

COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT AND BURNOUT AMONG UNDERGRADUATE TRANSFER  
AND NATIVE STUDENTS

by

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(Under the Direction of Edward Delgado-Romero)

ABSTRACT

The present study explored between and within group differences among native and transfer student groups on measures of adjustment and burnout. The study also explored how specific variables impact transfer student adjustment and sought to determine if a relationship exists between college adjustment and student burnout. Three-hundred sixty five undergraduate native and transfer students enrolled in a college of agriculture at a large southeastern public institution were administered The *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire* (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1989) and the *Maslach Burnout Inventory- Student Survey* (MBI-SS; Schaufeli et al., 2002). The results obtained in this study suggest that transfer students are experiencing more difficulty adjusting to the social and institutional demands of the university than do native students. The study also revealed that students in the college of agriculture are experiencing moderately elevated levels of emotional exhaustion. Finally, the results of the study identified a significant correlation between college adjustment and student burnout. The relationship identified suggests that students are less likely to develop burnout symptomatology if they are better adjusted to their higher educational institution. The results of the present study may be beneficial for college administrators, faculty and staff who work with transfer student

populations. The results could inform the development of programs and intervention strategies to use with students experiencing adjustment difficulties and/or symptoms of burnout.

**INDEX WORDS:** Transfer students, college adjustment, student burnout, college student retention.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Policymakers, institutional personnel, employers, and educational researchers at various levels in higher education have become increasingly concerned with the retention of students (Wlazelek & Coulter, 1999; Bean, 2001; Ishitani, 2008). Although there have been increases in undergraduate college enrollment and various retention strategies implemented, low rates of academic achievement and high levels of attrition persist (Devonport & Lane, 2006; Lloyd, Tienda, & Zajacova, 2001; Tinto, 1993, as cited in Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007). Academic achievement refers to a student's performance in scholarly related activities, a student's ability to obtain a high grade point average (GPA), and may include accomplishments such as graduation (Brown, Lent, & Larkin, 1989; Armstrong, 2006; Answers.com, 2010). In an effort to assure continued institutional support and flow of revenue from the payment of tuition, institutions of higher education seek to have low rates of attrition (Bean, 2001). Twenty-to-thirty percent of students do not return following their first year in college and an additional 20-30 percent will not return after their second year (Grayson & Grayson, 2003; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006). Some estimates suggest that as many as 50 percent of students who enter higher education never earn a degree (Seidman, 2005) and that attrition rates as high as 20 percent are not uncommon at many institutions (Gerds & Mallinckrodt, 1994).

#### *Attrition*

Student attrition in higher education is a complex problem involving the interaction of numerous variables. Due to the many different causes and forms of attrition, it is difficult to

clearly define (Edwards, Cangemi, & Kowalski, 1990; Polansky, Horan, & Hanish, 1993; McGrath & Braunstein, 1997). Voluntary withdrawals, non-continuous enrollment, transferring to another institution, and/or academic failure are all considered to be a type of attrition (Wintre, Bowers, Gordner, & Lange, 2006; Ishitani, 2008). Due to these numerous forms of departure, attrition rates may group a diverse set of factors and/or populations which have very little in common. Tinto (1975) asserted that the inadequate definition of student departure has led to the lumping together of behaviors that are very different in character. Due to the many variables involved, attrition rates are misleading and may vary from one institution to the next (Astin, 1997; Grayson et al, 2003). A better understanding of the factors that contribute to college success (and failure) is needed (Proctor et al, 2006).

#### *Factors impacting attrition*

Although high school GPA and standardized test scores have been traditionally used as predictors of college performance (Proctor et al., 2006), researchers have identified numerous factors that impact attrition and a student's ability to succeed in college (Petry & Craft, 1976; Edwards, Cangemi, & Kowalski, 1990; Proctor, Prevatt, Adams, Hurst, & Petscher, 2006). Some have suggested that attrition rates may be attributed to one of three general factors: the failings of the student, the failing of the university, and/or a combination of both (Wintre et al, 2006). Cuseo (n.d) suggested that some of the key factors involved in attrition include: academic problems, lack of interest in the academic material, and psychological adjustment problems. Other factors that have been identified include self-efficacy, stress, anxiety, low motivation, emotional problems, and academic burnout (Moneta, 2011; Caballero-Domínguez, Hederich, & Palacio-Sañudo, 2010; Arias, Justo, & Mañas, 2010; Ong & Cheong, 2009; Pisarik, 2009; Ngai & Cheung, 2009; Asberg, Bowers, Renk & McKinney, 2008; Schwitzer & Choate, 2007;

Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005; Chemers, Hu & Garcia, 2001; Hirose, Wada & Watanabe, 1999; Anderson & Cole, 1988).

Edwards and colleagues, (1990) condensed the numerous factors believed to impact attrition into five general domains: personal, financial, emotional/psychological, environmental, and academic. Personal factors include personality characteristics, immaturity, attitude towards the institution, and low motivation. Solberg Nes and colleagues, (2009) as well as Balduf (2009) suggest that a student's motivation and goal valuation are crucial factors in determining success. Lack of family or social/emotional support and other personal problems have also been suggested as factors that impact attrition rates (Mohr, Eiche, & Sedlacek, 1998; Dewitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009). Smith & Winterbottom (1970) found personality characteristics that seemed to be relevant factors involved in a college student's academic success. In their study, students who experienced academic problems seemed indifferent to their plight and did not avail themselves to remedial services. In a separate examination of non-intellectual factors, it was suggested that students experiencing academic problems experienced difficulty accepting responsibility for their academic circumstances, were unwilling to accept that they were doing poorly, and lacked enthusiasm for their courses (Smith et al, 1970). Hsieh et al (2007) found that students experiencing difficulty expressed goals that were counterproductive to their efforts to succeed.

Financial factors in college such as tuition, financial aid, employment, student fees, and book and supply expenses are not uncommon in the lives of many college students. The cost of attending an institution of higher education has steadily risen over the past two decades (Bozick, 2007). Although college students have a number of options for financing their higher educational expenses, many don't take full advantage of options such as government-sponsored

financial aid programs. Many times, college students rely on family, personal savings, and employment to fund their college education as opposed to federal grants and loans (Bozick, 2007). There are various reasons why college students underutilize financial aid resources (American Council on Education, 2004). Some college students do not apply for financial aid despite being eligible, others may be unaware of the different types of financial aid available to them, and some do not apply because they believe that a college education is not affordable despite financial assistance (Bozick, 2007). Additionally, despite increases in funding to federal and state financial aid programs, these increases have not kept up with the pace of rising tuition and fees. Financial aid programs play a vital role in many students ability to pay for their education. If the funding provided by these programs is not sufficient or if students are not able to access them, they many times turn to alternative resources to fund their educational and related expenses.

One way that many students address their financial issues while in college is through employment. Riggert and colleagues (2006) reported that an estimated 80 percent of college students are employed while completing their undergraduate education. Students may take advantage of many on and off campus employment opportunities while in college. While on-campus employment is federally funded and regulates the number of hours that students can work, off campus employment such as restaurants, department stores, and fast food locations do not. Pike and colleagues (2008) found a significant relationship between student employment and academic performance. Their study suggests that the number of hours a student spends working each week is correlated with their academic achievement. Pike and colleagues (2008) found that students who worked more than 20 hours per week earned substantially lower grades than students who did not work that many hours.

Emotional and psychological factors are also key variables that impact a college student's ability to succeed. Factors such as feelings of homesickness, loneliness, low self-esteem, indecisiveness, reduced self-efficacy, stress, and high levels of anxiety have been found to impact attrition of college students (Gerdes et al., 1994; Daugherty & Lane, 1999; Twenge, 2001; Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002). Research suggests that students who struggle academically display increased levels of anxiety, problems with concentration, and many experience adjustment difficulties as they encounter the stressors of college (Proctor, Prevatt, Adams, Hurst, & Petscher, 2006; Pittman & Richmond, 2008). Elevated levels of stress is common among college student populations (Ong et al., 2009) and has been linked to various negative psychological symptoms such as anxiety and burnout (Moneta, 2011, Salanova, Schaufeli, Martínez, & Bresó, 2010, Pissarik, 2009).

Environmental factors are also considered to be instrumental due to the role they play in college student success (Astin, 1997). College students many times experience various difficulties as they engage with the organizational and pedagogical demands of the academic environment (Duchesne, Ratelle, Larose, & Guay, 2007). The literature provides an overwhelming amount of evidence regarding the environmental difficulties experienced by students enrolled in higher education and the potential negative consequences these difficulties may produce (Compas, Wagner, Salvin, & Vannatta, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Rieke & Conn, 1994; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Brooks & DuBois, 1995; Pratt, Hunsberger, Pancer, Alisat, Bowers, Mackey, Osteniewicz, Rog, Terzian, & Thomas, 2000; Jackson & Finney, 2002; Lidy & Kahn, 2006). Some of the difficulties experienced many times include separation and restructuring of family or social networks; time management issues, adjustment problems, and conflicts between study and leisure activities. These barriers may impact a

student's social integration which has been cited as being a vital component of college student success (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Belch, Gebel, & Maas, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Kuo, Hagie, and Miller (2004) asserted that the social environment serves as a catalyst for college student achievement.

Factors in the academic domain include: study skills, class attendance and grades. Many variables have been cited as contributing to a student's academic achievement in college, these include peer culture, academic major, faculty contact, employment, career choice, personal motivation, organization, study habits, quality of effort, self-efficacy and perceived control (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Higgins, 2003). These variables may include positive and negative elements. For instance, a student's place of employment may be a compliment to academic and career interests but could also serve as competition for a student's time. Although academic performance is regarded as one of the major factors influencing a student's decision to withdrawal, most students do not fail due to lack of ability (Barefoot, 2004). It is estimated that 70 percent of students who dropout have the intellectual capacity to succeed in college (Edwards, Cangemi, & Kowalski, 1990). This suggests that other factors in addition to academic potential need to be considered when exploring the causes of attrition.

#### *Populations at risk for attrition*

Certain populations seem to experience attrition at much higher rates than others. Ethnic minority groups, the academically disadvantaged, non-traditional students, the physically disabled, students from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, and those with a learning disability have all been identified as groups that experience higher incidents of problems while in college (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Proctor et al, 2006; Hardin, 2008). Grayson and colleagues (2003), reported that the highest attrition rates were held by the following ethnic

minority groups: American Indians (33 percent), African Americans (25 percent), and Latino/as (24 percent). Asian American students had the lowest rate of attrition, (13 percent).

Wlazelek and colleagues (1999) suggested that students who experience academic problems such as academic probation or who have been dismissed due to academic reasons are also at considerable risk for attrition. Academic problems are defined as the point when a student's GPA has fallen below the minimum academic standards set by the institution. Many institutions of higher education typically set this standard at 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. When a student's GPA falls below the set standard, they are typically placed on academic probation by the institution (Cruise, 2002). Probation is used as an academic warning for students whose academic performance has fallen below the institution's requirements of good standing (Higgins, 2003). If a student on academic probation is not able to make academic progress and fails to raise the GPA above the set standard, they face the possibility of being dismissed from the institution. Dismissal represents the end of the road for students whose journey to academic peril began with academic probation (Rojas, 2003). National estimates suggest that as many as 25 percent of college students will be placed on academic probation at some point during their collegiate careers (Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Garnett, 1990, as cited in Tovar & Simon, 2006). A student's inability to manage the academic demands of the institution can contribute greatly to a student's failure and departure (Lau, 2003). A large proportion of students who voluntarily or involuntarily leave college before graduating have been on academic probation at some point prior to leaving (Coleman & Freedman, 1996). Mathies, Gardner, and Bauer (2006) found that students placed on academic probation prolong their time at the institution, have lower rates of graduation, and have an increased risk of attrition. Additionally, they found that only 5 percent

of students on academic probation graduated within 4 years and that as many as 30 percent dropped out of school altogether.

### *The Impact of Academic Difficulties*

Academic probation and dismissal can be costly in many ways. When students are dismissed due to academic failure or depart prior to completing a degree, there are negative implications for both the student and the educational institution (Grayson et al, 2003; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004). Students experiencing academic difficulties may experience psychological distress due to the stressors associated with their academic circumstances. At the individual level, academic problems may result in reduced self-efficacy and a decreased sense of hope among students (Nance, 2007).

Students who withdrawal or get dismissed due to academic problems may lose out on many potential opportunities. Solberg Nes and colleagues (2009) assert that completion of a college degree can have a significant positive impact on a person's life. They suggest that earning a college degree could potentially result in an individual earning twice as much over a lifetime when compared to individuals who do not earn a degree. In addition to generating opportunities for better jobs and financial stability, obtaining a college education also promotes a wide range of gains, such as better general health, longer life expectancy, and improved quality of life (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998).

Students who experience academic probation or dismissal may also stand to lose the eligibility to receive different forms of financial aid. With the majority of students on academic probation receiving need-based financial aid such as grants and loans (Mathies et al., 2006), they must remain eligible in order to continue to fund their education using these financial resources. Students must meet and maintain standards of satisfactory academic progress to remain eligible



for financial aid (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Academic progress entails maintaining at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA on a 4.0 scale (Office of Student Financial Aid, 2008). Students on academic probation also experience a large drop off in merit-based aid (scholarships) due to the high GPA requirement to remain eligible (Mathies et al., 2006). Merit-based aid typically requires a GPA above 3.0 (Cruise, 2002). Students who get dismissed for academic reasons may remain ineligible to apply or receive financial aid and scholarships until they re-establish their academic standing.

Attrition of student also has an impact at the institutional level. Student dismissal or withdrawal may impact graduation rates and may influence the way that stakeholders, legislators, parents, and potential students view the institution (Lau, 2003). These implications may result in institutions of higher education losing out on thousands of dollars in tuition, fees, and alumni contributions. Colleges and universities may stand to lose a considerable amount of revenue as a result of student attrition. One study estimated that institutions of higher education can lose more than \$4,000 per student as a result of student departure (Grayson et al., 2003).

Departure of students due to academic problems also has a negative impact on the societal level. Society is impacted in terms of the lost productivity and contribution of individuals who end up dropping out or who do not graduate. Students on academic probation may be placed in a position to earn less money over a lifetime of work if they are dismissed from an institution (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). Individuals without a college degree generally have lower rates of employment and income and contribute less to society than do persons who do have a degree. McIntosh and Rouse (2009) assert that the benefits of obtaining a higher education include higher lifetime earnings, increased civic participation and more desirable workplace amenities. The positives that may result from obtaining a higher

education and the alarmingly high attrition rates has led educators and researchers to study the predictors that contribute to success and failure in college (Solberg Nes et al, 2009).

