

HOME AWAY FROM HOME: IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIP FORMATION
FOR OUT-OF-STATE-STUDENTS

By

RACHEL ANNE RABENSTINE

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Approved by:

Dr. Margaret Pitts
Department of Communication

Abstract

Public higher education institutions have been slowly increasing their reliance on out-of-state students in order to increase revenue and balance their budgets to fit the needs of students in the 21st century. However, there is a severe lack of research into out-of-state students' experiences and how this particular population of students transition to college, establish relationships, and develop their identity in an environment that is separate than their permanent residence. Therefore, this study employs the communication theory of identity developed by Michael Hecht to examine how out-of-state students transition to college and how their identities and communication are affected in that transition. I conducted 4 focus group interviews with 18 out-of-state students at the University of Arizona (12 women and 6 men) about their experiences transitioning to a university environment, how they established meaningful relationships while in college, and their sense of self. Students revealed the importance of establishing relationships quickly and how they found meaningful interpersonal relationships in larger peer groups. In addition, they mentioned higher levels of autonomy and independence as they transitioned to college, and the setbacks they experienced as a result of not finding meaningful relationships quickly. Lastly, they described personal-relational identity gaps that emerged as a result of navigating between their relationships that they established prior to entering college and the ones that are newly established. These findings can help inform higher education professionals and institutions that rely heavily on out-of-state students how they can continue to support this population of students.

Keywords: Out-of-state students, Identity, Higher Education, Identity Gaps, Relationships

Home Away from Home: Communication Theory of Identity and Relationship Formation
for Out-of-State University Students

Introduction

This Honors Thesis project was inspired by a program at the University of Arizona that was formerly known as The UAdvantage First Year Experience- a yearlong mentoring program for incoming undergraduate students. The program focused on out-of-state students who were beginning their first year of college. The UAdvantage program utilized peer mentoring and community building in order to assist student adjustment in their first year of college. While I, Rachel Rabenstine, worked with this program, student participants indicated that programs and organizations like UAdvantage provided opportunities to build key relationships that helped them adjust to college life. In the Spring of 2019, after only a few years of its existence, the program ended. The closure of this program was unfortunate especially given a significant amount of evidence that institutions like the University of Arizona are pushing for increased out-of-state student enrollment. A long history of diminished state appropriations (Mixon & Hsing, 1994) means that higher education institutions are continuing to rely more and more on the influx of student tuition dollars, of which out-of-state students provide a significant amount (Jaquette & Curs, 2015). Despite the influx of out-of-state students, there is a significant lack of information on the out-of-state student experience and how they adjust to a new place of residence while in college. However, there is evidence that the transition to college is a time in which students experience a significant amount of identity negotiation and discovery (Mejias et al., 2014; Orbe, 2004; Wadsworth et al., 2008). Previous research has focused on different identity concerns, such as age, race, ability, and so forth. Regardless of their specific identity challenges, the biggest contributor to students' well-being and a sense of belonging in college is

social connection with their peers (Bowman et al., 2019). As evidenced in these studies, much of this identity negotiation can occur once a student finds a person, or group of people, with which they have a social connection.

Therefore, using the communication theory of identity (Hecht 1993), this investigation considers the potential roles that identity, social connection, and relationship formation by out-of-state students play in long-term student satisfaction and success. In particular, this study will consider how out-of-state students may experience identity negotiation as they transition from their permanent state of residence to their respective higher education institutions. Specifically, out-of-state students likely experience a disconnect between their identity and their environment causing potential identity gaps. This thesis seeks to explore the nature of potential identity gaps for out-of-state students and the role of personal relationships in managing those gaps by interviewing this population in focus group interviews. Understanding how out-of-state students transition and thrive in a college environment is key for higher education institutions as they become increasingly more reliant on this population due to the lack of state-appropriations (“Balancing the Budget on the Backs of Out-of-State Students”, 2017).

