate career, one of which could be faculty members.

According to Moriña and Carballo (2017), faculty members are undeniably one of the barriers faced during a disabled student's collegiate tenure. Faculty members can be reluctant or unwilling to implement accommodations deemed reasonable by the disability services office or offer modifications to classroom policies (Bessant, 2012; Claiborne et al., 2011; Strnadová et al., 2015). Most of the researchers who shared the voices of disabled students purported that faculty members needed increased awareness and proper training concerning the SWDs' specific needs. To examine disability-related training and its influence on faculty members' inclusive teaching practices, Lombardi et al. (2013) surveyed 565 faculty members at two 4-year institutions who participated in training on disability services topics. The findings showed the importance of training opportunities and professional development to increase awareness of disability-related issues (e.g., accommodations, disability law, inclusive instruction, and inclusive classrooms) and increase SWD support. This is in line with Moriña and Carballo's (2017) findings that disability and inclusion education training could positively change instructional practices. Research indicates a need for more tailored services for transfer SWDs and programming, increasing faculty and staff knowledge on disability-related issues. In addition, higher education institutions should review their current teaching structures for better accessibility and inclusion.

Summary

Chapter II presented the theoretical frameworks guiding this study—specifically, Tinto's theory of student departure focusing on Tinto's reflections on student persistence and the secondary framework of CDT. As CDT is concerned with organizational policies,

the review included a brief overview of the relevant legislation concerning postsecondary access for SWDs, primarily Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the ADAAA.

The reviewed literature covered disabled students' issues in postsecondary education, including sense of belonging, faculty attitudes toward SWDs, and self-efficacy and self-advocacy. With the onset of the COVID-19 public health pandemic creating new, unique access issues for SWDs, it was necessary to review COVID-19's influence on SWDs. As the present study focused on transfer SWDs, there was a discussion of transfer shock. Finally, the chapter presented researchers' suggestions for best practices to support the persistence and academic performance of SWDs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology employed in this qualitative research study, including research questions, research design, sampling, participants, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis procedures. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceived influence of an individualized university orientation on the self-efficacy and sense of belonging in transfer SWDs at a public 4-year institution in the U.S. Southeast. Qualitative studies are appropriate to uncover less-readily identifiable meaning and explore societal complexities through questioning the *what*, *why*, and *how* of lived experiences (Lin, 2013; Tuffour, 2017). Among the qualitative designs are ethnography, narrative, grounded theory, case study, and phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018), each with benefits and challenges.

Barritt et al. (1985) asserted that in the phenomenological tradition, “Experience is found in the taken-for-granted world of everyday and therefore we must study it there” (p. 219). To find meaning in the individual experience, a phenomenological researcher must accept and value that each participant is a part of social worlds, creating layers of meaning; thus, it is necessary to understand the world through the participant’s eyes before interpreting and drawing conclusions from these experiences. Creswell and Poth (2018) defined phenomenology as research that details the central meaning of the

individualized lived experiences of a particular event. As a philosophy, phenomenology is without presuppositions, suspending any prejudgments to make conclusions of reality found in and supported by the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lin, 2013; Padilla-Díaz, 2015). Drawing upon van Manen's (2014) description of phenomenological research, Creswell and Poth determined that this method starts "with a wonder at what gives itself and how something gives itself" (p. 75). The authors proposed that the human experience comprises phenomena specifically highlighting belongingness as lived circumstances. Given such a basis, phenomenology has become a widely used research approach in education, psychology, health professions, and policymaking.

Padilla-Díaz (2015) identified three main phenomenology research types: hermeneutical or descriptive, transcendental or essence-based, and constitutional or genetic. Hermeneutics is the ideology of interpretation, which, when linked with phenomenology, purports that meaning is indispensable to experience, requiring interpretation of the meaning to describe the experienced phenomena (Padilla-Díaz, 2015; Tuffour, 2017). Transcendental phenomenology holds meaning as the core of this approach in that it acquires the essence of human experiences (Moerer-Urdhal & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 2011). Specific to human experience, Husserl (1931) posited that essence offered a view of the essential knowledge of reality and perception. Finally, constitutional phenomenology, as described by Padilla-Díaz, analyzes consciousness as an entity itself and appeals to universal awareness. Taipale (2014) described this approach as concerned with how the lived body subjectively and objectively senses itself.

Despite its use across multiple disciplines, phenomenology has some challenges. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that researchers utilizing the phenomenological

design first have basic knowledge of and identify the overarching philosophical assumptions in their study. Some researchers may struggle to find participants who have experienced the studied phenomena. Creswell and Poth posited that interpretive phenomenology is the final challenge, as researchers must determine how the interpretive approach fits within their study, if at all, paying particular attention to how the participant understood the phenomenon.

Since its early underpinnings by scholars such as Husserl (1931), Polkinghorne (1989), van Manen (1990), and Moustakas (1994), the theory of phenomenology has matured into a highly regarded qualitative investigation approach. Phenomenology rejects ideologies fixed in quantitative measuring and counting in favor of studying human existence as an experience (Alase, 2017; Tuffour, 2017). Phenomenological researchers use words and phrases to describe specific phenomena (Alase, 2017). Scholars convert participants' lived experiences into reflections, drawing conclusions from the similarities among narratives. The phenomenological approach was appropriate to explore the unique experience of being a transfer SWDs. This design enabled a specific interpretation of the SWDs' perception of belonging within the institution and self-efficacy in being academically successful after attending an individualized orientation. The researcher chose a phenomenological approach in light of the value that administrators in higher education, policymakers, and disability service providers might find in the commonality within the essence of individual experiences.

Research Design

This researcher utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach to collect and analyze data. Phenomenology offered the ability to probe the essence of perception through individual experience (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). Purposeful sampling was necessary to find participants who meaningfully connected with and could offer insight into the experience of interest (Miller et al., 2018; van Manen, 2014). The researcher conducted an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore participants' experiences with an individualized orientation; the findings included descriptions of how they made sense of the orientation's effectiveness to influence their perception of self-efficacy and sense of belonging. IPA yielded a narrative of lived experiences without the bearing of prior theoretical conceptions and with the understanding that research efforts are interpretive, as people are sense-making (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA is likely "the most participant-oriented" (Alase, 2017, p. 10) approach to qualitative research, as it is receptive to and respectful of the participant's lived experience. Smith et al. (2009) described IPA as an approach that is psychological at its core, showing the developmental process through experiential qualitative psychology, with those subscribing to IPA being concerned with the "human predicament" (p. 5). Researchers who undertake investigations with IPA produce more robust analyses in terms of consistency, sophistication, and nuance. IPA combines transcendental phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography—the study of subjective, unique individual experiences (Tuffour, 2017)—to render a detailed examination of the participants' lived experience through the meanings placed upon their experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Primary Research Questions

1. How were perceptions of self-efficacy influenced by transfer SWDs' experience with an individualized orientation?
2. How were perceptions of belongingness influenced by transfer SWDs' experience with an individualized orientation?