### *Transfer Students*

Transfer students have also been identified as a population that is at-risk for attrition due to the range of difficulties that they many times experience (Dennis, Calvillo, & Gonzalez, 2008). A transfer student is someone who begins attending one institution and then transfers to another institution (Bean, 2001). Although transferring from one institution to another might be beneficial to some, it also can have a negative impact on degree attainment on others (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Research suggests that transfer student retention and completion rates are much lower than rates for students who do not transfer (Avakian, MacKinney, & Allen, 1982; Porter 1999). Ishitani (2008) found in a longitudinal study that after five semesters, students who had not transferred (native students) were retained at a much higher rate when compared to transfer students. Li (2009) found that students who attended multiple institutions had lower bachelor's degree attainment and spent an increased amount of time attaining their degree.

Zimmerman (2003) suggested that moving from one institution to another is not a simple process and that it is many times a confusing and frustrating experience for students. Although transfer students may be seasoned students as they have previous college/university experience, they can experience difficulties when transitioning into a new educational environment (Higgins, 2003). Transfer students must deal with many factors that challenge their academic success. As transfer student's transition to their new institution, they face a variety of academic, social, and intellectual difficulties while acclimating to their new school (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001). These include new surroundings, policies, procedures, and academic expectations, as well as the challenges they may face building relationships in their new setting (Higgins, 2003). Financial

aid concerns, class sizes, transfer of credits, course work, and the adjustment to the new scholastic rigor have also been cited as factors that contribute to the difficulties of transferring from one institution to another. Given the many potential problems and suggested difficulties, transfer students have a tendency to underperform academically and their chances of being placed on academic probation and/or of being dismissed are typically increased. The problems commonly experienced by transfer students often result in poor academic performance (Lee et al, 2009) which could result in dismissal.

### *Retention Programs*

In response to the high rates of attrition, many institutions of higher education have developed programs to address the problem. Many of these programs are designed to strengthen a student's persistence on campus (Ishitani, 2008) and reduce the likelihood that they will depart the institution. Retention programs vary in size and level of involvement and they typically fall into three general categories: academic advising programs, first-year programs, and learning support programs (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). Academic advisement programs may include a variety of services such as interventions aimed at selected student populations, academic centers, and career counseling. First-year programs assist students during their initial year on campus. First-year programs include freshman seminar, university 101 courses, and learning communities. Learning support programs include supplemental instruction efforts, student learning centers, reading centers, summer bridge programs, and tutoring programs.

Retention services may be operated out of a single office, may be a part of a statewide program, may be a program coordinated by students or institutional administrators, and/or may be part of a program that targets specific groups (e.g., first year students) (Exemplary Student Retention Programs, 2004). Although these efforts are improvements in the way institutions of

higher education address attrition, a national survey suggested that institutions have a way to go in making large scale changes that aid student persistence (What Works in Student Retention: A National Survey, 2005). Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) and Higgins (2003) suggested that three types of interventions have the greatest positive impact on a college student's academic performance. These include academic instruction/tutoring programs, advising and counseling programs, and comprehensive support programs.

At the local level, the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES) at the University of Georgia (UGA) has implemented an academic counseling program in an effort to increase student success and retention. UGA is the flagship institution of higher education in the state of Georgia, it was incorporated in 1785 and is the state's oldest, most comprehensive institution of higher education. With a student population of more than 34,000, the academic environment at UGA is rigorous and admission has become highly competitive over the last several years. Recent 1<sup>st</sup> year students have an average high school GPA above 3.8 on a 4.0 scale and average SAT scores over 1200 (University of Georgia, 2009). As evidence of academic rigor, 45 percent of the applicants for 2008 year and 46 percent of the applicants for 2009 year were denied admissions. The CAES at UGA was founded in 1859 and is one of the oldest and most prestigious colleges of agriculture in the country (College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, 2008). The college has exceptional programs in a variety of agricultural and environmental disciplines and an academic curriculum that is both challenging and rigorous. In an effort to graduate top quality students to fill the needs in various agricultural and environmental disciplines, the CAES has had rising admission standards (Rojas et al., 2002). The CAES has implemented various efforts that aid in retention which include new student

orientations, individual faculty advisement, financial support in the form of scholarships, and academic counseling services.

The Academic Counseling Program (ACP) was established in the CAES in 1999. It was established to assist CAES students experiencing problems that may be affecting their academic success. The program employs an academic counselor employed by the CAES Office of Academic Affairs. The position serves as a graduate assistantship for a Doctoral Student in the UGA Counseling Psychology program. Some of the problems frequently encountered by students utilizing the program include time management, employment concerns, decision making difficulties and personal issues. Although the ACP primarily serves students who are on academic probation or who are returning from academic dismissal, the program was implemented to provide services to any student within the college regardless of GPA. The program helps students to identify the sources of academic difficulty; assists students in designing an action plan to resolve the problem(s); identifies available resources within the university; and works to retain students at risk of academic dismissal (Rojas et al., 2002).

#### Statement of the Problem

There is an increasing body of research that is focusing on the psychological well being of college students (Cooke, Bewick, Barkham, Bradley, & Audin, 2006). The literature suggests that psychologically, college students fare worse compared to the general population and that various stressors seem to impact their well-being and levels of success (Roberts & Zelenyanki, 2002; Roberts, Golding, Towell, & Weinreb, 1999; Stewart-Brown, Evans, Patterson, Peterson, Doll, Balding, & Regis, 2000). College students have been found to exhibit significantly increased levels of anxiety during their first year in college (Cooke et al., 2006), experience emotional maladjustment as they encounter the stressors of college (Pittman et al., 2008), and

have higher prevalence of major psychological disorder such as depression (Gerdes et al., 1994). Additional issues prevalent among college students include feelings of homesickness, loneliness, low self-esteem, indecisiveness, higher levels of stress, sleep disturbance, and anxiety (Gerdes et al., 1994; Twenge, 2001; Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002).

College student adjustment is one of the emerging areas of interest among college administrators, faculty, and mental health service providers (Lee, Olson, Locke, Michelson, & Odes, 2009). The process of adjusting to the many tasks and demands involved in higher education has been linked to how student perform in college. The ability to adjust emotionally, socially, and academically to stressful and difficult situations in college has been cited as a major factor impacting college student success (Solberg Nes, Evans, & Segerstrom, 2009). Regardless of whether a student leaves voluntarily or involuntarily, poor adjustment to college has been linked to student departure and attrition (Martin Jr., Swartz-Kulstad, & Madson, 1999). Baker & Schultz (1992) found that college students who were less adjusted had lowered academic performance, utilized psychological services on campus more often, had increased rates of withdrawal, and reported reduced satisfaction with their college experience. Other studies have highlighted that students who experience loneliness and social/ emotional adjustment difficulties are more likely to drop out of school (Gerdes et al., 1994; Lee et al., 2009).

Another factor suggested to impact student success in higher education is the concept of burnout. Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment (Yang & Farn, 2005). Although initially found in professions that required interaction with people such as doctors, nurses, and human service workers (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001 as cited in Zhang, Gan, & Cham, 2007) there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that students in college can experience

academic burnout (Moneta, 2011; Caballero-Domínguez et al., 2010; Salanova et al., 2010; Pisarik, 2009; Bresó, Salanova, & Schaufeli, 2007). Yang et al (2005) suggested that the syndrome of student burnout is similar to what has typically been observed in the people-helping professionals. College student burnout is described as including feelings of exhaustion due to academic demands, having cynical and detached attitude regarding schoolwork, and feelings of incompetence with regard to academic ability (Zhang et al, 2007). College students may experience burnout due to the conditions in college that demand excessively high levels of effort and the lack of supportive mechanisms to assist them (Neumann, Finaly-Neumann, & Reichel, 1990). Burnout among college students can contribute to absenteeism, decreased motivation to succeed, reduced self-efficacy, and increased attrition rates (Yang et al, 2005).

Transfer students make up a substantial portion of the student body at many colleges and universities, but the factors affecting their success once they have arrived on campus are poorly understood (Johnson, 2005). At the local level, between 2005 and 2007 a total of 2212 students transferred to UGA and in 2009 a total of 1,689 students transferred to UGA from another institution (University of Georgia, 2009). Based on data from the CAES Office of Academic Affairs, transfer students typically comprise about 30 percent of the total CAES student population each semester.

Transfer students in the CAES are overrepresented in the academic probation process. Although only 34 percent of the new fall enrollments in the CAES between 2003 and 2008 were transfer students, transfer students during that same period represented 52 percent of the students involved in the academic probation process. During the spring 2009 semester, 57 percent of students involved in the academic probation process in the CAES were transfer students. Due to the difficulties that transfer student seem to be experiencing in the CAES and the potential

negative consequences that may result from adjustment difficulties and burnout, it seems important to better understand this population of students and their experiences.

Various factors have been identified by the ACP that impact the success and retention of undergraduate students in the CAES. Rojas and colleagues (2002) reported that adjustment difficulties seemed prevalent among CAES students who transferred to UGA from another institution. Although no formal measurement of adjustment was utilized, transfer students in the CAES presented with a wide range of issues affecting their academic performance and seemed under-prepared for the demands of the college (Rojas et al., 2002). Based on this anecdotal evidence, a pilot study was conducted that examined adjustment among a sample of transfer and native students ( $N = 114$ ) in the CAES. A measure of student adjustment was utilized which yielded significant statistical differences between transfer students and native students. The results of the pilot study suggested that transfer students from two-year institutions in the CAES were more likely to experience adjustment difficulties than native students. Specifically, transfer students from two-year institutions reported having increased difficulties when compared to native students in the areas of academic adjustment, social adjustment, and institutional attachment (Werther, Delgado-Romero, Broder, & Bertrand, 2009).

#### Purpose of the Study

The present study seeks to expand on the findings of the pilot study by exploring college adjustment and burnout among native and transfer students in the CAES at UGA. The literature suggests that institutions of higher education need to conduct studies on their own student populations in order to develop a better understanding of the culture and capture an understanding of the experiences of students within their institution (McGrath & Braunstein, 1997). Although attending multiple institutions has become more frequent, the issues affecting



transfer students are often overlooked (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2008). Gaps in the transfer student literature remain, specifically, research exploring the adjustment experiences of vertical transfer students (Davies & Casey, 1999; Jacobs, 2004). Conducting studies on the transfer student population at the local level will capture a better sense of how these students are functioning and may help to identify the local variables that may be impacting their success.

Although the sample size of the pilot study was sufficient to make comparisons between native and vertical students, the sample size of transfer students (N=30) limited the study's capacity to identify if differences existed between native and lateral transfer students. The pilot study was also limited in its capacity to explore if there were differences between the type of transfer (lateral or vertical) and adjustment, if there was a relationship between the amount of hours earned prior to transferring and adjustment, and if a relationship exists between academic probation and adjustment. The pilot study sample consisted of a high percentage of students on regular academic status and not enough responses were obtained from students who reported involvement with academic probation. The pilot study also did not explore for the presence of burnout symptomatology. Although empirical studies provide evidence of the presence of burnout among college student populations (Salonova et al., 2010; Jacobs et al., 2003), Pisarik (2009) highlights that the research is limited and that more studies are needed to better understand burnout among college student groups.

The present study explored adjustment and burnout among transfer and native students on measures of adjustment and burnout. The present study explored for differences among transfer student subgroups (lateral and vertical transfers) as they relate to adjustment and burnout. The present study explored how specific variables impact adjustment and burnout among native and

transfer student groups and sought to determine if a relationship existed between adjustment and burnout.

The results of the present study could be used to enhance the ACP's capacity to serve the transfer student population in the CAES, inform the office of academic affairs in the CAES, and contribute to the literature on transfer student adjustment and college student burnout. The results from the study could inform the development of programs or intervention strategies for students who experience adjustment difficulties and/or symptoms of burnout in the CAES. An extensive review of the literature did not reveal any research studies that have explored adjustment issues among subpopulations of transfer students (lateral vs. vertical transfers). The literature review also failed to reveal studies that have explored burnout among transfer student populations. Furthermore, no studies exploring the correlation between adjustment and burnout among transfer and/or native student groups were identified.

### Definition of Terms

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Attrition           | The gradual reduction of students enrolled at an institution of higher education   |
| Student Departure   | The voluntary and involuntary departure of students from institutions of higher education; the attrition of students                               |
| Completion Rate     | Refers to the number of students who complete their intended degree requirements   |
| Dropout             | A student who departs an institution of higher education without graduating  |
| Transfer Student    | A student who permanently transfers from one institution of higher education to another  |
| Native Student      | A student who began their education at an institution of higher education and who has not previously transferred to or from any other institution. |
| Retention           | The ability to keep students enrolled consecutive semesters until they complete their degree requirements  |
| Lateral Transfer    | A student who transfers from one four-year institution to another four-year institution.   |
| Reverse Transfer    | A student who transfers from a four-year institution to a two-year institution   |
| Vertically Transfer | A student who transfers from a two-year institution to a four-year institution.  |

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present study aims to address the following questions and hypotheses:

*Question 1(A):* Do transfer students in the CAES report increased adjustment difficulties and increased burnout symptomatology as opposed to native students in the CAES?

*Question 1(B):* Do differences exist between native and lateral transfer students on measures of adjustment and burnout?

*Null Hypothesis 1.1.* There will be no statistically significant difference between native students and transfer students on the SACQ full scale and subscale scores.

*Null Hypothesis 1.2.* There will be no statistically significant difference between native students and transfer students on the subscales of the MBI-SS.

*Null Hypothesis 1.3.* There will be no statistically significant difference between lateral transfer students and vertical transfer students on the SACQ full scale and subscale scores.

*Null Hypothesis 1.4.* There will be no statistically significant difference between lateral transfer students and vertical transfer students on the subscales of the MBI-SS.

*Question 2:* Do self-reported transfer GPA and transfer credits serve as predictors of adjustment among transfer students in the CAES?

*Null Hypothesis 2.1.* Self-reported transfer GPA and transfer credits will not be predictors of adjustment for transfer students in the CAES.

*Question 3:* Do students on academic probation report increased adjustment problems and burnout symptomatology as opposed to students not on academic probation?

*Null Hypothesis 3.1.* There will be no statistically significant difference between students on academic probation and students not on academic probation on the SACQ full scale and subscale scores.

*Null Hypothesis 3.2.* There will be no statistically significant difference between students on academic probation and students not on academic probation on the subscales of the MBI-SS.