Literature Review

Communication Theory of Identity and Identity Gaps

To shed light on how out-of-state students experience and navigate identity transitions when beginning their college career, I employ the communication theory of identity (Hecht, 1993). This theory is one way of understanding how identity can form through interaction with others. Communication theory of identity (CTI) was first proposed by Michael Hecht (Hecht 1993, 2015; Hecht et al., 2005). Using components of many different theories and modes of thought, Hecht composes CTI as a way to conceptualize identity. Hecht provided eight

assumptions, as a part of the theory of identity, all of which point to the fact that the messages we send are a communication behavior, and that those messages affect and are affected by our identities (Hecht, 1993). Moreover, CTI established that identity is complex and layered (Hecht 1993, 2015; Urban & Orbe, 2010). Hecht argued that identity is paradoxical or dialectical. Hecht pointed out that with many modes of thought contributing to theory, they can explain complex phenomenon, despite their inconsistencies (Hecht, 2015). By using separate yet contrasting frameworks from anthropology, psychology, and sociology, Hecht described identity as something that is infinitely layered and complex, with multiple seemingly contradictory ideas working together (Hecht, 1993). With CTI, there can be multiple different elements of identity where even the most opposing ideas can interpenetrate, or combine, to create something unique (Hecht, 1993). For example, scholars have investigated the primary dialectics that first generation college students navigate throughout their college experience (Orbe, 2004). Specifically, first generation college students struggle with the idea of being an individual, that is independent and autonomous, and being part of a community, where they can be connected and interdependent with their fellow students (Orbe, 2004). Though this is just one example, through these two key concepts of dialectics and paradoxical thinking, Hecht developed four different frames of identity: personal, enacted, relational, and communal (Hecht et al., 2005). They assert that the four identity frames coexist and interpenetrate each other. This coexistence of separate, yet related, identity frames can be complex, as Jung and Hecht (2004) asserted that dialectical tensions between these frames is inevitable. This conceptualization of identity explains how we communicate as individuals, in relationships, and with the communities that we find ourselves placed in. Moreover, this theory explains how different facets of our social reality are co-constructed by both internal and external factors.

Within the personal identity frame, people form identity based on how they think, feel, and view themselves. The personal frame is co-constructed by how we define ourselves and how others ascribe identities to us – a spiritual sense of self (Hecht, 1993). This in turn affects the other identity frames, as CTI is inherently layered. The enacted identity frame refers to the means by which individuals express their identity through their behavior and communication (Hecht, 2015). This frame explains how we embed parts of our identity in our messages and communication. Messages that we send can be comprised of parts of our identity (Hecht, 1993). This frame states that as we perform our identity through communication our identity can further emerge (Hecht et al., 2005). For example, an out-of-state student might perform an identity as a resident of their own state through communication behaviors such as using a specific dialect or incorporating regional colloquialisms. These are smaller examples, but these communication behaviors help establish their identity, per Hecht's core assumptions. This furthers the idea of the enacted frame, in that as someone's identity changes and develops, their behavior will do so as well (Hecht, 1995). One example of how our identity is performed is demonstrated in a study that investigates the experience of nineteen transgender individuals. The study sheds light on how transgender individuals express their identity in various ways, such as cross dressing and changing their names, pronouns, and other labels (Wagner et al., 2016). While this example is potentially more pronounced for trans individuals, as they conform to the gender norms of society, everyone, in similar ways, performs their identity through their behavior.

The relational identity frame shows how identity is co-constructed through our interactions with others (Hecht et al., 2005). We use other people's behavior and communication to adjust our identity in different contexts. CTI asserts that our identity and communication are shaped by the social behavior around us (Hecht, 1993). Therefore, as we become more and more