Sub-questions

1. What support practices within the individualized orientation did transfer SWDs view as helpful to developing self-efficacy?
2. What program practices influenced transfer SWDs' ability to persist throughout the semester?
3. What program practices shaped transfer SWDs' sense of belonging to the university?
4. What were the advantages of participating in an individualized orientation as a transfer SWD?

Philosophical Assumptions

Researchers must address philosophical assumptions, which can change with time, experience, and career (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Philosophical assumptions give direction to the research goals and outcomes, are the basis of evaluation and research-based decisions and are deeply rooted in the research training and experiences. Creswell and Poth identified four philosophical assumptions for phenomenological research: ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological. Ontology questions the nature of reality. This research used direct quotes from participants to identify themes that support the idea of multiple realities in the experience of a phenomenon. The

epistemological assumption questions what is valuable as knowledge, how individuals substantiate these claims, and the researcher's relationship to the subject. This researcher spends a significant amount of time with SWDs as the Director for the Office of Student Disability Services at PCU. Axiological assumptions pertain to the role of values in research, requiring the investigator to accept that research is highly weighted with values and biases. This researcher acknowledged any biases through the epoché process of suspending all personal beliefs (Lin, 2013). The final assumption is methodological, which questions the process and language of the research. This investigator employed IPA, using the participants' subjective expressions in reforming original meanings during transcript interpretation and analysis (Tuffour, 2017).

The phenomenological approach provided an opportunity to build the knowledge base from the ground up, with no preestablished suppositions about the student experience. Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed interpretive frameworks, or paradigms, that also influence the study process and guide research practice. The interpretive frameworks that most align with the purpose of this study are critical theory and disability inquiry. This study was best suited for the critical theory paradigm, which enables individuals to go above and beyond the limitations placed on them due to their race, class, or gender (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Disability inquiry was also appropriate for this exploration, with disability seen as one dimension of a person while explicitly addressing the meaning of inclusion in schools.

Sampling

Phenomenological studies have a narrow range of sampling strategies, as each participant must have experienced the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviewing two to 10 participants is enough to reach phenomenological study saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Johnson, 2017). The researcher used purposeful sampling to select seven participants based on their registration with the PCU Disability Services Office and their status as transfer students enrolled at the full-time or part-time level during the summer 2021 term. Overall, the researcher identified 17 transfer SWD that met these criteria for the summer 2021 term. However, only 10 were invited for participation, as they completed the individualized orientation to register with the Disability Services Office. Three of the 10 invited participants did not respond to the researcher's initial contact or follow-up. Ultimately, data were collected and analyzed from seven participants.

Participant Biographies

Participant eligibility depended upon registration with PCU's Office of Student Disability Services for the Summer 2021 term and status as transfer students. Upon registration, participants submitted an accommodation application that indicated their status as transfer students. Of the 16 students identified, 10 received invitations to participate in this study upon completion of their individualized orientation. Three of the 10 invitees did not respond to the request. Participant gender was 43% male and 57% female (see Table 1); no participants identified as other or preferred not to specify. Additional participant demographics appear in the tables that follow.

Table 1
Participant Gender.

Gender	<i>n</i>	%
Male	3	43%
Female	4	57%
Other	0	0%
Prefer not to say	0	0%

Britney

Britney was a 20-year-old freshman who had not yet declared a major. Britney lived off campus with her parents, grew up in the surrounding area, and was very active in community and civic organizations during her high school experience. She transferred to PCU after her second semester at a private, 4-year university in the Southeastern United States. Britney had received diagnoses of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, scoliosis, and vasovagal syncope. Her chief struggles with education were an inability to focus for long periods and impulsive behavior, which had often impacted her academic performance.

Curtis

Curtis was a 19-year-old freshman with a declared major in Communications. Curtis transferred to PCU after his second semester at a small, private institution in the Midwest. Curtis lived on campus, worked part-time, and enjoyed playing sports. Diagnosed postconcussive syndrome impacted his attention span, processing speed, memory, vision, sleep, and anxiety. Curtis struggled in large crowds and brightly lit rooms and was easily distracted with minute stimuli.

Dave

Dave was a 20-year sophomore who declared History as his major. Dave lived off campus with his parents and enjoyed online gaming with friends. He transferred to PCU after completing his general education requirements at a local community college. Dave had diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, bipolar disorder, and specific learning disorder. His significant struggles were social because he was an introvert and unable to be in large crowds. He also experienced daily worry that led to anxiety attacks, which were heightened during exam sessions.

Jacqueline

Jacqueline was a 45-year-old senior with a declared Nursing major. Jacqueline lived at home with an individual she identified as “a family member.” She was enrolled in a nursing program at a small private college in the Northeastern United States before her diagnosis of bipolar disorder, which led her to step away from her studies for 10 years. Jacqueline lived with auditory hallucinations and frequently experienced mood instability, which included periodic bouts of crying.

Jonathan

Jonathan was a 22-year-old senior who lived off campus and had declared Business Administration as his major. PCU was Jonathan’s third institution of higher education after completing credits toward his degree at a public, Southeastern research university and then a private military community college, also in the Southeast. He had received diagnoses of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder combined type and depression. Jonathan experienced severe struggles with math comprehension and writing composition. He enjoyed attending sporting events, exercising, and working part-time.

Ookami

Ookami was a 22-year-old junior who lived on campus and was a Meteorology major. Ookami is a former ROTC cadet. She completed her associate's degree at a Southeastern public community college and had enrolled in PCU for the Fall 2021 term. Ookami was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and major depressive disorder with anxious distress. She struggled with social isolation, self-esteem, emotional regulation, and social skills. Ookami enjoyed Japanese anime and spending time with her five dogs, one of which will serve as an emotional support animal during the 2021–2022 academic term.

Penny

Penny was a 21-year-old junior who lived on campus and had declared a major in Psychology. Penny completed her associate's degree at a Southeastern public community college and had enrolled in PCU for the Fall 2021 term. Penny was an only child and had received a diagnosis of mixed connective tissue disorder. As part of this disability, she experienced symptoms related to lupus, Raynaud's syndrome, and scleroderma. Although Penny's symptoms were controlled, she experienced infrequent flare-ups of joint pain, swelling, and an inability to regulate her body temperature. These episodes inhibited her ability to attend class.

College classification responses (see Table 2) indicated 29% freshmen, as two participants transferred from other private universities. College sophomores were 14% and juniors were 29%, as these participants transferred from a community college after completing general education courses. The remaining 29% were senior status, having transferred from a combined three other institutions.

Table 2
College Classification.