*Question 4:* Is there a relationship between adjustment and burnout symptomatology among students in the CEAS?

*Null Hypothesis 4.1.* There will be no statistical correlation between SACQ full scale and subscale scores and scores on the MBI- SS subscales.

CHAPTER 2  
COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT AND BURNOUT AMONG UNDERGRADUATE TRANSFER  
AND NATIVE STUDENTS  
LITERATURE REVIEW

*Student Integration Model*

A popular theory utilized to explain college student attrition and persistence is Tinto's (1975; 1993) student integration model. This model views student departure as a longitudinal process resulting from a student's interaction with the formal and informal dimensions of the institution (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Tinto, 1986, 1993). Colleges and universities are comprised of both social and academic systems that students must navigate in order to be successful. The student integration model posits that college student persistence and departure is primarily influenced by how well a student is able to fit into and navigate the structure, social and academic culture, and goals of the institution (Dewitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009).

Tinto postulates that different factors affect a student's ability to acclimate to the higher educational environment. These factors include pre-entry characteristics, initial goals and commitments, academic and social integration, and final goals and commitments (Tinto, 1975; 1993). Students enter higher education with a number of characteristics that have a direct and indirect impact on their performance in college. These characteristics may include sex, race, academic preparation, GPA, values, expectations, individual skills and abilities, and family background (Tinto, 1975; Grayson et al., 2003). Pre-entry characteristics are helpful in understanding the psychological and social orientations students bring with them to college and

are good predictors of how students will interact with the institutional environment (Tinto, 1975).

Once a student is enrolled into a college/university they begin to have experiences with the academic and social systems of the institution. These experiences may be positive or negative and may consist of the following: academic performance, intellectual development, interactions with faculty, peer relationships, and extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1975, 1993; Grayson et al., 2003). As students become acclimated to the institution, they undergo structural and normative integration processes. Structural integration is described as the process of meeting the educational standards of the institution and normative integration is described as the student's identification with the beliefs, values, and norms of the institution (Tinto, 1975).

Social and academic integration reflects a student's compatibility with the attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms of the social and academic systems within the institution (Tinto, 1975). As students engage with the academic and social systems of the institution, their initial goals and commitment to the institution may change as a result of their experiences. Academic and social integration influence a student's level of institutional commitment and goals (Tinto 1975, 1993; Grayson et al., 2003). Poor integration with the academic and social systems will result in a low level of institutional commitment and may negatively impact a student's educational and/or career goals. For instance, a student may initially enter with high academic goals such as going to graduate school and may feel highly committed to the institution that they have chosen to attend. A student's initial goals and level of commitment to the institution may be compromised if she/he becomes part of a peer group that does not value education, experiences academic difficulty, has negative experiences with faculty, and/or has difficulty

adjusting to the social culture and academic rigor of the institution. Tinto (1975) asserts that experiences such as these increase the probability that a student will depart the institution.

Tinto (1993) highlights that student departure from an institution can be categorized into one of two types of withdrawal behaviors: voluntary (e.g., transferring to another school or electing to discontinue pursuing higher education) or involuntary (e.g., dismissal due to poor academic performance or the breaking of institutional rules). It is important to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary withdrawal behaviors and how they are influenced by academic and social integration. These distinctions are important because students may be able to achieve integration in one domain and not the other which in turn may result in different withdrawal behavior (Tinto, 1975). For example, a student integrated socially may be forced to involuntarily withdraw due poor academic performance (i.e., poor academic integration) or a student may elect to leave the institution due to poor social integration despite satisfactory performance in the academic domain (e.g., having few friends or feeling socially isolated) (Tinto, 1975).

### *Adjustment to College*

Adjusting to the higher educational environment can be a frustrating and overwhelming process for many college students (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Researchers have highlighted that in order to be successful in college, students must be able to appropriately adjust to the higher educational environment (Van Heyningen, 1997 as cited in Kerr, Johnson, Gans, & Krumrine, 2004). Within the field of psychology, scholars have identified three common stages that individuals progress through as they adjust to changes in their lives. The three stages in the adjustment process include: an initial period of shock and/or denial, a period of distress, and a stage of acceptance (Kendall & Buys, 1998). This linear and developmental perspective



suggests that an individual's ability to achieve the stage of acceptance is dependent on their successful progression through the first two stages involved in the process. Progression through the stages of adjustment can be impacted by a variety of variables.

The college student adjustment process is said to be impacted by the following variables: social and interpersonal factors, personal-emotional demands, institutional attachment, and academics (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Martin Jr. et al., 1999). Living environment and meaningful relationships have also been emphasized as being integral factors involved in the college student adjustment process (Enochs & Roland, 2006). Research suggests that students who are able to establish new relationships, maintain secure attachments, and develop a strong connection with their new environment tend to transition much smoother and adjust better (Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley, & Gibbs, 1995; Enochs & Roland, 2006; Duru, 2008). Social and interpersonal variables include factors such as the separation from the home environment, the process of adapting to the social and interpersonal demands of the institution, the establishment and maintenance of peer relationships, and participation in extracurricular activities (Martin Jr. et al., 1999; Hook 2004). Significant relationships are essential and feelings of loneliness and anxiety increase as students undergo the process of adjustment (Duru, 2008). Personal-emotional variables are comprised of psychological reactions that students may experience as they attempt to cope with the new demands of the institution. Psychological reactions may include anxiety, stress, depression, and distress (Hook, 2004). Institutional attachment includes factors such as the level of connection and commitment an individual student has to the particular college/university and a student's commitment to earning a degree (Baker et al., 1984; Martin Jr. et al., 1999, Hook, 2004). Academic variables include a student's ability to acclimate to the new

academic rigor, their interest and motivation to engage in the course work, and their performance in courses as measured by grades and GPA (Hook, 2004).

As students enter and progress through college, they are confronted with a variety of experiences that can be physically, emotionally, and psychologically stressful (Cushman & West, 2006). Pervin, Relk, and Dalrymple (1966) suggest that institutions of higher education are environments in which one group (faculty, staff, administrators etc) deliberately attempt to alter another group (the students) through the setting of explicit and implicit tasks, pressures, and demands that the student group must learn to adapt to. These types of experiences can be very challenging for many college students. Other sources of stress that have been suggested to be prevalent among college students include: erratic sleeping patterns, vacations and breaks, changes in eating habits, and increased academic rigor (Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999). Jacobs & Dodd (2003) suggest that the high levels of stress among college student populations results from the combination of factors such as classes, exams, employment, and extracurricular activities. These stressful experiences are unavoidable many times and may debilitate a student's ability to succeed (Cushman et al., 2006). If students are unable to navigate such experiences successfully, they may face a number of negative consequences which may include academic failure, academic probation, dismissal/dropping out, and /or burnout.

### *Student Burnout*

Burnout has been a popular topic in the field of psychology since it first emerged in the United States during the mid-1970's (Yang, 2004; Maslach, Leiter, & Schaufeli, 2009). The concept of burnout was first introduced by Freudenberg (1974) who defined it as the failing, wearing out, or exhaustion resulting from the demands placed on an individual in the workplace. Burnout has also been defined as a psychological syndrome resulting from chronic stress

(Maslach & Jackson, 1981, Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). The coining of the term captured the psychological reality of people's experiences in the workplace (Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, & Christensen, 2005). Ried and colleagues (2006) suggested that burnout is a long-term reaction to stress and that it develops as a result of excessive demands placed on an individual's energy and resources.

Although burnout has been defined in various ways, common elements exist across definitions which suggest that it is an internal psychological experience involving feelings, attitudes, motives, and expectations; that it occurs at the individual level; and that it is a negative experience for individuals (Maslach et al., 2009). Additional commonalities across definitions strongly suggest that burnout has certain critical elements such as physical, emotional and mental exhaustion (Taormina & Law, 2000). Some of the factors that have been suggested to contribute to burnout include work overload, conflict of values, a lack of control, the absence of rewarding experiences, and reduced support (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Maslach and colleagues (1981; 1996) assert that burnout is composed of three distinct but related dimensions: high emotional exhaustion, high depersonalization (high cynicism), and reduced personal accomplishment (low self-efficacy). Emotional exhaustion is described by Jacobs and colleagues (2003) as the "demands and stressors that cause people to feel overwhelmed and unable to give of themselves at a psychological level" (p. 291). The development of attitudes that are negative and cynical about peers and one's work is described as an example of depersonalization. A reduced sense of personal accomplishment is described as a reduction in self-efficacy and dissatisfaction with one's accomplishments (Jacobs et al., 2003).

In recent years the traditional concept of burnout has broadened (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). A quarter century of research has provided substantial evidence that burnout

exists outside of human service occupations (Breso, Salanova, Schaufeli, 2007). The *Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey* (MBI-GS: Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996) was developed to better assess burnout in non-human service settings. The MBI-GS re-defined burnout as a crisis in one's relationship with work in general and not necessarily as a crisis with persons at work (Maslach et al., 1996). As the research on burnout continued to evolve, a number of study's began to explore the syndrome among student populations (Gold & Michael, 1985; Meier & Schmeck, 1985; Balogun, Helgemoe, Pellegrini & Hoerberlein, 1996; Schaufeli, Martínez, Marqués-Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002; Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002; Durán, Extremera, Rey, Fernández-Berrocal, & Montalbán, 2006; Bresó, Salanova, Schaufeli, 2007). Many of these studies provide empirical evidence of the presence of burnout among college student populations. Anderson and colleagues (1988) posit that excessive stress, anxiety, and burnout are common among students in higher educational environments.

Researchers have suggested that burnout may be more prevalent among younger aged populations (Maslach et al., 1996, Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Although students are not formal employees of the institution they attend, Bresó and colleagues (2007) highlight that from a psychological perspective, many of their activities can be considered "work". Some of the research studies on academic stress have viewed students as a kind of employee (Chambel & Curral, 2005). Students many times are engaged in a variety of demanding activities such as attending classes, completing assignments, studying, and taking exams which can be considered a type of "work". Using the definition by Maslach and colleagues (1996), college student burnout can be conceptualized as a crisis in a student's relationship with her/his academics and not necessarily as a crisis in their relationship with peers at school. Burnout may manifest itself

in college student populations through feelings of exhaustion from academic responsibilities, cynical and detached attitude towards peers and/or their academics, and developed feelings of academic incompetence (Breso et al., 2007).

Moneta (2011) suggests that college student may experience intense and prolonged academic related stressors such as work overload, time restraints, frequent evaluations, competition with peers, perceived irrelevance of content, and poor interaction with professors. These academic related stressors may lead to the development of burnout among college student populations (Moneta, 2011). Neumann and colleagues (1990) suggest that college students may experience burnout as a result of learning conditions that demand excessively high levels of effort to meet academic expectations. Boudreau, Santen, Hemphill, & Dobson (2004) found that anxiety concerning grades, uncertainty about future plans, time management issues, interpersonal relationships, imbalance between personal and academic life, and decreased levels of support from peers and friends were factors associated with the development of burnout among a sample of students in medical school. Other researchers have reported that long hours, subjective overload (feeling that there is too much to do), and the demands of conflicting roles also contribute to the development of burnout among college student populations (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998).

College student burnout may lead to increased absenteeism, reduced motivation to complete course work, and higher rates of attrition (Meier & Schmeck, 1985). College students who experience burnout may also develop various psychological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, frustration, hostility, and fear (Yang, 2004). Additionally, burnout among college student populations has been linked to a variety of dysfunctions such as insomnia, physical exhaustion, and increased drug and alcohol use (Jacobs et al., 2003).

Although the available literature suggests that college students may be experiencing burnout, the number of studies exploring the construct with college aged populations is limited (Jacobs et al., 2003; Pisarik, 2009) and has been described as inadequate (Lingard, 2007). Kao (2009) suggests due to the potential adverse effects that burnout may have on student health, well-being and their academic achievement, more research is needed. Research on college student burnout is a promising area of study as it may help to better understand a wide range of student behaviors such as attrition and academic performance (Neumann, Finaly-Neumann, & Reichel, 1990). Additionally, research on college student burnout may also be helpful in understanding how college students adjust psychologically to the collegiate environment (Moneta, 2011).

#### *College Student Adjustment and Burnout*

Although no previous studies have directly explored the relationship between adjustment and burnout, scholars have explored the relationship between variables such as stress and self-efficacy, and college adjustment. Stress is considered by some researchers as being one of the major predictors of burnout (Maslach et al., 1996). Moneta (2011) asserted that college students may develop burnout as a result of the stressors that many of them experience as they navigate higher education. Among the many stressors that have been identified, adjustment related stressors have been shown to have a variety of negative consequences such as increased anxiety, depression, social dysfunction, and academic failure (Ross et al., 1999; Chemers et al., 2001; Jacobs et al., 2003; Kerr et al., 2004; Cushman et al., 2006; Ong et al., 2009). Researchers have also explored the relationship between adjustment and self-efficacy, which is one of the three factors associated with burnout (Maslach et al., 1981; 1996). Researchers have found a significant relationship between a student's level of self-efficacy and their ability to succeed in

college. High self-efficacy reportedly may help students manage stress better and may help to facilitate their adjustment to college (Chemers et al., 2001). Ramos-Sanchez and colleagues (2007) found that students with higher levels of self-efficacy seemed better adjusted to their collegiate environment. Although the research is limited, there seems to be a clear relationship between predictors and factors associated with burnout and adjustment to college. Additional research is needed to better understand these relationships.

### *College Student Enrollment Patterns*

The proportion of college students who follow the “traditional” path to obtaining a college education is diminishing (Goldrick-Rab & Roksa, 2008). The “traditional” path consists of a student entering a four-year college/university directly after high school and completing their degree program within four years. College students are becoming less traditional in the way they approach higher education. As Lipka (2008) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (2008) both highlight, it is becoming increasingly common for college students to attend more than one institution during their time in college. Some estimates report that nearly 60 percent of undergraduate students attend more than one institution and that 40 percent of students who graduate with a bachelor’s degree will have earned credit from multiple institutions (Adelman, 2005, Cutright, 2009). Goldrick-Rab and colleagues (2008) reported that 40 percent of undergraduates begin their education at a two-year institution and then transfer to a four-year institution to pursue a bachelor’s degree. More than 70 percent of students who are enrolled in a two-year institution anticipate earning a bachelor’s degree or higher (Bradburn, Hurst, & Peng, 2001) which means that they will need to transfer to another institution to accomplish their educational goals. Additionally, 16 percent of transfer students will start at one four-year institution and transition to another four-year institution to finish their degree (McCormick &

Carroll, 1997). The mobility of students in higher education has raised many questions about the possibilities and challenges that may arise as student's transition from one institution to another. (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2008).