involved in relationships with others, the relationship changes from two individuals, to a single dyad. The relationships we have become a part of who we are as we internalize the ascribed identities that come with being in a relationship (Hecht, 2015). For example, the labels we ascribe to each other can be internalized and be exhibited through our behavior. If someone were to be labeled as “a good student” by teachers, friends, and fellow students, they may continue to enact behaviors that further the idea that they are a good student-- thus showing the layered nature of these identity frames. The same idea can be attributed to various types of relationships, whether those be marital, personal, professional, or otherwise. Examples like this demonstrate that identity can emerge from being a part of any dyadic relationship. Similar to the relational identity frame, the communal identity frame is a co-constructed frame. But rather than it being co-constructed by one other person or a small group, this frame states that identity can be shaped based on the social networks we surround ourselves in (Hecht, 1993). For example, one study that investigated how contemporary immigrants in the United states negotiate identity in different communal frames. Urban and Orbe (2011) investigated the communal identity of the “immigrant” label and how that label interplays with other identities. In their investigation, they found that contemporary immigrants wrestled with the tension of being caught between being labeled as an “immigrant” or “American” simultaneously (Urban & Orbe, 2010). These labels note that they are part of two different communities at the same time.

One aspect of CTI That developed after the initial theory is the idea of identity gaps. Although at times the four layers of identity work separately in unproblematic ways, identity gaps occur when these identity frames contradict each other (Wagner et al., 2016). These intersections quite often given the push-pull dynamic of a dialectic. Jung and Hecht (2004) refer to these discrepancies, or the lack of connection that a person may experience between two

different identity frames as an identity gap. For example, if someone were to identify as a person who is generally good-natured and kind, but is told by a relational partner that they are a selfish relational partner, this may indicate that there is a personal-relational identity gap, as the individual sees a discrepancy with their self-image and what their partner is telling them. With these four frames, there is a potential of eleven different identity gaps, as all four frames are not mutually exclusive (Jung & Hecht, 2004). With these gaps, there may be a certain amount of cognitive dissonance when two parts of the identity compete. Many studies have shown that identity gaps affect not just an individual's identity, but also their experiences and attitudes as well. In a study investigating international students and the identity gaps that they experience in relation to their educational satisfaction and acculturation, they found that their personal-enacted gaps had a primary effect on their interpersonal communication satisfaction, depression, and educational satisfaction (Wadsworth et al., 2008). Moreover, some scholars have assumed that with the development or reduction of this dissonance, or gap, change occurs (Hecht, 2015).

There has been a lot of research on various types of gaps, such as personal-relational identity gaps, personal-enacted identity gaps, etc. With this study, it is unclear if there are any particular identity gaps that out-of-state students experience, since there is such a lack of research on out-of-state students as a population. However, out-of-state students likely experience a disconnect between their identity and their environment causing potential identity gaps, given the amount of research on students who experience similar transitional changes in their life. Identity as a concept in higher education is something that has been looked at extensively, in particular with ideas of race, gender, and different cultures. Even with theories like Chickering's Vectors of Student Development, identity formation and negotiation is a common experience that helps define the outcome of college for many college students,

regardless of what labels they identify with (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Therefore, this study looks to the label of “out-of-state students” as an identity and its effect on the formation and negotiation process that a student may experience through college. Moreover, this thesis seeks to explore the nature of potential identity gaps and formation for out-of-state students and the role of personal relationships in managing those gaps. The idea of change coupled with the idea of identity gaps poses an interesting question about whether or not change interplays with identity gaps.

Higher Education and Out-Of-State Enrollment in the United States

One anticipated outcome of this study is to investigate the out-of-state student experience and to propose ways in which higher education institutions can abate the potential stressors that these students may face. Investigating this type of experience will be helpful in two particular ways. Firstly, new methods for helping students achieve a stronger sense of well-being and security can be developed. One key to facilitating greater well-being is the development of meaningful relationships. Indeed, studies have shown that “social connection, relationship satisfaction with college friends, and feeling successful in class were most strongly related to changes in belonging and well-being” (Bowman et al., 2019, p. 273). Many large higher education institutions like the University of Arizona, have entire departments dedicated to student life, which provide programming and communities to ensure that undergraduate students of all walks of life feel like they belong. For these student affairs professionals, it is prudent that they be aware of the needs of the students they work with, no matter their walk of life. Therefore, by investigating this student population, student affairs professionals can continue to cater to the widespread populations that attend their institutions.