Year	<i>n</i>	%
Freshman	2	29%
Sophomore	1	14%
Junior	2	29%
Senior	2	29%
Other	0	0%

Participants indicated alternative testing (extended testing time and a distraction-reduced testing environment) and note-taking accommodations (e.g., use of a computer for note-taking, ability to voice record lectures, or permission to use a Livescribe pen) as the most utilized accommodations. Of the participants, 29% had classroom access accommodations (e.g., written instructions for all assignments and priority seating), 14% required housing accommodations (e.g., private room with a private bathroom), 14% required modification to course attendance policies, 14% needed alternative text formats (e.g., documents provided in MS Word or PDF), and 29% were granted other accommodations (e.g., frequent bathroom breaks, emotional support animal).

Table 3
Accommodations Utilized.

Accommodation granted	<i>n</i>
Ability to voice record lectures	5
Attendance policy modification	1
Distraction-reduced testing environment	5
Documents provided in Microsoft Word or PDF	1
Emotional support animal	1
Extended testing time	5
Frequent bathroom breaks	1
Permission to use a Livescribe pen	1
Priority seating	1
Private room with a private bathroom	1
Use of a computer for notetaking	4
Written instructions for all assignments	1

Specific to ethnicity, six (86%) participants identified as Caucasian and one (14%) as African American. No other ethnicities were reported.

Research Setting and Ethical Considerations

The study site was PCU, where the researcher serves as the Director for the Office of Student Disability Services. PCU is a midsized, research-based institution of higher education located in the Southeast U.S. with an annual enrollment of approximately 14,000 students globally (PCU, 2021c). PCU boasts that it attracts students because of its proximity to other vibrant metropolitan cities, faculty dedicated to supporting students in reaching their maximum potential, state-of-the-art dining hall, and Southern hospitality (PCU, 2020a). Because PCU is engaged in global research and instruction with a

commitment to student success, this study's findings could be significant to staff and faculty in the divisions of academic and student affairs.

As the researcher is a PCU employee, this study was insider research (Trowler, 2011). Trowler (2011) argued that insider research is beneficial because the investigator's access to participants and naturalistic data facilitates generating meaningful data and conducting influential action-based inquiry. Just as there are benefits to insider research, there are also ethical concerns. Insider researchers are most concerned with anonymity for the study site and participants.

Given that PCU commits to student success and that the research participants will be SWDs, considered a protected population by federal regulations, the most salient ethical concern will be confidentiality. This researcher followed the PCU Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved ethical principles for research with human subjects. In accordance with these principles, the researcher fully disclosed the investigation's nature, purpose, and participation requirements. The researcher also established a confidentiality agreement with participants, noting that all information offered would remain confidential and used only for this study. This researcher employed every effort to protect participant and site anonymity by not collecting or publishing any identifying information, using participant-selected pseudonyms from the initial point of contact. Research data remained securely stored in the researcher's personal files maintained in the locked and secured Office of Student Disability Services. The potential risk for participating in this study was no greater than that experienced in daily life. Potential benefits included the opportunity to add to the current literature concerning transfer SWDs and best practices for student success.

Instrumentation

Invitation to Participate

Participant recruitment occurred through personal telephone call invitations (see Appendix B). Because the researcher met the potential participants during their accommodations registration process, this type of contact yielded a better participation rate. Invitees were reminded that they could choose not to participate without penalty upon acceptance to interview. Following each participant's acceptance of the invitation, a virtual interview was scheduled via Zoom—a cloud-based, peer-to-peer videotelephony platform used for teleconferencing, distance education, and social relations (Zoom, n.d.)—at a mutually convenient time. Each participant received an interview confirmation via email (see Appendix C), which contained the purpose and goals of the study and the informed consent form (see Appendix D). Selected participants self-identified as a transfer SWD and participated in the individual orientation for the summer 2021 term, as confirmed through the PCU's Office of Disability Services Accessible Information Management database. This database is a secure electronic case management system for disability services providers to maintain educational records and accommodations administration.

Individual Interviews

Each one-on-one, semi-structured interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Phenomenological scholars should conduct lengthy interviews with no more than 10 participants (Johnson, 2017). The semi-structured approach is ideal in that it allows for

natural discussion and exploration of uncharted territory. Using semi-structured interviews with SWDs is appropriate to curtail the potential for anxiety and distress when discussing emotional and personal issues and specific disabilities (Skeens, 2020). Sixteen questions (see Appendix A) developed by the researcher in conjunction with Skeens's (2020) protocol will guide the interview sessions. Seven participants scheduled individual interviews via Zoom at the time of their choosing. The researcher video recorded the interviews via Zoom to increase notation and thematic accuracy. As the Zoom platform automatically creates transcripts of recorded meetings, the researcher utilized the rendering for the coding review. To increase the accuracy of data interpretation, interviewees reviewed their interview transcripts and made edits or corrections as needed.

Procedures

Before beginning the study, the researcher obtained permission from PCU's IRB. This study involved human subjects and met the federal definition of research using a systematic investigation (PCU, 2020b). The researcher obtained written consent from participants before conducting interviews. Upon securing IRB approval, the researcher began data collection.

Participants in the individual orientation were students seeking disability-related academic adjustments, modifications, and auxiliary services from PCU's Disability Services Office. The one-on-one orientation is a 30-minute private meeting between the SWD and a Disability Services staff member to discuss academic adjustments (e.g., alternative testing, classroom access, attendance modification, etc.), self-advocacy skills

development—through role-play techniques, office and university policies, and access to institutional support services. The individualized orientation provides an opportunity for SWDs to understand their granted accommodations, discuss their academic curriculum, review the use of the PCU’s learning management system, and obtain referrals to relevant campus services to support the student’s needs further. Interviews took place approximately three weeks after participants completed their individual orientation. At the beginning of the interview, the investigator reminded the participants of the study’s purpose and goals and their ability to withdraw consent for participation at any time without penalty.

At the beginning of each interview, participants selected a pseudonym for the researcher to use throughout this study to maintain the students’ confidentiality. After all interviews, the researcher used the Zoom-generated recording transcriptions to begin the coding and analysis process. The researcher then reviewed the transcripts for accuracy while playing the corresponding interview video. Participants were emailed their interview transcripts for review and asked to return them, with any needed corrections for clarification and accuracy, within seven days from receipt.

Reliability and Validity

Given the uniqueness of qualitative research, Angen (2000) suggested using validation versus validity because it better emphasizes the determination of trustworthiness on an ongoing basis. Rose and Johnson (2020) described validation as the process of understanding the accuracy of the study findings. Hayashi et al. (2019) indicated the need for validation in qualitative interpretative studies to gain an in-depth appreciation of the phenomenon and its nuance, given a constantly changing or

developing context. Validation in qualitative research differs from quantitative work, instead determined on the basis of rigor, trustworthiness, appropriateness, and quality (Angen, 2000; Hayashi et al., 2019; Rose & Johnson, 2020). As defined by Rose and Johnson, trustworthiness is the systematic rigor in the research design, researcher credibility, findings believability, and applicability of the methods. Qualitative research validation, specifically in interpretative research studies, can entail various techniques, such as member checking, triangulation, critical reflexivity, rich and thick description, peer debriefing, and prolonged engagement (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hayashi et al., 2019; Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Validation in this study was achieved through transcript checking, reflexivity, and rich and thick description. Participants engaged in the process of reviewing interview transcripts for accuracy. Reflexivity was in accordance with Moustakas's (1994) concept of epoché, as the researcher reflected on personal biases and assumptions through the process of bracketing (Ahern, 1999). Finally, this researcher compiled rich and thick description through the use of participant quotes during coding and thematic development.