These increasingly complex enrollment patterns have made it difficult for institutions of higher education to appropriately classify students who transfer. Goldrick-Rab and colleagues (2008) highlighted that gauging the extent of mobility among transfer students is challenging due to definitional issues. The various definitions used have produced institutional transfer rates as low as 25 percent and as high as 61 percent (Bradburn et al., 2001). Many times transfer students are labeled as "dropouts". Students who are labeled as "dropouts" are those who at some point depart an institution of higher education without graduating (Rugg, 1982). This label is inappropriate as it does not take into account students who transfer to another institution and eventually graduate. Some students who depart from institutions of higher education can and do many times transfer to other institutions and eventually complete their degree program (Astin, 1997). Grayson and colleagues (2003) noted that students who depart an institution typically return at a later date or transfer and enroll at a different college or university to complete their degree requirements.

Transfer students may be categorized into one of three transfer types: vertical transfers, lateral transfers, and reverse transfers. Vertical transfers are students who move from two-year institutions to four-year institutions, lateral transfers are students who move from one four-year institution to another four-year institution, and reverse transfers are students who move from a four-year institution to a two-year institution (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2008). In addition to the different types of transfers, students may also be classified as transients. A transient student is someone who is enrolled fulltime at one institution (home institution) but takes a course or set of



courses at a second institution that will count towards their degree at their home institution.

Transient students typically only spend a short period of time at the second institution (e.g. one semester, summer breaks).

Adelman, (2005) suggests that it is important to mark the act of transferring as a permanent change of venue. This means that spending a short amount of time (e.g., one semester) at a second institution would not constitute as a transfer. Farmer & Fredrickson (1999) defined transfer as the permanent movement of students from one institution to another. This suggests that the term “transfer student” may be better defined as someone who has attended a college/university after graduating from high school, has earned college level credit, and has then transferred to another college/university to pursue or continue a program of study.

#### *Nontraditional Students*

As previously mentioned, the “traditional” college student is becoming less common. The characteristics of students in higher education have been changing (Kimbrough & Weaver, 1999). A “traditional” college student can typically be defined as a student who is 18-22 years old, enrolls in college directly after graduating high school, lives on campus, has parental support, and is enrolled full-time (Dill & Henley, 1998; Kimbrough et al., 1999; Strage, 2008). Nontraditional students are often students who are older (age 25 or older) and who have circumstances and characteristics that set them apart from the typical/traditional student population (Sharkey, Bischoff, Echols, Morrson, Northman, Leiberman, & Steele, 1987; Hardin, 2008). Some of the circumstances and characteristics that set nontraditional students apart from traditional students include: delaying enrollment after high school, part-time enrollment, full-time employment, financial independence, family responsibilities, and academic deficiencies.

Nontraditional students have different learning needs and concerns than traditional-aged college students (Sharkey et al., 1987).

A variety of barriers have been identified that are believed to impact the success of nontraditional students. These barriers include factors in the following four domains: institutional, situational, psychological, and educational (Hardin, 2008). Institutional barriers may consist of policies, procedures, and red tape that hinder the progress of students. These types of barriers may be unintentionally created by colleges and universities and may be present throughout a student's time enrolled. Hardin (2008) highlighted that nontraditional students are less tolerant of institutional barriers and that these barriers may impact their level of success and decision to continue in school. Situational barriers are unique to the individual and include things such as role conflicts, time management issues, family and work problems, need for legal aid, economic problems, etc. (Hardin, 2008). Psychological barriers include a number of internal factors that impact a nontraditional student's capacity to perform. These internal factors include poor coping skills, self-esteem issues, anxiety and negative cognitions (Hardin, 2008). Educational barriers refer to factors that impact the level of academic preparedness or capacity to succeed. Unfortunately, many nontraditional students are not adequately prepared to succeed academically in college which may be due to reasons such as poor educational decisions, extended absence from school, physical or learning disabilities, and non English fluency (Hardin, 2008).

Transfer students are one segment of an increasing number of nontraditional students in higher education (Duchesne, Ratelle, Larose, & Guay, 2007). Transfer students are typically older, have dependants, and live and work off campus (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2008). Transfer students many times may have added responsibilities and different social

aspects that affect their academic persistence and class attendance patterns (Rhine, et al, 2000). Davies et al., (1999) identified the following barriers that impact transfer students: poor academic preparation, lack of goals, low involvement with faculty, strained family relationships, and social isolation.

### *Reasons Students Transfer*

Many different factors can influence a student's decision to transfer to another institution. Li (2009) reported that some of the top reasons students transfer include a desire to enroll in a program offered at another institution, logistics, personal interests/enrichment, financial reasons, low satisfaction with the institution's reputation/quality, and other academic concerns about the original institution . Students who transfer vertically are prone to choose a four-year institution that has an organized articulation agreement with their two-year institution (Ishitani, 2008). This allows for the credits that have been earned to be applied to the degree requirements at the new institution. Students who transfer laterally have often cited dissatisfaction with their initial institution as a reason that influenced their desire to transfer (Ishitani, 2008). McCormick, (1997) found that 63percent of students who transferred laterally cited dissatisfaction with their intellectual growth as a reason for leaving.

### *Transfer Shock*

Most of the research that has been conducted on transfer students has predominantly centered on the transfer shock concept. Transfer shock refers to the drop in GPA that occurs after a student transfers vertically (i.e., from a two-year college to a four-year institution) (Rhine et al., 2000; Flaga, 2006). Transfer shock research has typically focused on the transfer students' academic adjustment (Laanan, 2001). Transfer shock studies are limited as they fail to examine the dynamics of the transfer student's transition into life at the new institution. Flaga, (2006)

noted that although academic performance is an important part of the transfer student experience, grades are the result of a complex set of dynamics.

Students must do more than simply perform academically to succeed in college (Liptak, 2006). College student academic achievement and success is influenced by a complex interplay of academic and non-academic factors (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Laanan (2004) identified the following non-academic factors as impacting vertical transfer students: larger classes, larger campus size, increased academic rigor, and negotiating a new social and physical environment. Additional non-academic factors suggested to play a role in transfer student success include: academic goals, self-confidence, contextual influences, social support, and extracurricular involvement (Lotkowski et al., 2004). A more complete understanding of these complexities is essential (Laanan, 2007).

#### *Two-Year Institutions and Vertical Transfers*

Two-year colleges are post-secondary institutions of higher education that grant vocational certificates, associate of arts degrees, and associate of science degrees (Solarek & Solarek, 1998). They may be classified as community colleges, junior colleges, and technical/vocational schools. Between 2003-04, 43 percent of all undergraduate students in the United States were enrolled at two-year colleges (Goan & Cunningham, 2007). Two-year colleges make up 40 percent of all degree granting institutions in the United States (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). There are more than 1400 two-year colleges in the United States and they enroll almost half of all U.S. undergraduates each year (Solarek et al., 1998, Laanan, 2003). Many of the students who pursue a higher education begin at a two-year institution and many of these students also transfer to a four-year institution in an effort to obtain a bachelor's degree (Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Ishitani, 2008). Some estimates predict that 11.5 million students

will attend a two-year college in the United States each year and that about 22 percent of these students will transfer to a four-year institution (Farmer & Fredrickson, 1999; American Association of Community Colleges, 2008).

One of the original functions of two-year colleges was to serve as transfer institutions in which students completed the first two years of college credit in preparation to transition to a four-year institution to complete their area of study (Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Roksa & Calcagno, 2008). In addition to traditional postsecondary educational curricula, the modern functions of two-year institutions include providing vocational education, community service and remedial education (Roksa & Calcagno, 2008). Although their mission has evolved, the transfer function of two-year institutions has always been important as they provide an alternative road to access a four-year college education (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). Lanaan (2001, 2003) asserts that the ability to transfer from a two-year college into a four-year institution has long been viewed as a stepping stone to educational upward mobility. Two-year colleges provide an economical means for students to obtain higher education as they are considered the most cost-effective way to begin the pursuit of a college degree (Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000).

The vertical movement of students from two-year institutions to four-year institutions has been an area of policy debate for many years (Roksa & Calcagno, 2008). Degree completion and retention rates are lower for students who begin their postsecondary education at two-year institutions when compared to students who begin at a four-year institution (Velez, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Lanaan, 2003; McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). It has been reported that one out of every five students in two-year institutions will transfer to a larger school

(Eggleston & Laanan, 2001). Jacobs (2008) estimates that as many as 2.5 million students will transfer vertically to a four-year institution each year.

Students transferring from two-year colleges have often delayed college attendance after high school, experienced vocational stressors, worked while attending school, completed fewer than 15 credit hours per semester and alternated between full-time and part-time enrollment (Fredrickson, 1998; Pascarella, 1999; Piland, 1995). Two-year college students have typically paid their own tuition and living expenses while managing academic responsibilities (Rhine et al., 2000). In their study, Cejda, Kaylor, and Rewey (1998) reported dismissal rates ranging between 18 to 20 percent for vertical transfer students. They also highlight the relationship between the number of credits completed prior to transferring and GPA at the new institution. Transfer student's experience transfer shock to a lesser degree if they transfer with at least 60 hours of earned credit or after earning an associate's degree (Cejda et al, 1998). Given these factors, transfer students from two year institutions seem susceptible to experiencing difficulties as they enter the four-year institution. Although little empirical attention has historically been given to studying vertical transfer students, this area of study is increasingly becoming an area of interest (Ishitani, 2008).

Due to the academic underachievement of many vertical transfer students, two-year colleges have been criticized as being unsuccessful in preparing students for the educational demands of four-year colleges/universities (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000). Dougherty (1997) reported that community college transfer students were poorly prepared for the academic demands of upper-division courses. Grades that many two-year college students earn have also been criticized as being inflated and not on par with the grading standards at many four-year institutions (Carlan et al., 2000). Townsend and Wilson (2006) reported that the more credit

hours a student transfers with, the greater the likelihood of academic success at the four-year institution, thus a significant amount of transfer credits may ameliorate the potential for transfer shock. Students who graduated from a community college with an associate's degree prior to transferring were found to have GPA equal to or better than the native students at the four-year college/university (Marti, 2001).

### *Transfer Student Adjustment and Burnout*

Attending college requires an individual to adjust to various segments of the collegiate environment such as the social and intellectual norms of the particular institution (Tinto, 1993). Many college students experience an increased level of stress as they encounter the changes in their social and academic lives (Fisher & Hood, 1987; Towbes & Cohen, 1996; Tovar et al., 2006). The difficulty experienced by students in college is said to arise from two sources: the students inability to separate from past forms of associations (local high school and peer groups/ separation from family) and from the new and often challenging demands of the college or university (Tinto, 1993). Although all students have to adjust to some degree as they begin their new life in college, adjustment difficulties are most evident among freshman and transfer students (Lee et al., 2009). First year students will most likely only experience these adjustment difficulties during their initial year enrolled in college. Transfer students on the other hand will likely experience an adjustment phase on two separate occasions, during their first year in college as well as after transferring to another institution (Porter, 1999).

Transfer students often have difficulties making the transition to the new educational and social environment (Townsend, 1995; Davies & Casey, 1999; Dennis, Calvillo, & Gonzalez, 2008). Townsend (2008) suggested that the transfer student's transition involved two distinct parts. The first part involves a student deciding where to transfer to, the application process,

financial concerns, and determining how many of their earned credits will be accepted by the new institution. The second part of the transfer student experience involves the actual adjustment process once they are enrolled at the new institution. Transfer students face numerous obstacles that can impact their ability to adjust adequately once they arrive at their new institution. These include a lack of information, different institutional culture, lack of social relationships at the new institution, and high expectations to succeed (Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Lee, Olson, Locke, Michelson, & Odes, 2009).

Although transfer students are familiar with the demands of college life, they many times struggle with various social and personal difficulties after enrolling at a new school (Lee et al, 2009 ). Townsend (2008) asserted that transfer students “may feel like freshman again” as they learn how to be students at their new institution p.77. Transfer students have often reported that they experience a sense of “campus culture shock” after arriving on campus (Davies et al., 1999). Transfer students frequently face the same difficulties as do first-time college students (Pascarella, 1999; Tinto, 1993).

Research exploring the adjustment of transfer students is limited as only a handful of studies have explored the issue (Laanan, 2001). Previous research on transfer students has generally focused on the following areas: institutional factors and programs, student motivation and involvement, social dynamics, academic outcomes, and on transfer shock (Laanan, 2001; Woosley & Johnson, 2006). Despite evidence that adjustment difficulties have the potential to generate various symptoms of psychological distress (Lee et al, 2009), research on transfer student adjustment has typically not focused on their emotional and psychological development (Laanan, 2004). Bojuwoye, (2002) noted that relocation, financial pressures, new social relationships, and increased personal responsibility were factors likely to cause intense



psychological distress. Other variables that have been suggested to impact a transfer student's transition include: confusing institutional transfer policies, lack of information about academic requirements, and reduced faculty attention, concern, and interaction (Dennis, Calvillo, & Gonzalez, 2008). Eggleston and Laanan (2001) identified specific stressors that transfer students must deal with as they transition into life at the new institution, these included housing, registration, academic advising issues, career planning, and involvement with student activities.

The adjustment process may be a very stressful experience for students (Ross et al., 1999; Chemers et al., 2001; Jacobs et al., 2003; Kerr et al., 2004; Cushman et al., 2006; Ong et al., 2009). Researchers have reported that college students with high levels of stress have an increased risk of experiencing academic difficulty and also tend to suffer from a variety of emotional problems (Chiauzzi, Brevard, Thurn, Decembrele, & Lord, 2008). The stressors endured by students in college have also been suggested to contribute to the development of burnout (Moneta, 2011). Social support has been suggested to be a crucial components for students during times of transition as it may serve as a buffer to the effects of stress (Hays & Oxley, 1986; Arthur, 1998). DeBerard, Spielmans, and Julka (2004) posit that during times of increased transitional stress, social support seems to insulate students from the potentially harmful impact of stress.