A second contribution of this study will also be of interest to higher education professionals, as it may address potential budgetary concerns of a higher education institution. In the United States, research indicates that, over the past decade or so, higher education institutions have been pushing for more out-of-state enrollments in order to balance their budgets. Public universities have been engaging in price discrimination for out-of-state students, where nonresidents pay more than resident students (Mixon & Hsing, 1994). Data from 2017 indicate that after the recession in 2008, public universities in the U.S. have had to reduce expenditures in many areas while simultaneously increasing student tuition and fees, especially for out-of-state students (“Balancing the Budget on the Backs of Out-of-State Students”, 2017). This seems to be because these universities need to gather more funding from tuition due to lack of state appropriations (Jaquette & Curs, 2015). Therefore the interest in out-of-state students is important, as “College administrators and government officials are concerned about the economics of college student migration because each additional in-migrating student represents an additional source of revenue... which is especially important because many state universities are currently facing large budget cuts” (Mixon & Hsing, 1994, p. 329). One way to attract out-of-state students to a public institution-- and keep them for the duration of their studies-- is to find ways to involve them into life at the institution. Therefore, by investigating out-of-state student experiences, including how they successfully integrate into the greater community of a higher education institution, we can learn more about how to support and retain out-of-state students. Moreover, there is an opportunity to potentially reduce institutional budgetary concerns, especially in the wake of the current global COVID-19 pandemic that has and continues to affect higher education institutions across the nation.

Research Questions

Since there is a lack of study about their experience in college, there is a need to study out-of-state students and their experiences in more depth. It is unclear whether or not the label of “out-of-state” is an identity that is salient to students in higher education, whether that be personal, enacted, relational, or communal. Moreover, it is unclear if there are distinct differences in how out-of-state students interact and communicate in the context of higher education. Given that research indicates that college can be an especially formative time in early adulthood (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), it would make sense that out-of-state students could be experiencing a time where their identity is changing. By analyzing their communication behaviors in reference to their identity, I hope to illuminate how professionals in the realm of higher education can understand and support this potentially turbulent time for students. Therefore, this study explored four areas of inquiry.

Based on the theoretical framework outlined above, there is evidence that the concept of co-constructed identity interplays into how people react and interact with the world around them. Therefore, the first area of inquiry for this study is how out-of-state students establish their identity with others. The second area of inquiry is a follow up to the first. More specifically, once more information can be gleaned about the nature of how out-of-state students may co-construct identity with their peers, it is important to understand how their identity navigation relates with how they navigate college systems and norms, since they may have an impact on their experience. The third area of inquiry takes a look at out-of-state students’ identity and communication to see if there are any possible discrepancies in their frames. It is possible that out-of-state students do not experience identity gaps in regard to their status as an out-of-state student, however if they do, it may certainly interplay with collegiate experience as a whole.

Moreover, the last area of inquiry looks at how these potential discrepancies may connect with the relationships out-of-state students establish. These four areas of inquiry are what guided the following four research questions for the study.

RQ1: How do out-of-state students form meaningful relationships during college?

RQ2: How do the social relationships that out-of-state students form during college help them navigate the transition to college?

RQ 3: What identity gaps do out-of-state students experience with regard to their transition to college?

RQ 4: How do peer relationships exacerbate or reduce identity gaps for out-of-state students?

Methods

Focus Groups

This study used in-depth focus group interviews to explore the identity and experiences of out-of-state students and the meaningful relationships they have created during college, per the research questions outlined above. Specifically, focus group interviews were conducted with out-of-state students about their meaningful relationships with a friend, sibling, romantic partner, or other relationships important to them during their first years of college. In addition, they were questioned about how they self-identified, their transitions to college and any discrepancies or dissonance they may have experienced throughout those processes of building relationships or going to college.