Creswell and Poth (2018) defined reliability in qualitative studies as response stability between multiple coders of a dataset. Rose and Johnson (2020) found reliability achieved by an outside individual coding the text with similar results. This concept is known as an intercoder agreement (Miles et al., 2014). Enhancing reliability entails the use of field (observation) notes, audio recordings, transcripts, and blind coding by an independent reviewer (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This researcher enhanced reliability through the use of audio and video recordings and transcript generation.

Considering the researcher's experience providing disability services as the Director of PCU's Office of Student Disability Services as well as opinions and perceptions as an SWD, it is essential to maintain awareness of personal bias. Qualitative research necessitates recognizing, understanding, and inventorying how existing biases could shape the research outcomes. The only commonalities between this investigator and potential participants were that the researcher is an SWD. This researcher did not share this information with participants to avoid perceptions of there being correct and incorrect responses to interview questions.

Role of the Researcher

The role of interpretative researchers is to minimize the distance between the investigator and the research (Angen, 2000). This entails the researcher having a deep, intimate involvement in the process, with their views moderated by how differences form and expand their understanding of the topic. Ultimately, the researcher is an instrument who reveals the topic on an ongoing basis. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended that interpretative researchers situate themselves in or close to the writings. Alase (2017) asserted that because qualitative researchers minimize the distance between themselves and the research, they become an instrument of the study, investigating and interpreting phenomena. Because it is traditional in qualitative research for the investigator to be closely involved with the study data as an instrument, this examiner worked with the data to analyze and develop codes that lead to themes derived from the participants' words and expressions. Given the relationship between the researcher and the study, engaging in epoché was necessary. Epoché is the process of revisiting phenomena with an open mind after setting aside any previous knowledge, conceptualization, or judgments (Moustakas,

2011). Researchers have identified epoché as the initial phase of phenomenological research (Lin, 2013; Moerer-Urdhal & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 2011).

The collected data facilitated an understanding of the world through participants' experiences. Accordingly, this researcher set aside preconceived notions, judgments, and biases of transfer SWDs through reflexivity. In a journal entry completed after each interview, the researcher explored personal thoughts and feelings before, during, and after the interview. This action supported the investigator in readily accepting new knowledge presented in subsequent interviews to accurately perceive the world through participants' eyes.

This step was essential to this research and purging predetermined ideas of transfer SWDs and SWDs in general because this researcher is an SWD. The researcher earned both Bachelor of Arts and Master of Science degrees with the support of disability-related accommodations and now works as the Director for the Office of Student Disability Services, thus having an appreciation for the idea that this role heightens cognizance, comprehension, and sensitivity toward the issues addressed in this study. As a disability services professional, the investigator is extremely invested in the effect of students' experiences on self-efficacy and belongingness. Given this investment in experience, participant interview data was highly valuable to the researcher, while it required effort to remain objective. Ultimately, the researcher's academic and professional backgrounds guided analyzing the information from the students' perspectives to expand the knowledge of best practices to support transfer SWDs.

Data Analysis

When analyzing the data, the researcher invoked a process that was both iterative and inductive (Sterling, 2018). Data analysis commenced with a line-by-line review of interview transcripts, entering impactful statements into NVivo qualitative data analysis software (QSR International, n.d.) for organization into codes and then identification of emerging themes. NVivo is a computer software program widely used for qualitative analysis, as it helps researchers find, organize, and examine insights from unstructured data. The creation of a matrix consisting of recurring codes and supporting statements by interviewee pseudonym allowed for emerging themes, showing the commonality among participants' experiences with the individual orientation. The researcher established trustworthiness by allowing participants to review their interview transcripts and provide feedback to ensure accuracy. To further yield rich data, the researcher took notes during the interviews, documenting topics and participants' words and thoughts regarded as important.

Summary

Chapter III presented a synopsis of this study's methods, participants, data collection, and analysis procedures. Qualitative research is the selected approach to provide insight into participants' experiences. Interpreting experiential descriptions to answer the research questions occurred using phenomenology and IPA. Epoché assisted in identifying and setting aside the investigator's biases and philosophical assumptions to conduct a research study that is natural and objective.

The chapter also included descriptions of the participants, research setting, and study instrumentation. Data collection utilized individual interviews with the student participants. Also discussed were reliability and validation, as well as the steps taken to achieve these objectives. Finally, Chapter III presented the researcher's role, addressing the assumptions and ethical issues relevant to this study.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the influence of an individualized orientation session on the perceptions of self-efficacy and belongingness in transfer SWDs at a Southeastern public university, Port City University. This chapter presents the factors that most influenced participants' self-efficacy, belongingness, and persistence from the students' perspective. Chapter IV includes excerpts from semi-structured participant interviews and the data generated from four transfer SWDs registered with PCU's Office of Student Disability Services. The collected data indicated a need for further exploration and study of the transfer SWD population and the influence of individualized orientations. Chapter IV presents the qualitative data utilized in the subsequent chapter's recommendations. This chapter includes brief introductions to the participants, providing the reader with a rich description of the data results.

Data Presentation

Data for this study came from student accommodation applications and seven semi-structured interview transcripts. Early data analysis produced emerging themes when commonalities developed during the researcher's note-taking.

Primary Research Questions

1. How were perceptions of self-efficacy influenced by transfer SWDs' experience with an individualized orientation?
2. How were perceptions of belongingness influenced by transfer SWDs' experience with an individualized orientation?

Sub-questions

1. What support practices within the individualized orientation did transfer SWDs view as helpful to developing self-efficacy?
2. What program practices influenced transfer SWDs' ability to persist throughout the semester?
3. What program practices shaped transfer SWDs' sense of belonging to the university?
4. What were the advantages of participating in an individualized orientation as a transfer SWD?

The researcher interviewed seven participants to collect rich data regarding their perceptions of self-efficacy and sense of belonging as a transfer SWD after experiencing an individualized orientation.

Table 4 shows the emerging themes from each research question and the corresponding sub-questions. This table also presents the emerging themes for Sub-questions 2 and 4.

Table 4
Emerging Themes of Participant Perceptions.

Research question	Emerging theme
<p>RQ1: How were perceptions of self-efficacy influenced by transfer SWDs' experience with an individualized orientation?</p> <p>SQ1: What support practices within the individualized orientation did transfer SWDs view as helpful to developing self-efficacy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared to succeed • Support of accommodations
<p>RQ 2: How were perceptions of belongingness influenced by transfer SWDs' experience with an individualized orientation?</p> <p>SQ3: What program practices shaped transfer SWDs' sense of belonging to the university?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual meeting options • Tailored approaches • Knowledgeable and engaging disability services providers
<p>SQ2: What program practices influenced transfer SWDs' ability to persist throughout the semester?</p> <p>SQ4: What were the advantages of participating in an individualized orientation as a transfer SWD?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared to succeed • Tailored approaches • Support of accommodations

RQ1: How were perceptions of self-efficacy influenced by transfer SWDs' experience with an individualized orientation?