Unfortunately, transfer students tend to be less connected socially and academically at their new institution (Lipka, 2008). The National Survey of Student Engagement (2008) reports that when compared to native students, transfer students are less engaged in classes, interact less with faculty, engage less socially with peers, and participate less in out of class activities. Transfer students seem to have lower rates of social engagement, are less involved in campus activities, and are less academically immersed than are native students (Lipka, 2008). Reduced

academic engagement has been suggested to seriously jeopardize a student's ability to succeed in college and has been linked to the development of burnout among college students (Schaufeli, Martinez, Marqués-Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002). Schaufeli and colleagues (2002) describe the development of burnout among college students as an "erosion of academic engagement" p. 465. Maslach and Leiter (1997) suggest that engagement is characterized by increased energy, involvement, and efficacy which are the direct opposite of the symptoms characteristic of burnout (high emotional exhaustion, high cynicism, and reduced self efficacy). Based on the available literature, it seems plausible that transfer students may be at-risk of developing burnout due to the variety of stressors that they may encounter during the adjustment process and due to their reduced engagement with the academic and social environment at a new institution.

Woosley and Johnson (2006) assert that it is important to explore the issues that impact transfer student success as they are a vital population at many colleges and universities. Understanding the various factors that may negatively impact transfer student success can be used to enhance retention programs and may help to reduce attrition rates among this population of students. Rarely has the research on transfer students been used to implement new strategies that address their needs. The data obtained on transfer students is often merely reported to fulfill state requirements and not used to implement interventions (Kozieracki, 2001). It is essential that transfer students be provided with appropriate services that will assist them in becoming acclimated and successful at the college/university they transfer to. Without assistance, transfer students may flounder and not adjust to the life of the university, leading to failure, lack of satisfaction and/or inability to complete degree requirements (Tinto, 1993). Kozieracki (2001) has highlighted that interaction with institutional services impacts the level of success for many transfer students. Eggleston and Laanan (2001) reported that transfer students desired

counseling and advising services, knowledge of campus resources, and transfer student-centered programs that would assist their transition.

Orienting transfer students to the norms of the new institution is vital for their success. The quicker a student adjusts, gets involved, and feels connected to the institution, the increased likelihood of persistence, success and reduced attrition (Kadar, 2001). Also, getting better acclimated may help transfer students to become better engaged with their new social and academic environment which may in turn reduce the risks of developing burnout. Due to the potential negative consequences that may arise from adjustment difficulties and academic burnout, an exploration into how these issues are impacting both native and transfer student groups seems warranted.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

#### *Research Design*

The present study utilized correlational research methods to explore for natural occurring variance in adjustment and burnout among CAES undergraduate student groups. The study identified independent variables of interest using a demographical questionnaire and explored between and within group differences on measures of adjustment and burnout among native, vertical transfer, and lateral transfer students. Additionally, group differences were explored on measures of adjustment and burnout based on self-reported probation status. The present study also explored the predictive power of self-reported transfer hours and transfer GPA on adjustment among transfer students. Finally the current study explored if a relationship exists between adjustment and burnout. Experimental methods such as manipulation of variables, administration of an intervention, or random assignment were not utilized.

#### *Target Population*

A power analysis using the GPOWER software (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) was conducted to determine the sample size for the present study. The power analysis indicated that a total of 338 participants would be needed assuming a medium effect size of .25, an alpha of .05, and a power of .90. The power analysis indicated that if these variables were to hold at these levels, the power of the study would be .9005 and that a critical F value of 1.859 would be needed to reach significance. Participants for the present study were undergraduate students enrolled in the CAES at UGA during the Fall 2010 semester. Responses from four hundred (n = 400) students were obtained. After removing responses from thirty five (n = 35) of the

participants, the final sample consisted of three hundred sixty five ( $n = 365$ ) students which suggests excellent power.

### *Instrumentation*

A demographical questionnaire was developed to obtain descriptive information of the sample. The questionnaire consisted of 10 items which assisted in identifying the following independent variables of interest: gender, age, racial/ethnic identity, student type (native, lateral transfer, or vertical transfer), self-reported hours completed prior to transferring, academic probation status, and self-reported transfer GPA. These variables were utilized in the data analysis.

The *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire* (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1989) was utilized to measure student adjustment. The SACQ is a 67-item self-report measure rated on a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from 9: *applies very closely to me* to 1: *does not apply to me at all* (Feldt, 2008). The instrument is comprised of four subscales that include: *Academic Adjustment*, *Social Adjustment*, *Personal-Emotional Adjustment*, and *Institutional Attachment* (Sandberg & Lynn, 1992). The subscales reflect the theoretical assumption of the SACQ's which views college adjustment as a multidimensional process (Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson, & Strauss, 2003). Higher scores on the full scale and subscales, indicate better adjustment to the institution.

The SACQ has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, reliability, and criterion-related validity (Sandberg et al., 1992). The instrument was standardized with more than 1,300 college freshman and has been used in research with diverse populations in North America, Europe, China, Japan, the former Czech republic, Belgium, South Korea, and South Africa (Sennett et al., 2003; Beyers & Goossens, 2002). The SACQ yields a full scale score as well as four subscales scores that have been shown to be internally consistent in several studies with

Cronbach's alphas greater than .80 (Beyers et al., 2002). The full scale purports to measure overall adjustment to college, the academic adjustment subscale purports to measure a student's ability to manage the educational demands of college; social adjustment subscale purports to measure a student's ability to deal with interpersonal experiences in college; personal-emotional adjustment subscale purports to measure a student's degree of general psychological distress; and institutional attachment subscale purports to measure the degree of commitment a student feels towards the university (Cecero1, Beitel, & Prout, 2008). The SACQ has demonstrated statistically significant correlation with numerous other measures. These include the College Maladjustment Scale (Mt) on the MMPI-2, the College Student Stress Scale, the Dissociative Experience Scale, the California Psychological Inventory, the Scheier, Carver's Life Orientation Test, the Adult Nowicki-Strickland Internal External Scale, and the Student Anti-intellectualism Scale (see Haemmerlie & Merz, 1991; Sandberg et al., 1992; Merker & Smith, 2001; Montgomery, Haemmerlie & Ray, 2003; Hook, 2004; Estrada, Dupoux, & Wolman, 2006; Feldt, 2008). Furthermore, the SACQ has been used by many universities as a cost effective way of detecting adaptation problems that students may be experiencing in college and has also been used to assist with retention efforts (Western Psychological Services, n.d.).

The *Maslach Burnout Inventory- Student Survey* (MBI-SS; Schaufeli et al., 2002) was utilized to assess student burnout. The MBI-SS is a 15 item self-report instrument that is designed to measure burnout among student populations. The MBI-SS is a slightly modified version of the *Maslach Burnout Inventory- General Survey* (MBI-GS: Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996). For instance, the original item on the MBI-GS "*I feel emotionally drained from my work*" is rephrased on the MBI-SS as "*I feel emotionally drained from my studies*" (Schaufeli, et al., 2002; Bresó, et al., 2007). All of the items on the MBI-SS are rated on

a 7-point frequency rating scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). The MBI-SS has three subscales which evaluate the three dimensions of burnout. These include: Emotional Exhaustion (5 Items), Cynicism (4 Items), and Academic Efficacy (6 items) (Schaufeli, et al., 2002). The emotional exhaustion subscale is purported to measure emotional and physical fatigue in students; the cynicism subscale purports to measure a student's detached or distant attitude toward their academics and; the academic efficacy subscale purports to measure a student's feelings of academic competency (Maslach et al., 1997; Bresó et al., 2007). High scores on the emotional exhaustion and cynicism subscales and low scores on the academic efficacy subscales are suggested to be indicative of burnout (Durán et al, 2006).

As mentioned previously, the MBI-SS is a modified version of the MBI-GS which has been shown to have acceptable internal consistency and validity (Maslach et al. 1981; 1997; Meier et al., 1985; Yang, 2004; Yang et al., 2005). Acceptable internal consistency and validity has also been reported for the MBI-SS in several studies. Cronbach's alpha coefficients on the three dimensions of the MBI-SS greater than .70 have been reported in numerous studies with college student populations in Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, China and Australia (see Schaufeli et al., 2002; Duran et al., 2006; Bresó et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2007; Lingard, 2007). To date, no studies have been identified that have utilized the MBI-SS with college student populations in the United States.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

The present study utilized electronic data collection methods. A mass email and a secure internet survey website were used to distribute the research instruments to potential participants. Purposive sampling methods were used to target undergraduate students in the CAES. Flyers advertising the study were posted in each CAES building as well as at every corresponding

campus transit stop 12 days prior to the launching of the study. One week prior to the study, an informational email was sent on the CAES undergraduate student list serve that also advertised the study. The flyers and informational email both provided a broad description of the aims of the study, highlighted the participation incentive, and provided instructions for participation. In an effort to avoid potential misinterpretation of the purpose of the study, all emails, flyers, and consent forms avoided the use of terms such as *adjustment*, *burnout*, or *research study*. Further, the specific goals of the study were not disclosed prior to participation. All subjects were debriefed of the purposes of the study following their participation. Participation in the current study was entirely voluntary and all participants were provided an opportunity to discard their responses during the study and after debriefing.

The study was launched by sending an email on the CAES undergraduate listserve. The email provided students with a brief explanation of the study's purpose and included a hyperlink to connect to the study's website. Students who were interested in participating were instructed to click on the hyperlink which electronically connected them to the secure internet website and the informed consent page. After consent was obtained, participants were asked to complete the demographical questionnaire and the two research instruments. Completion time was estimated to be between 25-30 minutes. Upon completion of the instruments, participants were provided with a debriefing statement.

Incentives were offered to encourage student participation. To achieve higher response rates when conducting research online, Cobanoglu and colleagues (2003) recommend that researchers provide participants with incentives. All students who elected to participate in the study had the opportunity to receive a \$5.00 Wal-Mart gift card. Participants were asked to provide their last four digits of their student number in order to collect their gift card incentive.



Following data collection, the list of student numbers was downloaded from the internet survey website. Student numbers were categorized numerically from lowest to highest and assigned a gift card number based on their position on the list. Participants who provided their last four digits were instructed to stop by the Academic Counselors office in the CAES to collect their gift card. Participants were asked to provide their last four digits verbally or by presenting their student ID in order to receive their gift card. Three hundred-forty eight ( $n = 348$ ) participants elected to receive the gift card incentive by providing the last four digits of their student number.

#### *Methods of Data Analysis*

The IBM SPSS Statistics 18 (Formerly: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) (SPSS) was utilized to analyze the data for this current study. The following independent variables were identified: (a) Student type (native student, lateral transfer student, or vertical transfer student), (b) amount of hours completed prior to transferring, (c) academic probation status, and (d) transfer GPA. The following dependent variables were explored: (a) SACQ full scale and subscale mean scores, and (b) MBI-SS subscale mean scores.

#### *Research Question 1(A)*

Do transfer students in the CAES report increased adjustment difficulties and increased burnout symptomatology as opposed to native students in the CAES?

#### *Research Question 1(B)*

Do differences exist between native and lateral transfer students in the CAES on measures of adjustment and burnout?

*Null Hypothesis 1.1.* There will be no statistically significant difference between native students and transfer students on the SACQ full scale and subscale scores.

*Null Hypothesis 1.2.* There will be no statistically significant difference between native students and transfer students on the subscales of the MBI-SS.

*Null Hypothesis 1.3.* There will be no statistically significant difference between lateral transfer students and vertical transfer students on the SACQ full scale and subscale scores.

*Null Hypothesis 1.4.* There will be no statistically significant difference between lateral transfer students and vertical transfer students on the subscales of the MBI-SS.

*Statistical Analysis:* A MANOVA was conducted to compare transfer student and native student adjustment and burnout. The independent variables were student type (native, vertical, or lateral). The dependent variables were mean scores on the five subscales of the SACQ and the three subscales of the MBI-SS. Post hoc comparisons were conducted using the Tukey HSD and Bonferroni procedures to determine if independent variable differences contributed to the findings. Due to the number of dependent variables, a strict Alpha level was used to reduce the chances of Type I Errors. The alpha level was set at .0065 which was calculated using the Bonferroni adjustment (.05 divided by number of dependent variables [8]).

## *Research Question 2*

Do self-reported transfer GPA and transfer credits serve as predictors of adjustment among transfer students in the CAES?

*Null Hypothesis 2.1.* Self-reported transfer GPA and transfer credits will not be predictors of adjustment for transfer students in the CAES.

*Statistical Analysis:* A multivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of transfer student adjustment scores from self-reported transfer GPA

and transfer hours. The predictor variables were self-reported transfer GPA and number of hours earned prior to transferring. The criterion variable was transfer student SACQ full scale scores. Alpha level was set at .05.

### *Research Question 3*

Do students on academic probation report increased adjustment problems and burnout symptomatology as opposed to students not on academic probation?

*Null Hypothesis 3.1.* There will be no statistically significant difference between students on academic probation and students not on academic probation on the SACQ full scale and subscale scores.

*Null Hypothesis 3.2.* There will be no statistically significant difference between students on academic probation and students not on academic probation on the subscales of the MBI-SS.

*Statistical Analysis:* Independent-samples t-tests were used to determine if adjustment and burnout differences exist between students on academic probation and students that are not on probation. The independent variables were participant academic status (on probation or not on probation). The dependent variables were mean scores on the SACQ and MBI-SS subscales. Alpha level was set at .05.

### *Research Question 4*

Is there a relationship between adjustment and burnout symptomatology among students in the CEAS?

*Null Hypothesis 4.1.* There will be no statistical correlation between SACQ full scale and subscale scores and scores on the MBI- SS subscales.

*Statistical Analysis:* A correlational analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between adjustment and burnout. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients were calculated to determine if a linear relationship exists between SACQ and MBI-SS subscales. Alpha levels were set at .01.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present a description of the sample as well as the results of the statistical analyses that were conducted. The four research questions, corresponding null hypotheses, and related results are presented. Tables and figures are provided throughout the chapter.

#### *Description of the Sample*

The current study surveyed the entire undergraduate student population in the CEAS ( $n = 1,561$ ) during the Fall 2010 semester and data were obtained from four hundred ( $n = 400$ ) students. Responses from thirty five ( $n = 35$ ) participants were removed from the study because they did not fully complete the research instrumentation. The final sample for the current study consisted of three hundred sixty five ( $n = 365$ ) undergraduate students in the CAES. The mean age of the sample was 21.18 years ( $SD = 4.93$ ) with a range from 18 to 54 years. It should be noted that 22% of participants ( $n = 81$ ) elected not to disclose their age on the demographical questionnaire. Table 1 presents the gender make-up of the sample for this study. Although the gender make-up of the student population in the CAES is relatively equal, 52% female and 48% male (College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, 2009), females were overrepresented and males were underrepresented in the present study. As can be seen in Table 1, females accounted for 67.9% ( $n = 248$ ) of the sample, while males accounted for 32.1% ( $n = 117$ ) of the sample.

Table 1

*Gender of Participants*

| Gender | <i>N</i> | Percentage |
|--------|----------|------------|
| Male   | 117      | 32.1%      |
| Female | 248      | 67.9%      |

Table 2 provides information on the participant's self-reported race and ethnicity. As can be seen, the majority of the participants were Caucasian as they accounted for 80.3% ( $n = 293$ ) of the sample collected. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the sample seems consistent with the student demographics in the CAES (86% Caucasian, 5.7% African American, 14% all ethnic minority) (College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, 2009). More than 18% of the current sample reported an ethnic minority identity which comparatively is slightly higher than the percentage of ethnic minorities in the CAES (14%). Five participants (1.4%) elected not to report their race/ethnicity.

Table 2

*Ethnic/Racial make-up of Participants*

| Race/Ethnicity         | <i>N</i> | Percentage |
|------------------------|----------|------------|
| Caucasian              | 293      | 80.3%      |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 29       | 7.9%       |
| African American       | 21       | 5.8%       |
| Biracial               | 11       | 3%         |
| Latino/Hispanic        | 5        | 1.4%       |
| Middle Eastern         | 1        | 0.3%       |
| Total Ethnic Minority  | 67       | 18.4%      |
| Did not report         | 5        | 1.4%       |

Table 3 presents information on participants reported time at UGA and class standing. As can be seen, participants reported being at UGA a mean of 4.1 semesters. Third and 4<sup>th</sup> year students comprised the majority of the participants as they accounted for 24.7% and 27.9% of the sample respectively.

Table 3

*Participant Time at UGA and Class Standing*

| Class Standing       | <i>N</i> | Percentage | Time at UGA | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|----------------------|----------|------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> year | 58       | 15.9%      | Semesters   | 4.1      | 2.62      |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> year | 68       | 18.6%      |             |          |           |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> year | 90       | 24.7%      |             |          |           |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> year | 102      | 27.9%      |             |          |           |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> year | 34       | 9.3%       |             |          |           |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> year | 3        | 0.8%       |             |          |           |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> year | 10       | 2.7%       |             |          |           |

Table 4 presents information regarding academic probation status. As can be seen, the majority of the sample (93.4%) reported that they were not on academic probation during the Fall 2010 semester. Based on data from the CAES Office of Academic Affairs, during a given semester, only about three to four percent of the total student population is on academic probation. For this study, students who reported being on academic probation accounted for 6.3% ( $n = 23$ ) of the sample.

Table 4

*Academic Probation Status of Participants*

| Academic Status  | <i>N</i> | Percentage |
|------------------|----------|------------|
| On Probation     | 23       | 6.3%       |
| Not on Probation | 342      | 93.4%      |

With regards to student employment, 51% of the sample ( $n = 187$ ) reported that they were employed. Table 5 presents the percentage of students employed and the mean number of self reported hours worked by participants during the fall 2010 semester. As can be seen, the majority of the sample reported being employed on average 16 hours per week.

Table 5

*Student Employment and Mean Hours Worked*

| Employment Status | <i>N</i> | Percentage | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|-------------------|----------|------------|----------|-----------|
| Employed          | 187      | 51.3%      | 16.04    | 8.56      |
| Not- Employed     | 178      | 48.7%      |          |           |

Table 6 presents the transfer status of the participants. The majority of participants reported that they were native students as they accounted for 70.7% ( $n = 258$ ) of the sample. Of the 506 transfer students enrolled in the CAES during the fall 2010 semester, one-hundred seven ( $n = 107$ ) participated in the current study. Of these, 16.7% ( $n = 61$ ) were vertical transfers and 12.6% ( $n = 46$ ) reported being lateral transfer students.

Table 6  
*Transfer Status of Participants*

| Student Type | <i>N</i> | Percentage |
|--------------|----------|------------|
| Native       | 258      | 70.7%      |
| Vertical     | 61       | 16.7%      |
| Lateral      | 46       | 12.6%      |

The mean age among the transfer student sub-sample was 23.91 years ( $SD = 7.23$ ) with a range from 19 to 54 years. Table 7 presents demographical information of the transfer student sub-sample. Although females accounted for the majority of the transfer student sub-sample, the gender make-up was more equally distributed. Very few transfer student reported being from an ethnic minority group as 87.9% ( $n = 94$ ) identified as Caucasian. In regards to academic standing, the majority of the transfer student sample was in their 3<sup>rd</sup> (34.6%), 4<sup>th</sup> (32.7%), or 5<sup>th</sup> (22.4%) year.



Table 7

*Transfer Student Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Class Standing*

|                              | <i>N</i> | Percentage |
|------------------------------|----------|------------|
| <b><i>Gender</i></b>         |          |            |
| Male                         | 50       | 46.7%      |
| Female                       | 57       | 53.3%      |
| <b><i>Race/Ethnicity</i></b> |          |            |
| Caucasian                    | 94       | 87.9%      |
| Asian/Pacific                | 4        | 3.7%       |
| African American             | 2        | 1.9%       |
| Biracial                     | 3        | 2.8%       |
| Latino/Hispanic              | 1        | .9%        |
| Did not report               | 3        | 2.8%       |
| <b><i>Class Standing</i></b> |          |            |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> year         | 1        | .9%        |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> year         | 5        | 4.7%       |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> year         | 37       | 34.6%      |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> year         | 35       | 32.7%      |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> year         | 24       | 22.4%      |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> year         | 2        | 1.9%       |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> year         | 3        | 2.8%       |

Table 8 presents information on the mean number of semesters at UGA as well as transfer hours and transfer GPA. The transfer student sub-sample reported that they had been at UGA an average of 3 semesters. Transfer students self-reported their average number of transfer credit hours to be close to 60 and an average GPA of above 3.3.

Table 8

*Transfer Student Time at UGA, Transfer Credit, and (self-reported) Transfer GPA*

|                  | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|------------------|----------|-----------|
| Semesters at UGA | 3.15     | 1.96      |
| Transfer Credits | 59.9     | 15.71     |
| Transfer GPA     | 3.39     | .395      |

Table 9 presents the percentage of transfer students who reported being employed during the fall 2010 semester. As can be seen, the majority of the transfer student sample was employed, 61.7% (n = 66). The average number of self reported hours worked per week was slightly more than eighteen.

Table 9  
*Transfer Student Employment and Mean Hours Worked*

| Employment Status | <i>N</i> | Percentage | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|-------------------|----------|------------|----------|-----------|
| Employed          | 66       | 61.7%      | 18.24    | 8.53      |
| Not- Employed     | 41       | 38.3%      |          |           |

#### *Preliminary Analysis*

Raw scores on each of the five subscales of the SACQ were converted into T-scores as outlined in the instrument manual by Baker and Siryk (1999). Raw scores on the MBI-SS were computed and averaged for each of the three subscales using the MBI scoring keys and as outlined in the MBI manual by Maslach and colleagues (1996). Table 10 provides descriptive and reliability statistics for the SACQ and MBI-SS subscales. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for both the SACQ and MBI-SS ranged from .86 to .94 which were higher than Nunally's (1978) suggested cutoff of .70. The values obtained for the SACQ are consistent with those derived from the normative data reported in the instrument manual. The alpha values obtained for the MBI-SS were higher than those reported in previous studies by Schaufeli et al., (2002) and Maslach, et al., (1996). Based on these findings, it appears that both instruments functioned as expected and demonstrated adequate internal reliability.

Table 10  
*Means, Standard Deviations, and Alpha Values for SACQ  
and MBI-SS Subscales*

| Instrument                    | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | $\alpha$ |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| <b><i>SACQ Subscales</i></b>  |          |           |          |
| Full-scale                    | 51.39    | 10.23     | .94      |
| Academic Adjustment           | 52.01    | 9.45      | .86      |
| Social Adjustment             | 51.41    | 10.08     | .89      |
| Personal/Emotional Adjustment | 48.11    | 11.19     | .87      |
| Institutional Attachment      | 52.40    | 8.19      | .87      |
| <b><i>MBI-SS</i></b>          |          |           |          |
| Exhaustion                    | 13.27    | 6.41      | .90      |
| Cynicism                      | 7.12     | 5.94      | .91      |
| Academic Efficacy             | 25.10    | 6.25      | .88      |

### *Data Analysis*

#### *Research Question 1*

(A) Do transfer students in the CAES report increased adjustment difficulties and increased burnout symptomatology as opposed to native students in the CAES?

(B) Do vertical transfer students in the CAES report increased adjustment difficulties and increased burnout symptomatology as opposed to lateral transfer students in the CAES?

*Null Hypothesis 1.1.* There will be no statistically significant difference between native students and transfer students on the SACQ subscale scores.

*Null Hypothesis 1.2.* There will be no statistically significant difference between native students and transfer students on the subscales of the MBI-SS.

*Null Hypothesis 1.3.* There will be no statistically significant difference between lateral transfer students and vertical transfer students on the SACQ subscale scores.

*Null Hypothesis 1.4.* There will be no statistically significant difference between lateral transfer students and vertical transfer students on the subscales of the MBI-SS.

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine if Null Hypothesis 1.1 and 1.2 could be rejected. The MANOVA and follow-up analyses investigated differences in adjustment and burnout scores among transfer and native students. The eight dependent variables used were the mean scores on the five subscales of the SACQ and three subscales of the MBI-SS. The independent variable was student type which consisted of three levels: native, vertical, or lateral. Post hoc analyses were used to determine if Null Hypothesis 1.3 and 1.4 could be rejected.

The analyses found significant differences among the student types on the dependent variables, Wilks's  $\Lambda = .90$ ,  $F(16,710) = 2.4$ ,  $p = .002$ , the multivariate effect size  $\eta^2$  (eta squared) = .05. To further explore these findings, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted on each of the dependent variables as follow-up tests to the MANOVA. Each ANOVA was tested at the .00625 level. Significant results were obtained by the ANOVA for two SACQ subscales: Social Adjustment,  $F(2,362) = 7.62$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$  and Institutional Attachment,  $F(2,362) = 5.60$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ . Post hoc tests using the Tukey and Bonferroni procedures were used to explore the significant results obtained by the ANOVA's. Post Hoc analyses revealed that the mean native student scores on the Social Adjustment subscale ( $\underline{M} = 52.57$ ,  $\underline{SD} = 10.03$ ) were significantly different from lateral transfer student scores ( $\underline{M} = 46.63$ ,  $\underline{SD} = 10.21$ ). Post Hoc analysis also revealed that native student scores on the Institutional Attachment subscale ( $\underline{M} = 53.11$ ,  $\underline{SD} = 8.11$ ) were significantly different than lateral transfer student scores ( $\underline{M} = 48.78$ ,  $\underline{SD} = 8.91$ ). No other significant differences were identified. Based on these results Null Hypothesis 1.1 can be rejected as significant differences were found on the SACQ subscales. Results for Null Hypothesis 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4 did not yield significant results and therefore cannot be rejected. Results are presented in table 11.

Table 11

*Adjustment and Burnout Differences Based on Student Type*

|                    | Native(N = 258) |           | Vertical (N = 61) |           | Lateral (N = 46) |           | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|----------|
|                    | <i>M</i>        | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>          | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>         | <i>SD</i> |          |
| <b><i>SACQ</i></b> |                 |           |                   |           |                  |           |          |
| FS                 | 51.79           | (10.5)    | 51.66             | (8.97)    | 48.80            | (10.16)   | .185     |
| AA                 | 52.15           | (9.73)    | 51.70             | (8.63)    | 51.65            | (9.11)    | .911     |
| SA                 | 52.57           | (10.03)   | 50.14             | (9.11)    | 46.63            | (10.21)   | .001*    |
| P/E-A              | 47.99           | (11.31)   | 49.46             | (10.45)   | 47.02            | (11.56)   | .511     |
| IA                 | 53.11           | (8.11)    | 52.18             | (7.37)    | 48.78            | (8.91)    | .004*    |
| <b><i>MBI-</i></b> |                 |           |                   |           |                  |           |          |
| EX                 | 13.23           | (6.46)    | 12.56             | (6.01)    | 14.50            | (6.67)    | .294     |
| CYN                | 7.23            | (5.88)    | 6.85              | (5.79)    | 6.91             | (6.59)    | .874     |
| EFF                | 24.89           | (6.28)    | 25.05             | (6.63)    | 26.30            | (5.59)    | .374     |

\* Significant at  $p < .00625$

*Research Question 2*

Do self-reported transfer GPA and transfer hours serve as predictors of adjustment among transfer students in the CAES?

*Null Hypothesis 2.1.* No statistically significant relationship will exist. Transfer GPA and transfer credit hours will not be predictors of adjustment.

A multivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to determine if transfer hours and transfer GPA were significant predictors of transfer student adjustment. The predictor variables for this analysis were self-reported transfer GPA and transfer hours. Transfer student scores on the SACQ full scale served as the criterion variable. The alpha level for the regression analysis was set at .05. No significant results were obtained. The regression analysis revealed that transfer GPA and transfer hours were not significant predictors of transfer student adjustment as measured by the SACQ full scale. Based on these results, Null Hypothesis 2.1 cannot be rejected.

### *Research Question 3*

Do students on academic probation report increased adjustment problems and burnout symptomatology as opposed to students not on academic probation?

*Null Hypothesis 3.1.* There will be no statistically significant difference between students on academic probation and students not on academic probation on the SACQ full scale and subscale scores.

*Null Hypothesis 3.2.* There will be no statistically significant difference between students on academic probation and students not on academic probation on the subscales of the MBI-SS.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores on the subscales of the SACQ and MBI-SS between students on academic probation and students not on academic probation. Results of this analysis are presented in table 12. As can be seen, there was a statistically significant difference identified on the Emotional Exhaustion subscale of the MBI-SS between students on academic probation ( $\underline{M} = 9.96$ ,  $\underline{SD} = 6.57$ ) and those not on academic probation ( $\underline{M} = 13.50$ ,  $\underline{SD} = 6.36$ ),  $t(362) = -2.583$ ,  $p = .01$ . These results suggest that students not on academic probation are experiencing higher levels of emotional exhaustion as opposed to students on academic probation. High emotional exhaustion is the starting point for burnout syndrome. Although the criteria for burnout was not met (i.e., high emotional exhaustion, high cynicism, and low self-efficacy), students not on academic probation seem to be experiencing the initial symptoms of burnout syndrome based on their moderately elevated emotional exhaustion scores.

Significant differences were not detected on any other SACQ or MBI-SS subscales. Due to the fact that no differences were detected on any of the SACQ subscales, Null Hypothesis 3.1 cannot be rejected. Although the analysis provides some support to reject Null Hypothesis 3.2 as

differences were detected on one of the MBI-SS subscales. Additional evidence is needed to confidently reject Null Hypothesis 3.2.