As defined by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is individuals' belief in their potential to accomplish specific tasks or achieve favorable outcomes in various situations. Self-efficacy is a critical student characteristic for persistence (Adams & Proctor, 2010). Analysis of the research interviews and participant responses indicated positive impacts on their self-efficacy perceptions, producing two themes: (a) preparation and (b) support of accommodations as the most influential.

Preparation

The individualized orientation offers transfer SWDs an opportunity to review University and office policies and procedures, discuss academic modifications and auxiliary services, and ask situation-specific questions. Specific to the theme of preparation, data analysis uncovered that having the opportunity to better understand accommodations and how such academic modifications would create an equitable student experience were the most influential to their entrance into PCU. Dave remarked,

Oh yeah, it's brought up my self-confidence because just getting to know these accommodations actually rather than just kind of walking into it, getting to know how all this stuff works, has really brought my confidence in knowing what I'm going to experience. It makes me feel pretty good, because I get to share these things in a professional way. I guess what I'm trying to say is when I go to [PCU], I feel like I'm going to be much more ready because I know what to expect, rather than just kind of walking into something because I'm not prepared for it all.

Additionally, Britney shared,

[It] made me feel even better about being able to be successful here with this class that I'm taking because I know that I'll be able to do it to the same ability that I would have at my other university by having my same accommodations.

Jonathan expressed,

So, it was a good thing, and then having the direct interaction just trying to get it in was pretty good when I was able just to ask questions face to face, or as face to face as we can really do it. It all helped.

Finally, Penny stated,

Honestly, it was very informative. It was helpful. When I got off the Zoom with [staff], I was able to know exactly where to go and my AIM account, make sure everything is good. Know what I need to tell my teachers. [Staff] gave me a chance to ask questions at the end of our Zoom meeting, and I asked them about the library and how that works and the computers and if you could rent out books, and I asked about textbooks, and they explained that to me and when I should get them and everything like that. I don't know if that's what you do normally—it's probably just with the disability meetings—but that was very, very helpful. It made me feel better about going into it. Going into a university from a community

college, it feels the exact same as going from high school to a community college. It's terrifying. But after talking with [staff] and having it explained what you guys offer and how I can get help and my accommodations and everything like that, I feel like I can do it.

Support of Accommodations

The second theme that emerged from an analysis of the data for this RQ was that participants found accommodation support to be instrumental in the development of their self-efficacy for college success. Data analysis revealed that knowing the Disability Services Office is available to establish new or similar accommodations and troubleshoot any needs was also influential to their self-efficacy. Britney said, “[It] definitely influenced it in a positive way, knowing that I was able to still receive the accommodations here.” Curtis reported, “Being able to learn about what they do, and it was a blessing that I was able to receive the same accommodations I have had in the past.” Jonathan stated, “It helped now that I know that everything’s on record with the office and that I have my accommodations back in order, and I actually just got my confirmation emails today for my classes that they’ll be in there.” Penny remarked, “I’m even more confident now that I’ve talked with [Disability Services] and had my accommodations put in place.” Finally, Ookami responded, “Well, with [the emotional support animal] there, I have a pretty good opinion that he will be there with me. I do have stronger confidence and opinion that I will do better this semester.”

These responses suggest that, after experiencing the individualized orientation, participants’ self-efficacy increased due to gaining a better grasp of what it takes to be successful within PCU, making them feel better prepared for the institution’s academic rigor. Moreover, these data indicate that participants perceived better self-efficacy

knowing that their granted accommodations made their access to PCU's academic programming equitable. The following section presents the individualized orientation's influence on participants' sense of belonging.

RQ2: How were perceptions of belongingness influenced by transfer SWDs' experience with an individualized orientation?

Belongingness in education centers on students' belief of having a connection to their college or university, the institution's staff, and other students (Kahu & Nelson, 2017). Vaccaro et al. (2015) postulated that a sense of belonging at the college level is highly related to academic success and persistence. Analysis of the data pertaining to this RQ indicated that the individualized orientation positively influenced their sense of belonging at PCU. Data analysis uncovered three themes: (a) virtual meeting options, (b) tailored approaches, and (c) knowledgeable and engaging disability service providers as the most influential support practices of the individualized orientation.

Virtual Meeting Options

Analysis of the data for RQ2 revealed that participants reported that offering virtual meeting options for individualized orientation sessions increased their ability to easily access the Disability Services Office. Ookami remarked,

So, this is kind of like the only option instead of trying to formulate a trip, probably with my parents and probably my dog, to go down there because I don't live down there. It would be a different story if I live down there, but I don't. I live five hours away, so it was very helpful that there's a Zoom meeting.

Dave said, "Personally, I think it's worked really well in the virtual form." Britney shared, "It was definitely easier to figure out a time that fit into my schedule that was available to schedule a meeting because of Zoom, so that was very helpful." Curtis

reported, “I didn’t prefer it, but it worked well, and I enjoyed it.” Finally, Jacqueline stated, “It was very pleasant. I was not sure that it was going to be that easy.”

Tailored Approaches

Using a tailored approach for transfer SWDs in the individualized orientation is, as Jackson and Laanan (2015) noted, an opportunity to acknowledge that transfer students are different and require awareness of their adjustment experience. Analysis of the interviews and participant data for RQ2 uncovered tailored approaches as a second theme concerning the individualized orientation of this study and belongingness, Britney expressed, “Just feeling like I wasn’t just another cog in the big wheel, you know. He was very personable and helped me feel more individualized and seen rather than just...going through the same old motions.” Dave shared,

It has made me kind of feel a bit like I do belong in a sense. You guys are kind of setting me in a place, I guess, and also allowing me room to kind of do my own thing while also showing me how everything works.

Also, Jacqueline said, “[It] made me feel comfortable and not being judged because it was about me.”

Knowledgeable and Engaging Disability Service Provider

In tandem with developing a tailored approach for students receiving the individualized orientation, data analysis indicated that having a disability service provider who was both knowledgeable and engaging was influential to their experience and sense of belonging. Dave remarked,

It was very easy for me to talk to you guys. You guys are very good at listening to things. That was a good aspect, I thought, you know, working with the disability stuff and, as I said earlier, the previous college I was at was not even like disability service all. It would not even answer the phone sometimes, and so in that, you guys have been amazing in terms of helping me out and in terms of what

I can do and stuff. So, yeah, I think, again, in terms of those aspects, you guys are above the other stuff.

Britney expressed,

The man I spoke to who helped me at my accessibility meeting, he really created a welcoming and warm environment. I was a little nervous that it would be, you know, just one of those general machine-like meetings where it's just back-and-forth basic—you know, questions and answers—but he really did, you know, come off as really nice and helpful and concerned and willing to help me get where I needed to be in order to gain my accommodations here.

Curtis shared, “[The staff] did a phenomenal job on making sure that I received the accommodations I needed, and he also made sure I understood all the processes.” Finally,

Penny stated,

So, going into something like school, especially the older you get, you notice more things, especially at universities, you have more people that can be a part of groups and do sports, and you think, “I won't be able to do that.” But after talking with [staff] about clubs to join and stuff like that, I felt so welcomed.

Additional Emerging Themes

While the research and interview questions did not explicitly seek responses relating to SWD difficulties in college, many participants spoke of issues that were most influential to their student experience. The most salient themes data analysis revealed concerning transfer SWD issues were (a) stigma in requesting accommodations and (b) faculty and staff interaction.

Stigma in Requesting Accommodations

Megivern et al. (2003) found that at least a third of SWDs experience stigma and discrimination, particularly those with mental health disabilities. Related to stigma,

Jonathan stated,

That's mainly the thing, right? Um, for a lot of us, if we grew up, like myself—I know growing up having attention deficit disorder and stuff like that, it's not seen

really as a major thing. It's just, "Oh, you have trouble focusing," stuff like that. The people who really know that it can be a problem are people who have experienced it themselves or are helping you through that. Sometimes it can't be looked past a lot of times, or you can just be looked down on, which happened with family and stuff like that.

Ookami shared,

To describe my autism, I am on the spectrum. I was diagnosed by a professional, but to normal people and to the spectrum, I am highly functional. So, like, in middle school, for example, before I was told that I had autism, the word that was used to describe me was "overly sensitive."

Jacqueline responded, "I was very hesitant due to being concerned that I would be judged [because] of my bipolar." Finally, Penny expressed:

I've always been very, you know, positive about having a disability, especially one that affects you so often. You have to prepare yourself for daily things that people won't think of, such as writing, and your hands get locked up. Then you think, "If I do this too long, will I be able to do this tomorrow?" I have to plan out what I can be able to do, and there are people who are not understanding of that.

Staff and Faculty Interaction

The second emerging theme data analysis revealed concerning transfer SWD experience was faculty and staff interaction. Participants indicated they were mostly concerned with having adequate in-person opportunities to engage professors and university staff members, as such interaction was influential to their academic success.

Dave remarked,

I really enjoy a class being in-person because, with me, my attention span, when it comes to just listening to lectures and writing stuff down, whether that's on virtual or in a classroom, [I] can just kind of lose interest, at least in my mind, pretty quickly. But in terms of interacting, when you're in an actual classroom, you actually get to do certain things, talk with professors and people for groups to explain things.

Ookami shared,

I would rather be in an in-person class. It's just how I learn. I learn through doing, and in a classroom setting, it's easier for me to learn the material. In person, I don't have to wait for, like, a zillion more people to ask questions before me. I ask the questions at the beginning or something because I don't like to interrupt people. In the classroom setting, if I don't have another class to get to, I can just stand there and wait until...they're finished, ask my question, and go over what I need.

Jonathan expressed,

It helps just to actually have somebody with you there, where you can go through basically sort of a checklist of things, like, "Have you signed up for your classes? Have you figured out what direction you actually want to go in? Have you figured out what college you're actually going to be a part of at the university?" That sort of stuff.

Finally, Penny stated,

I did miss that one-on-one in the classroom setting because you can raise your hand and ask a question, and I didn't have a lot of Zoom online classes. I think I had one the entire time. And then I did a year and a half of school online since COVID. That was probably the most difficult because I would go weeks without hearing from professors.

Overall, this study showed that transfer SWDs found the individualized orientation experience to be a positive influence on their perceptions of self-efficacy and sense of belonging to PCU. The findings supported the idea that student preparation influences transfer SWDs' persistence. Preparation by PCU staff includes orienting them to the institutional policies and procedures, supporting them with student-specific accommodations, and creating a connection to their college or university.

Summary

Chapter IV presented data from seven participant interviews to show the influence of an individualized orientation on their perceptions of self-efficacy and sense of belonging. The experiences participants shared indicated the factors they perceived as the

most influential to academic success and persistence. The factors most influential to self-efficacy were preparation for success and support of accommodations. Moreover, the factors most influential to perceptions of belongingness were multiple means of access, tailored approaches, and knowledgeable and engaging disability services providers. Participants' responses showed other clear, emerging themes, as discussed within the future research and recommendations sections in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of self-efficacy and sense of belonging in transfer SWDs after experiencing an individualized orientation with the Disability Services Office at a Southeastern public institution. The researcher also aimed to identify what aspects of the individualized orientation were the most influential to shaping self-efficacy and belongingness, affecting students' persistence. The study occurred at PCU, a Southeastern, public 4-year institution. In line with recommendations by Smith et al. (2009) and Creswell and Poth (2018) related to performing phenomenological research, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with seven transfer SWDs who sought accommodations from PCU's Disability Service Office and participated in the individualized orientation for the Summer 2021 term. At the conclusion of the seven semi-structured individual interviews, the researcher followed the steps of interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The findings showed several emerging themes, indicating individualized orientation experiences and situations that transfer SWDs perceived as influential to their self-efficacy and belongingness.

Discussion of Findings

This study supported Tinto's (1975, 1988, 1993) theory of student departure and Tinto's (2019) reflections on persistence. In the theory of student departure, Tinto (1975, 1988, 1993) focused on student behavior, arguing that for students to persist and reach degree completion, they must appropriately and equally integrate into the academic and social environments of their college or university. In 2019, Tinto expanded upon the theory of student departure with reflections on student persistence focused on the institution, recommending that higher education leaders begin viewing persistence through the student lens. Tinto (2019) identified persistence through the student lens as a combination of self-efficacy (confidence), sense of belonging, and relevant curriculum. The present study indicated program support practices that participants believed were influential to shaping their self-efficacy. Findings from this study also showed practices participants found influential in shaping their sense of belonging.

Additionally, this research supported the framework of critical disability theory (CDT). CDT centers on a disabled person's lived experiences (Hall, 2019) concerning the societal norms that characterize disability, both physical and mental, and contribute to the stigmatization of one population over another (Schalk, 2017). Moreover, CDT suggests refitting policies, practices, and procedures (or society as a collective) to allow for understanding disability on a continuum of impairment (Procknow et al., 2017). The present study found themes that support individualization with organizational policy and instruction to influence self-efficacy and sense of belonging.

Two primary research questions and four sub-questions guided this study. As Sub-questions 2 and 4 were subsumed within the findings of the two primary research

questions and Sub-questions 1 and 3, a brief discussion of how these findings align with the existing literature on SWD experiences follows.

RQ1: How were perceptions of self-efficacy influenced by transfer SWDs' experience with an individualized orientation?