Table 12

*Adjustment and Burnout Differences Based on Academic Probation Status*

|             | Prob.(N = 23) |           | Non-Prob. (N = |           | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------|----------|
|             | <i>M</i>      | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>       | <i>SD</i> |          |          |
| <b>SACQ</b> |               |           |                |           |          |          |
| FS          | 51.74         | (11.31)   | 51.43          | (10.15)   | .143     | .887     |
| AA          | 53.83         | (10.25)   | 51.93          | (9.39)    | .933     | .352     |
| SA          | 50.30         | (10.09)   | 51.56          | (10.03)   | -.581    | .562     |
| P/E-A       | 48.65         | (12.84)   | 48.11          | (11.09)   | .223     | .824     |
| IA          | 52.09         | (10.03)   | 52.48          | (8.04)    | -.222    | .824     |
| <b>MBI-</b> |               |           |                |           |          |          |
| EX          | 9.96          | (6.57)    | 13.50          | (6.36)    | - 2.583  | .010*    |
| CYN         | 5.26          | (4.42)    | 7.25           | (6.03)    | -1.553   | .121     |
| EFF         | 23.69         | (6.77)    | 25.23          | (6.21)    | -1.138   | .256     |

\* Significant at  $p < .05$

*Research Question 4*

Is there a relationship between adjustment and burnout symptomatology among students in the CEAS?

*Null Hypothesis 4.1.* There will be no statistical correlation between SACQ and MBI- SS subscales.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients were calculated to explore if a relationship exists between college student adjustment and burnout as measured by the SACQ and MBI-SS. Table 13 presents the findings of this analysis. As can be seen, statistically significant relationships were identified between the SACQ and MBI-SS subscale scores. The Exhaustion and Cynicism scales of the MBI-SS were negatively correlated with the subscales of the SACQ. Higher adjustment scores on the SACQ subscales were significantly correlated with lower rates of emotional exhaustion and cynicism on the MBI-SS. Additionally, the Self-Efficacy scale of the MBI-SS was positively correlated with the SACQ subscales. Higher

adjustment scores on the SACQ were significantly correlated with higher levels of self-efficacy as measured by the MBI-SS. Based on the statistically significant relationships identified in this analysis Null Hypothesis 4.1 is rejected.

Table 13  
*Correlation Coefficients for SACQ and MBI-SS*

|                | 1            | 2            | 3            | 4            | 5            | 6    | 7    | 8 |
|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------|------|---|
| 1. SACQ-F.S.   | -            |              |              |              |              |      |      |   |
| 2. SACQ-A.A.   | .84          | -            |              |              |              |      |      |   |
| 3. SACQ-S.A.   | .79          | .48          | -            |              |              |      |      |   |
| 4. SACQ-P/E.A. | .82          | .64          | .52          | -            |              |      |      |   |
| 5. SACQ-I.A.   | .82          | .59          | .87          | .55          | -            |      |      |   |
| 6. MBI-SS- EXH | <b>-.60*</b> | <b>-.56*</b> | <b>-.38*</b> | <b>-.60*</b> | <b>-.42*</b> | -    |      |   |
| 7. MBI-SS- CYN | <b>-.58*</b> | <b>-.68*</b> | <b>-.34*</b> | <b>-.45*</b> | <b>-.43*</b> | .61  | -    |   |
| 8. MBI-SS- EFF | <b>.52*</b>  | <b>.59*</b>  | <b>.33*</b>  | <b>.38*</b>  | <b>.38*</b>  | -.27 | -.44 | - |

\* Significant at  $p < .01$



## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of the relevant findings, implications of the results, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and conclusions.

#### *Summary*

The pilot study for this dissertation yielded significant differences in adjustment scores between native and transfer student groups in the CAES. The pilot study revealed that vertical transfer students were experiencing difficulties in the areas of academic adjustment, social adjustment, and institutional attachment. Despite the significant results, the sample size of the pilot study was limiting. The present study aimed to expand on the initial findings of the pilot study and expand the areas of interest to include both adjustment and burnout. The purpose of the present study was to explore college adjustment and academic burnout among undergraduate native and transfer student groups in the CAES.

The current study aimed to explore the following four research questions: (1-A) Do transfer students in the CAES report increased adjustment difficulties and increased burnout symptomatology as opposed to native students in the CAES?; (1-B) Do vertical transfer students in the CAES report increased adjustment difficulties and increased burnout symptomatology as opposed to lateral transfer students in the CAES?; (2) Do self-reported transfer GPA and previous hours earned serve as predictors of adjustment among transfer students in the CAES?; (3) Do students on academic probation report increased adjustment problems and burnout

symptomatology as opposed to students not on academic probation?; and (4) Is there a relationship between adjustment and burnout symptomatology among students in the CEAS?

Purposive sampling methods were employed to obtain responses from undergraduate students in the CAES. Monetary incentives were provided to encourage student participation. Data were obtained from four-hundred (n = 400) participants. Due to missing responses, data from thirty five (n = 35) participants was eliminated and the final sample size consisted of three hundred sixty-five (n = 365) participants. The mean age of the sample was 21.18 years with a range of 18 to 54. Twenty two percent of the sample (n = 81) elected not to disclose their age on the demographical questionnaire.

The sample for the current study was predominantly female (67.9%) and Caucasian (80.3%). Vertical transfer students (n = 61) and lateral transfer students (n = 46) accounted for 16.7% and 12.6% of the total sample respectively. The current study also obtained responses from students on academic probation 6.3% (n = 23). In the present study, the percentage of students who reported being on academic probation was comparatively larger than the percentage of students in the CAES on academic probation which is typically between 3% and 4% each semester.

Adequate internal consistency was demonstrated by both instruments in the present study. The SACQ and MBI-SS both yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients higher than the .70 cutoff suggested by Nunally (1978). This suggests that both the instruments functioned as expected and that they serve as reliable measures of adjustment and burnout.

### *Summary of Findings*

Research questions 1A and 1B were interested in determining if transfer students reported increased adjustment difficulties and increased burnout symptomology as opposed to native

students in the CAES and if differences existed between the transfer student sub groups (i.e., native vs. lateral) on measures of adjustment and burnout. A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted with post Hoc Analyses to properly explore this research question. The MANOVA yielded significant results with regards to adjustment on the SACQ as transfer students reported increased adjustment difficulties. Closer examination of these results via Post Hoc analysis revealed that lateral transfer students reported increased difficulties in the areas of social adjustment and institutional attachment. These results suggests that when compared to native students, lateral transfer students may be experiencing more difficulty dealing with the interpersonal demands and social experiences at UGA and may feel less committed to UGA. No significant differences were detected between vertical and lateral transfers or between vertical transfers and native students. Although no statistically significant differences were revealed with regards to burnout, based on the mean scores of the MBI-SS subscales, all participants ( $n = 365$ ) seem to be experiencing moderate levels of emotional exhaustion.

The MANOVA revealed that lateral transfer students were experiencing difficulties in the areas of social adjustment and institutional attachment. These findings compliment the results of the pilot study that found that vertical transfer students were experiencing difficulties in the areas of academic adjustment, social adjustment, and institutional attachment. Although the results of the current study are somewhat different, the results provide additional evidence that transfer students in the CAES are experiencing adjustment difficulties, specifically in the areas of social adjustment and institutional attachment. Additionally, the results suggest that all students who participated ( $n = 365$ ), are experiencing moderate elevations on the Emotional Exhaustion subscale of the MBI-SS. Based on the MBI-SS scoring manual, the moderate elevations do not rise to a clinically significant level that meets the criteria for burnout (i.e., high emotional

exhaustion, high cynicism, and low self-efficacy). Despite not being clinically significant, the results are concerning because elevated levels of emotional exhaustion is considered to be the starting point for the burnout syndrome (Maslach et al., 1981; 1996).

Research question 2 was interested in determining if transfer GPA and transfer hours served as predictors of adjustment among transfer students in the CAES. To explore this research question, a multivariate linear regression analysis was conducted. The predictive variables consisted of student self-reported transfer GPA and transfer credits. The criterion variable for the analysis consisted of transfer student mean scores on the SACQ full scale. The regression analysis did not yield any significant results. This suggests that transfer GPA and transfer hours do not serve as significant predictors of transfer student adjustment based on SACQ full scale scores.

Research question 3 was interested in determining if students on academic probation reported increased adjustment problems and burnout symptomatology as opposed to students not on academic probation. To explore this research question, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the SACQ and MBI-SS mean scores of these two groups. The analysis revealed significant differences on the Emotional Exhaustion subscale of the MBI-SS. Students that were not on academic probation reported moderately elevated levels of emotional exhaustion. No significant differences were detected on any other SACQ or MBI-SS subscales. These results suggest that students who are on regular academic status (i.e. not on academic probation) may be experiencing some symptoms of emotional exhaustion based on their mean scores on the Emotional Exhaustion subscale of the MBI-SS. As previously noted, despite the fact that these moderate elevations do not rise to a clinically significant level, the results are concerning because elevated emotional exhaustion is the starting point for the burnout syndrome.

Research question 4 was interested in determining if a significant relationship exists between college student adjustment and academic burnout as measured by the SACQ and MBI-SS. To explore this relationship, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients were calculated. The analysis revealed statistically significant relationships between MBI-SS and SACQ subscales. The Emotional Exhaustion and Cynicism subscales of the MBI-SS were negatively correlated with SACQ subscale scores. This suggests that higher adjustment scores corresponded with reduced emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Additionally, the Self-Efficacy scale of the MBI-SS was positively correlated with SACQ subscale scores which suggests that higher adjustment scores correspond with increased levels of self-efficacy.

The correlational analysis suggests that students who are better adjusted to the college environment (i.e., ability to manage the educational demands of the institution; ability to deal with interpersonal and social experiences at the institution; ability to cope with general psychological distress; and their commitment towards the institution) may be less likely to experience burnout symptomatology. The analysis revealed positive and negative relationships between adjustment and burnout based on MBI-SS and SACQ scores. Students who had higher levels of adjustment had lower levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Students who had higher levels of adjustment also had higher levels of academic self-efficacy. Better adjusted students seem to have lower levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism and higher levels of self-efficacy, which according to Maslach and colleagues (1997) is indicative of engagement and not burnout. As previously highlighted, student engagement is characterized by increased energy, involvement, and efficacy which are the direct opposite of the symptoms characteristic of burnout (i.e., high emotional exhaustion, high cynicism, and reduced self efficacy) Maslach et

al., (1997). These results suggest that students who are better adjusted seem to also be better engaged with their social and academic environment.

### *Implications*

The results of the current study provide continued evidence that transfer students in the CAES are experiencing adjustment difficulties. Additionally, the findings suggest that students in the CAES are experiencing moderately elevated levels of emotional exhaustion. Finally, the current study revealed positive and negative correlations between college adjustment and academic burnout. The results of the current study may have numerous implications and provides important information that could be utilized for advisement, counseling, and orientation purposes.

Transfer students comprise over 30 percent of the undergraduate student population in the CAES each semester. Given the size of this student group and the difficulties that have been highlighted, it may be appropriate to allocate resources that could assist transfer students in the CAES as they transition to life at UGA and provide them with support. Assisting transfer students during their transition to UGA seems appropriate not only due to the potential negative effects associated with adjustment difficulties (Solberg Nes et al., 2009) but also due to the current findings which suggest that students who are better adjusted potentially experience lower levels of burnout symptomatology. Supporting transfer students academically, providing them with increased networking or social opportunities, and fostering a greater sense of connection to the university seems appropriate given the results of this study.

To better assist transfer students in navigating new institutional structures and the campus community, Eggleston and Laanan, (2001) recommend that universities develop orientation programs that specifically address some of their unique needs. Currently, the CAES conducts

orientation sessions for incoming transfer students each summer. The content of these sessions could be easily adapted so that they better meet the specific needs of transfer students in the CAES which have been highlighted in the current findings. For instance, the current orientation sessions provide a presentation on the history of UGA and the CAES and reviews academic and scholarship opportunities within the CAES. Following the presentation, students are provided an opportunity to meet with an academic advisor and sign up for classes.

The needs of transfer students could be better addressed by incorporating information regarding academic standards and policies (i.e., GPA information, rigorous academic standards, withdrawal limits etc.), discussing the new interpersonal and social demands that they will have to navigate (i.e., large university setting, residential campus etc.), and providing students with information on available resources that could assist their adjustment (i.e. academic counseling, CAPS, Milledge Academic Center, tutoring etc.). The highlighted information could be easily incorporated into the current format of the orientation program in the CAES by extending the time of the presentation by 5 to 10 minutes. Additionally, staff could also be available to answer any follow-up questions following the presentation or while students are meeting with their advisors.

It also seems that transfer students in the CAES may benefit from learning about social and networking opportunities (i.e., clubs, tutoring etc.) to assist in their adjustment to UGA and the CAES. For instance, it may be appropriate to provide transfer students with information about the new Transfer Student Organization that was recently established at UGA during the fall 2010 semester. The purpose of this student organization is to provide transfer students with resources, information and social networking opportunities to encourage their involvement and help them become better connected to the university. The organization could potentially help

transfer students in the CAES foster new relationships, become better acclimated as they transition to life at UGA, and may help them develop a sense of school identity. Additionally, transfer students may benefit from receiving information about clubs and organizations within the CAES. These organizations may provide transfer students with an opportunity to become better acquainted with the CAES and meet peers within their major or area of interest. Organizational information could be disseminated during orientation sessions or provided to new transfer students via an informational packet provided to them during orientation. This information could also be easily incorporated into the orientation presentation.

The academic counselor in the CAES may also become more involved with the transfer student orientation sessions during the summer and use the data from this study to inform her/his work with this group of students throughout the year. The duties of the academic counselor are typically reduced during the summer months. This seems to be primarily due to the reduced numbers of probation students who attend summer classes. The academic counselors may be able to assist during orientation sessions by utilizing the results of this study to discuss the aforementioned issues and resources. Although the current academic counselor has elected to participate during orientation sessions, this is not a formal duty of the position. It might be beneficial for this duty to become a formal aspect of the position in the future. The academic counselor may also be able to utilize the instruments used in this study (SACQ and MBI-SS) as screener tools to explore for adjustment difficulties and/or academic burnout symptoms when working with students throughout the year.