The participants discussed overall positive experiences with the individualized orientation. Specific to self-efficacy, participants reported a perception of increased self-efficacy after attending the individualized orientation. Sub-question 1 focused on what program practices were the most supportive in shaping participants' self-confidence. Data analysis showed that the most influential aspects of the individualized orientation pertaining to self-efficacy centered on opportunities to learn more about the accommodation process, their specific modifications, institutional resources, and university policies. Sub-question 1 showed these practices as supporting participants' preparation for success. Additionally, the study found participants' self-efficacy most influenced by the Disability Services Office granting accommodations to increase equitable access to academic programming. Sub-question 1 presented this practice's support of accommodations.

The present study's findings were consistent with Herbert et al. (2014) and Mamiseishvili and Koch (2011), who presented experiences that assisted in the development of student success behaviors. Herbert et al. examined college SWDs' persistence, finding that disabled students who received disability services had a higher rate of reaching degree completion. Mamiseishvili and Koch explored SWDs' characteristics and factors that influenced persistence, finding significant associations

between persistence and type of services received. Those studies aligned with the perspectives obtained through participant interviews in this study.

RQ2: How were perceptions of belongingness influenced by transfer SWDs' experience with an individualized orientation?

Participants reported that the individualized orientation positively influenced their sense of belonging—specifically, their belongingness perceptions increased after the experience. Sub-question 3 was specific to what program practices supported the participants' belongingness. The most reported situations influencing the participants' experience related to belongingness were a tailored approach to their needs and a knowledgeable and engaging disability services provider. Participants felt that the individualized orientation considered what was unique about them and their matriculation. Moreover, interviewees highlighted the Disability Services Office's staff as inviting, professional, and knowledgeable, creating an engaging environment.

These findings are consistent with the research of Jackson and Laanan (2015), Burgstahler (2001), Vaccaro et al. (2015), and Robertson et al. (2011). Jackson and Laanan argued that transfer students' success is also the responsibility of the higher education institutions, positing that faculty and staff must be cognizant of the transfer student's adjustment experience. One of Burgstahler et al.'s recommendations was for postsecondary institutions to implement a separate orientation for disabled students transferring to the new campus. Vaccaro et al. suggested that students can persist as they gain a sense of belonging through developing working relationships with staff, faculty, and peers. Finally, Robertson et al. argued for supporting transfer students with a more individualized orientation to assist them with academic advising, understanding

differences between institutions, and developing self-determination skills. These researchers' findings supported the perspectives concerning sense of belonging garnered from the participants' responses in the present study.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

These research findings support recommendations for disability service offices to act as secondary advisors, being knowledgeable on students' academic programming, financial needs, and other relevant campus resources. In addition, existing literature has recommended that institutions of higher education offer unique services for transfer SWD, as they are not a monolithic population (Burgstahler et al., 2001; Gawley & McGowen, 2006). This study proposes that disability services offices develop a supplemental individualized orientation for incoming transfer SWD tailored to each student's specific need. As this study highlighted, offering an individualized orientation allows a transfer SWD a more personalized opportunity to understand the new institution's practices, policies, and procedures.

Additionally, study findings support offering professional development for faculty and staff concerning disability and transfer issues to ease SWDs' transition. An emerging theme of this research that positively impacted participants' persistence was knowledgeable and engaging disability service providers. Lombardi et al. (2013) highlighted that faculty and staff awareness of disability-related issues increased SWDs' perception of support and inclusion. Moreover, Moriña and Carballo (2017) posited that disability and inclusion education training could positively change instructional practices. The findings from this research study support institutions eliminating the one-size-fits-all

system within postsecondary education, developing an individualized approach that considers student need on a case-by-case basis.

Finally, this research supports universities and colleges developing mentorship programs between SWD and faculty members. Markle et al. (2017) recommended developing a faculty mentorship program for SWD in their transitional year as such offering supports these students' academic success and classroom inclusion. Findings from the present study revealed that participants coveted one-on-one interaction with faculty members, as they perceived this to be instrumental to their academic success, which aligns with Markle et al.'s (2017) recommendation.

Limitations

Limitations to this study include the use of purposeful sampling, as required in phenomenological guided explorations, which reduces the ability to generalize findings. Although the researcher invited all eligible participants, some students did not respond to the call for participation. Additionally, qualitative methodology depends on participants to be expressive to gain rich data; however, some participants provided limited responses, even with prompting. Ideally, future investigators would account for these limitations, strengthening the body of work produced.

Recommendations for Future Research

The present study will continue longitudinally, as the investigator will follow the study participants through matriculation, further exploring the influence of the individualized orientation on degree completion. This researcher will report the findings

of the longitudinal investigation in a future body of work. Furthermore, future researchers may choose to explore the influence of faculty professional development concerning disability-related access and Universal Design in the classroom on individualization, belongingness, and self-efficacy.

Transfer SWDs are not a monolithic population, as this study has shown. Given such status, future researchers of the influence of an individualized orientation on transfer SWDs might wish to explore the differences of experiences between prior and incoming transfer students. As this study was partially concerned with perceptions of a sense of belonging, future researchers could investigate the influence of an individualized orientation on transfer SWDs who have spent at least one semester at an institution prior to seeking accommodations, given the potential for this population to feel isolated and excluded.

Additionally, adult SWDs may also be an area of future research concerning the influence of an individualized orientation. One of this study's participants was an adult SWD transferring credits to the institution after a 10-year hiatus from academic work. This researcher did not explicitly explore the influence of the individualized orientation on the adult student identity; therefore, further research could amplify the voice of this population.

A final area unexplored in this study was the graduate transfer SWD identity. None of the participants were at the graduate level. However, future researchers could provide suggestions for tailoring the individualized orientation to meet the needs of the graduate student and graduate transfer SWD population.

Summary

This study added to the literature concerning transfer SWDs by exploring the influences of an individualized orientation on their perceptions of self-efficacy and sense of belonging. The findings showed a relationship between experiencing an individualized orientation and self-efficacy and belongingness, leading to persistence. With this exploration, the researcher uncovered connections between services within the individualized orientation participants received that promoted efficacy, belongingness, and persistence. The findings from the seven participant interviews aligned with and supported existing research and theories. Additionally, this chapter included considerations for institutional policies and procedures and recommendations for future researchers to add to the body of literature on transfer SWDs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. What influenced your decision to transfer to a 4-year college/university?
2. What influenced your decision to transfer to Port City University?
3. Did you have a similar individualized orientation experience at another institution?
4. What types of accommodations do you utilize in the classroom?
5. Did you feel you had a clear perception of the process on how to obtain accommodations at Port City University?
6. Were you comfortable with initiating the process of obtaining accommodations?
If so, what made you comfortable initiating the process?
7. Do you perceive that, as a transfer student with disabilities, you have different stressors than students who do not have disabilities? Please explain.
8. How has COVID-19 influenced your transition from community college to the university setting?
 - a. Follow-up/clarifying question: How has the transition to online/remote learning due to COVID-19 influenced you?
9. How has virtual interaction due to the recommended social distancing policies influenced your ability to connect with others?
 - a. Follow-up/clarifying question: Can you tell me more about that?
10. What is your opinion of your individualized orientation being given in a virtual format due to COVID-19?

11. What was the most influential aspect of your individualized orientation with the Office of Student Disability Services?
12. How confident (belief in your potential to accomplish specific tasks or achieve favorable outcomes in various situations) were you in your ability to be academically successful coming into the university?
13. How has experiencing the individualized orientation influenced your self-confidence (belief in your potential to accomplish specific tasks or achieve favorable outcomes in various situations)?
14. How confident (belief in your potential to accomplish specific tasks or achieve favorable outcomes in various situations) were you in your ability to complete the semester before connecting with the Office of Student Disability Services?
15. How has your experience with the individualized orientation influenced you to complete this semester?
 - a. Follow-up/clarifying question: How has your experience with the individualized orientation influenced you to complete your future semesters?
16. Has the individualized orientation contributed to a sense of belongingness for you? If so, how?

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate Phone Script

[Date]

Subject: Influence of an individualized orientation on the perceptions of self-efficacy and belongingness in transfer students with disabilities

Dear [Pseudonym],

I am interested in exploring your experience with the Office of Student Disability Services' individualized orientation. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that will assess varying aspects of your experience in an individualized orientation as a transfer student with disabilities.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to provide responses about your experience as a transfer student with disabilities. Your risk in this study is minimal as all information will remain anonymous and confidential. Completing this study will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. You may also choose not to participate in the study or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Laventrice S. Ridgeway, M.S.

Appendix C: Participation and Interview Email Confirmation

[Date]

Subject: Meeting Confirmation

Dear [Pseudonym],

It was a pleasure to speak with you a moment ago. As discussed, I am emailing you a Zoom invitation (see below) for our meeting on [meeting date] at [meeting time]. Our meeting will last approximately 1 hour. If you are unable to keep this scheduled time for any reason, please feel free to let me know at your earliest convenience. I look forward to meeting with you.

[Zoom invitation information]

Sincerely,

Laventrice S. Ridgeway, M.S.

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-EFFICACY AND BELONGINGNESS IN TRANSFER STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AFTER AN INDIVIDUALIZED ORIENTATION AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

Principal Investigator: Laventrice S. Ridgeway, M.S., Office of Student Disability Services, 251-460-7271, lsridgeway@southalabama.edu

Advisor: Dr. Peggy M. Delmas, Department of Leadership & Teacher Education

IS MY PARTICIPATION VOLUNTARY AND CAN I WITHDRAW?

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. You can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequences. Tell the study team if you are thinking about stopping or decide to stop.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

You are invited to consider participating in this research study. This study is being done in order to note how an individualized orientation for transfer students with disabilities shapes their perception of self-efficacy (confidence) and belongingness. The goal of this study is to learn what aspects of having an individualized orientation are most influential to the student experience. This information can be used to help create tools, policies, and procedures that student support administrators can implement to improve their services.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

Participants who decide to join this study will be asked to meet with the investigator over Zoom for approximately 60 minutes. This Zoom meeting will be video recorded and audio recorded for the purposes of transcription. Once the recording has been transcribed, the participant will have the opportunity to review their meeting transcription to ensure statement accuracy.

- **Audio/Videotaping:** Please initial one of the following:

____ I agree to be audio/videotaped

____ I do not agree to be audio/videotaped

WHAT RISKS CAN I EXPECT FROM BEING IN THE STUDY?

Risks associated with this study are no more than that of the everyday life experience. Participants will not be asked to share sensitive information or information they are uncomfortable reporting.

ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you participate in this research, there will be no direct benefit to you. There may not be any benefit to society at this stage of the research, but future generations are likely to benefit.

WHAT OTHER CHOICES DO I HAVE IF I DO NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

Participants may choose to withdraw consent for participation at any time throughout this study. Participants do not have to participate in the interview portion of the study. Participants may request to complete the study in a survey format if preferred.

HOW WILL MY INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

This study is anonymous. Participants will select or be assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. No identifying information is being collected as part of the research study. The data is stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked room. Only the researcher has access to this information. Information will be stored on the researcher's computer in password-protected files. Data will be destroyed once interpretation has reached completion.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no costs associated with participation in this study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING A PART OF THIS STUDY?

Participants will not receive compensation for engaging in this study. Participants will have the benefit of knowing that they are expanding the information available for best practices in supporting students throughout their academic careers.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

You have rights as a research participant. All research with human participants is reviewed by a committee called the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions about your rights, an unresolved question, a concern, or a complaint about this research you may contact the IRB office at 251-460-6308, toll-free at 866-511-6509, or via email at irb@southalabama.edu.

HOW DO I INDICATE MY AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE?

You have read, or have had read to you, the purpose and procedures of this research. You have had an opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to your satisfaction. You voluntarily agree to participate in this research as described.

Participant Name (printed)	Date
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Signature of Participant	Date
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Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent (printed)	Date
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Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent	Date
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Appendix E: Institutional Review Board Approval

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 13, 2021

Principal Investigator: Laventrice Ridgeway, M.S.
IRB # and Title: IRB PROTOCOL: 21-124
[1732963-2] A Phenomenological Study of Perceptions of Self-efficacy and Belongingness in Transfer Students with Disabilities after an Individualized Orientation with the Office of Student Disability Services

Status: APPROVED Review Type: Limited Review
Approval Date: April 26, 2021 Submission Type: New Project
Initial Approval: April 26, 2021 Expiration Date:
Review Category: 45 CFR 46.104 (d)(2): Research that only includes interaction involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording):

iii. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can be readily ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7)

This panel, operating under the authority of the DHHS Office for Human Research and Protection, assurance number FWA 00001602, and IRB Database #00000286 or #00011574, has reviewed the submitted materials for the following:

- 1. Protection of the rights and the welfare of human subjects involved.*
- 2. The methods used to secure and the appropriateness of informed consent.*
- 3. The risk and potential benefits to the subject.*

The regulations require that the investigator not initiate any changes in the research without prior IRB approval, except where necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the human subjects, and that **all problems involving risks and adverse events be reported to the IRB immediately!**

Subsequent supporting documents that have been approved will be stamped with an IRB approval and expiration date (if applicable) on every page. Copies of the supporting documents must be utilized with the current IRB approval stamp unless consent has been waived.

Notes:

There are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of data

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Name of Author: Laventrice S. Ridgeway

Graduate and Undergraduate School Attended:

University of South Alabama, Mobile, Alabama

Degrees Awarded:

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, 2021, University of South
Alabama

Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, 2013, University of
South Alabama

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, 2011, University of South Alabama

Awards and Honors

Graduate Assistantship in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, 2012, University of
South Alabama

Graduate Assistantship in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, 2013, University of
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