The administration in the CAES may also consider utilizing courses such as AESC 1010-Orientation to Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, to better meet the needs of transfer students. Although classes such as AESC 1010 are currently one-hour electives courses, the



administration could consider making courses such as this mandatory for all new incoming transfer students. AESC 1010 is designed to help undecided freshmen and transfers in the CAES on deciding on a major. The course is also designed to provide information related to campus services and activities. This course may be an excellent venue to review with transfer students the various demands and challenges that may negatively impact them. Topics specific to transfer student needs could be easily incorporated into the structure of the course.

Another potential course related option that could be used to assist transfer students as they transition to UGA is the First-Year Odyssey (FYO) program. The FYO program is comprised of more than 300 unique seminars that cover a diverse set of topics. Each individual seminar is taught by tenured faculty and is designed to introduce incoming freshman to the academic life at UGA. Seminars provide students with an opportunity to engage with faculty and other first-year students in a small class environment and learn about the unique academic culture at UGA. All incoming freshman are required to participate in the FYO program by enrolling in one of the seminars. Students receive a one hour graded credit for participating in the FYO program and must complete the requirement by the end of their first year in residence at UGA. Currently, transfer students are not required to participate and are not permitted to enroll in any of the seminars. Given the results highlighted in the current study, the administration at UGA may wish to consider making this program available to new incoming transfer students. Given the diverse nature of the seminars offered, a seminar specifically for transfer student could be designed and incorporated into the program.

Although students in the CAES do not seem to be experiencing burnout, moderate elevations of emotional exhaustion were detected. Elevated emotional exhaustion has been cited as the first symptom associated with the development of the burnout syndrome (Maslach et al.,

1997; Yang et al., 2005; Durán et al, 2006). Neumann and colleagues (1990) assert that learning environments that encourage learning flexibility and student involvement may help to mediate emotional exhaustion among college students. They encourage institutions of higher learning to develop academic programs that provide students with diverse course elective options, independent study opportunities, and courses that move away from the traditional lecture format. Furthermore, they suggest that students should be provided with opportunities to become involved in out-of-class activities such as departmental forums, seminars, special events, and activities that encourage student-faculty contact. These strategies have been suggested to help reduce emotional exhaustion among college students (Neumann et al., 1990) and may be helpful in addressing the emotional exhaustion levels detected among the native and transfer students in the CAES. Additionally, students in the CAES may benefit from learning stress management strategies. For example, the college may be able to collaborate with the University Health Center or the Counseling Psychology program to develop a series of seminars or events for students that discuss stress management and self-care issues.

### *Limitations*

1. Although the sample for this study seemed adequate, it is only reflective of the experiences of students within the CAES. It is not known if students from other colleges at UGA or at other institutions of higher learning would produce similar results.
2. The current study utilized a correlational research design which is unable to determine causation. Therefore, the present study was not able to establish causality.
3. The results of the present study are based on non-longitudinal data. The current data captured a snap shot view of what students may be experiencing in the CAES during the fall 2010 semester. It is not known if similar results would be obtained if data were collected

longitudinally, at another time during the current semester (before midterms, after finals etc), or during a different semester (beginning of spring semester, during summer semester etc.).

4. The sample for the current study was homogenous with regard to gender, race, and ethnicity. Few males and fewer ethnic minority students participated in the study. It is not known if participation from more males and ethnic minority students would produce similar results.
5. Although participation was voluntary, incentives were offered and it is unknown how this impacted responses.
6. The current study used an internet-based survey website for data collection. It is not known if other collection methods (i.e., face-to-face, classroom solicitation, facebook, information booths etc.) would produce similar results. Additionally, it is not known if alternative data collection methods would impact the sample demographics (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity, student type).
7. The current study did not explore student engagement which has been noted to be a relevant factor in adjustment related issues and burnout.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

1. It is recommended that future research take a longitudinal approach to explore adjustment and burnout among undergraduate students in the CAES. A longitudinal approach would allow researchers to determine how responses are impacted at different points in the semester and if they differ from one semester to the next.
2. It is recommended that future research determine if gender differences exists on measures of adjustment and burnout. Gender differences could be explored on multiple levels (e.g., among transfer students, among native students, and among high or low achieving students).

3. It is recommended that future research explore the experiences of high achieving students. It is assumed that these students have to navigate similar academic environments and manage similar stressors as those students who underachieve. It might be beneficial to determine how these high achieving students successfully overcome these obstacles and avoid academic difficulties.
4. It is recommended that future research explore how race and ethnicity impact adjustment and burnout. Specifically, it is recommended that researchers explore these constructs among ethnic minority groups as opposed to comparing ethnic minority results with non ethnic samples.
5. It is recommended that future research utilize diverse methods of data collection. Although the current method of data collection yielded a large sample size, it may have inadvertently excluded a segment of the student population that does not check their emails. Some of the data collection methods that could be considered include: facebook, face-to-face, classroom solicitation, and/or information booths.
6. It is recommended that future research on adjustment and burnout be expanded to other colleges at UGA, to the entire university population, and/or to other institutions within the state of Georgia. Expanding the study could help to strengthen the external validity of the results.
7. It is recommended that future research incorporate qualitative or mixed method approaches to explore adjustment and burnout among undergraduate students in the CEAS. Qualitative or mix method approaches may provide a deeper and richer understanding of student experiences which may compliment quantitative findings. Further, they may enhance our understanding of the variables that impact adjustment and burnout.

## *Conclusions*

This research is the culmination of an effort to identify the difficulties that students in the CAES may be experiencing. Located in the states flagship institution, the CAES at the University of Georgia is one of the most prestigious colleges of agriculture in the country. Despite the fact that the college attracts top quality students, the competitive and rigorous academic environment may be overwhelming for some students. This study was inspired by the researcher's interaction with students on academic probation in the CAES and review of anecdotal data. Over the course of three years, this researcher was able to interact with many students on probation and engage in conversation with them about their academic situation. During these conversations, many students discussed their stressors, difficulties and experiences that contributed to their academic circumstances. This researcher was also able to access and review data and previous studies that provided anecdotal evidence that transfer students were over represented in the academic probation process and experiencing difficulties after transferring to UGA.

The current study provides empirical evidence of the difficulties that some students in the CAES are experiencing. The study reveals that transfer students are experiencing difficulty adjusting socially and that they do not feel connected to the institution. The study also revealed that students in the CAES seem to be experiencing moderate levels of emotional exhaustion which is the beginning stage of burnout. Finally, the study identified a relationship between adjustment and academic burnout which suggests that better adjusted students may have lower instances of burnout symptomatology.

The current study provides a better understanding of some of the difficulties that may be negatively impacting students in the CAES. Difficulty adjusting to a new academic environment

or managing the stressful aspects of a rigorous academic program may have various negative consequences for students. For instance, students who cannot acclimate appropriately to a new environment or who have problems coping with their academic related stressors are at higher risk for experiencing academic failure, academic probation, and academic dismissal. They are also at higher risk for developing psychological problems such as burnout. These consequences may result in numerous long term side effects for students such as reduced lifetime earnings, decreased quality of life, and fewer vocational opportunities as well as increased psychological problems.

In summary, the purpose of the present study was to examine adjustment and academic burnout among undergraduate native and transfer student groups in the CAES. The study provided continued evidence of the adjustment difficulties endured by transfer students in the CAES and revealed that students in the CAES are experiencing the beginning symptoms of burnout. Additionally, the current study revealed a previously unknown relationship between adjustment and burnout. It is hoped that the results of this study are beneficial to the administrators, faculty, and staff in the CAES in meeting the needs of transfer and native students.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### **Solicitation Email**

CAES Undergraduates,

We need your help. Our College is conducting a survey on the experiences of students in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES). All students who complete the survey will receive a \$5 Wal-Mart gift card.

The survey is being conducted by Eckart Werther, the CAES Academic Counselor. In a few days, you will be receiving an e-mail message to your UGA email titled: CAES STUDENT EXPERIENCES.

Please help us to better understand your undergraduate experiences in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and at the University of Georgia. I would greatly appreciate your participation in this survey.

Thanks,  
Josef M. Broder  
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs  
College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

## APPENDIX B

### Solicitation Flyer



THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

# Tell Us About Your College Experience?



- We are conducting a **survey** about your college experiences.
- We want to **improve** your undergraduate experience.
- Students who complete the survey will receive a **\$5 Wal-Mart** gift card!



- Please be on the lookout for an **email** titled: **(CAES STUDENT EXPERIENCES)**, on October 13th.
- The email will be sent to your **UGA** email account.
- Participation is strictly **voluntary** and will not in any way influence, positively or negatively, your status in the CAES or at UGA.
- Your responses will remain **confidential**.

This research study has been approved by the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions before, during, or after this study, you may contact Mr. Eckart Werther at (706) 583-0499 or email him at ewerther@uga.edu. Questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, GA, 30602 (706-542-3199 or irb@uga.edu).

## APPENDIX C

### **Launching Email**

Dear Students,

We are conducting a survey about your experiences as students at UGA.

You will be eligible to receive a \$5 Wal-Mart gift card if you complete the survey. Your participation is voluntary.

If you wish to participate, please click on the link below (or cut and paste the URL into your browser) and you will be directed to the survey.

[Http://hyperlink\\_for\\_study.com](http://hyperlink_for_study.com)

Thank you in advance for your participation,

Eckart Werther  
The University of Georgia  
ewerther@uga.edu

## APPENDIX D

### **Informed Consent Statement**

The following research study is being conducted by Eckart Werther, doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Edward Delgado-Romero (Department of Counseling & Human Developmental Services) at the University of Georgia. The title of the study is: The Experiences of Undergraduate Students in the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences.

The general purpose of this study is to gather data about how you interact with the academic environment. The data collected will be used to better understand your experiences at UGA. There are no known risks, discomforts, or stressors anticipated by your participation.

If you elect to take part in this study, you have the option of collecting a \$5.00 Wal-Mart gift card. To collect your gift card, you must provide the last four-digits of your “810” number. You will collect your gift card in person and will only be asked to verbally provide you last 4 digits.

Only students age 18 or older are eligible to participate. Involvement in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw your consent at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled by clicking on the “Withdraw from Survey/Discard Responses” button. None of the questions are mandatory and you may skip questions at any time. In order to make this study a valid one, some information about the study will be withheld until the completion of the study. Participation will involve the completion of three questionnaires. This will take approximately 25-30 minutes.

Your participation is confidential. Only the researcher will have access to any individually identifiable information obtained. All data collected will be stored in a secured, password protected location. The researcher will be the only person with access to the data and all reasonable precautions will be taken to protect your identity. Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once the materials are received by the researcher, standard confidentiality procedures will be employed.

If you have questions about this research please feel free to contact: Eckart Werther (ewerther@uga.edu or 706-583-0499). Questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, GA. 30602 (706-542-3199 or irb@uga.edu).

By completing the survey you are agreeing to participate in the research, please press the “Next” button below to continue.

## APPENDIX E

### Demographic Questionnaire

What is your age?

What is your Gender?

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

How would you classify yourself?

- ☐ Caucasian/White  
☐ African American  
☐ Arab  
☐ Asian/Pacific Islander  
☐ Latino/a  
☐ Multiracial  
☐ Would rather not say  
☐ Other

How long have you been at UGA?

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> 1 semester  | <input type="radio"/> 5 semesters         |
| <input type="radio"/> 2 semesters | <input type="radio"/> 6 semesters         |
| <input type="radio"/> 3 semesters | <input type="radio"/> 7 semesters         |
| <input type="radio"/> 4 semesters | <input type="radio"/> 8 or more semesters |

I enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences as:

- ☐ A Freshman  
☐ An internal transfer from another college at UGA  
☐ A transfer from a two-year community college/ technical school  
☐ A transfer from a four-year college/university

If you transferred to UGA, how many credit hours did you earn prior to transferring?

If you transferred to UGA, what was your overall GPA when you transferred?

Are you currently on Academic Probation?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

If you are employed, how many hours do you typically work per week?

## APPENDIX F

### MBI-SS

Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your academics. If you have never had this feeling, write a '0' (zero) before the statement. If you have had this feeling, indicate how often you feel it by writing the number (from 1 to 6) that best describes how frequently you feel that way.

| 0     | Very rarely                   | Rarely                  | Regularly              | Often          | Very often            | Always    |
|-------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| Never | 1                             | 2                       | 3                      | 4              | 5                     | 6         |
|       | A few times<br>a year or less | Once a month<br>or less | A few times<br>a month | Once a<br>week | A few times<br>a week | Every day |

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I feel emotionally drained by my academics.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I feel used up at the end of a day at the university.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I feel tired when I get up in the morning and I have to face another day at  
the university.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Studying or attending a class is really a strain for me.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I feel burned out from my academics.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ I have become less interested in my academics since my enrolment at the  
university.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ I have become less enthusiastic about my academics.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ I have become more cynical about the potential usefulness of my academics.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ I doubt the significance of my academics.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ I can effectively solve the problems that arise in my academics.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ I believe that I make an effective contribution to the classes that I attend.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ In my opinion, I am a good student.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ I feel stimulated when I achieve my academic goals.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ I have learned much interesting things during the course of my academics.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ During class I feel confident that I am effective in getting things done.

## APPENDIX G

### Debriefing Statement

Dear Student,

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this study. The actual title of this study is: Adjustment and Burnout Among Undergraduate Transfer and Native Student Groups.

The study explored college adjustment and academic burnout among transfer and native students. The study was also interested in determining if a relationship exists between college adjustment and academic burnout. You were asked to complete a demographical questionnaire and the following two instruments: the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) which measures college student adjustment and the Maslach Burnout Inventory- Student Survey (MBI-SS) which is a measure of academic burnout.

The primary aim of this study was to identify the possible adjustment factors that may impact student success and identify if students are experiencing academic burnout. A better understanding of these factors seems warranted as they are suggested to impact college student success efforts. Understanding these factors is important in order to better prepare students for the demands of college and to assist them once they are in college. The results of this study could potentially enhance current and future student support services in the CAES.

\*To collect your \$5.00 Wal-Mart gift card, you will come to the Academic Counselor's Office in Room 103 of the Poultry Science Building beginning the first week in November. You will be asked to verbally provide the last four digits of your "810" number at the time you collect your gift card.

Please click on "Submit" to have your responses included in this study. You may elect to withdraw your participation and have your responses discarded by clicking on the "Withdraw from Survey/Discard Responses" button.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation, the general study or about collecting your incentive, you may contact:

Eckart Werther, MSW  
CAES Academic Counselor  
Poultry Science Building, Room 103  
706-583-0499  
[ewerther@uga.edu](mailto:ewerther@uga.edu)