I chose to conduct focus group interviews for three primary reasons. First, focus groups offer insight into the interactions of specific populations. Focus groups allow for participants to express their reality and describe their experiences in a relaxed, but guided, environment of peers (Krueger, 1994). Second, focus group discussion allows for an environment that is less isolating

than individual interviews and allows for social interaction that is somewhat indicative of how participants act naturally. In a focus group, participants are in a peer group (Krueger, 1994). This lessens the stress of embarrassment and fear of disclosing personal information to strangers. This allows for a richness in data that is harder to achieve in a more formal or structured environment, such as an individual interview or laboratory observation, as participants may not feel as comfortable disclosing information. Third, since the identities of the participants can be so varied and elusive, it is important that the data collected be as in depth as possible. With so many identity gaps that could be potentially in play, I was able to account for both individual and collective views on the topics discussed (Krueger, 1994).

Participants and Recruitment

Focus groups allowed me to collect data relatively quickly so that thorough coding and analysis could be performed within the strict timeline parameters of an honors thesis. In terms of recruitment, I was the primary recruiter. I recruited from my workplaces, places of leisure activities, classrooms, and social networks. In addition to my personal recruitment, I sought out groups that may contain higher concentrations of out-of-state students, more specifically undergraduate students in the Communication Department. I worked with professors in the Communication Department to provide research credits for the various classes within the major as a form of incentive. Overall, the Communication Department research pool was a primary way students were recruited for the study, as the vast majority of them identified that they were a part of one of the Communication courses on campus. See APPENDIX B for the general recruitment script that was used in this process.

I conducted 4 focus groups with a total number of 18 participants (12 women and 6 men). Participants in the focus groups ranged in number from 3-5 students. On average, the focus

groups took 51 minutes, with a range between 42 minutes and 1 hour. Participants were included if they meet the following criteria: (1) they were in a meaningful relationship with another student at the university (2) they were at least 18 years of age; (3) and they had a permanent residence outside the state of the university. The relationship types ranged from romantic, to friendship, to familial, to workplace and mentoring and more. In the interview process, they also indicated how long they have been at their respective undergraduate institution. The participants ranged in length of study at their institutions, some as short as a few months and some as long 3 years. In terms of geographic region, all participants noted where their permanent residence is located. Overall, 9 of the participants were from the southwestern region of the United States, closer to the state of Arizona, 5 were form the mid-western region of the United States, and 4 were from the eastern region of the United States. There were no other restrictions in terms of gender, ethnicity, ability, etc.

Ethical Considerations

The protocol used for this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the primary investigator's university. Prior to their interview, participants were given a copy of the informed consent (APPENDIX A) and given time to review the informed consent and decide to participate. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research project and their data. Participants were orally reminded that participation was entirely voluntary and that their names and other identifying information would not be used in any presentation of the findings. Participants who agreed to participate signed copies of the consent form and were given one copy to keep. Participants were told that they were welcome to share as much or as little information as they wish. If a participant appeared to be uncomfortable sharing personal information, they were given the opportunity to discontinue the interview or to decline to answer

a question. Participants were informed that they would be assigned a pseudonym or participant number during the transcription process and specific details that would identify that individual would be omitted or obscured.

Focus Group Protocol and Questions

Participants were interviewed in enclosed private spaces in a public library at the main campus of the University of Arizona. Participants were grouped together based on their availability in groups of 6 to 10. Focus groups occurred in a consecutive series over the course of three weeks, in order to account for internal and external events that could affect the study's data, such as events on campus that affect the student population. In total, I aimed for around 20-40 participants maximum to be a part of the study in order to infer more about the population at large.

Participants were asked to reflect broadly on relationship formation, the challenges they experienced in college, how their relationship helped over the course of those challenges, how their sense of belonging, communication, and self has developed over time through those relationships, and how all of these affect a sense of satisfaction and belonging as an out-of-state student (See Appendix C). These questions were asked in a more open-ended manner to allow for expansion of ideas from participants (Krueger, 1994). Participants were asked some basic discussion questions about the nature of their relationships and their identity. Interviews took no longer than 60 minutes and were organized in convenient locations on weekdays to vary opportunities for students to participate in a focus group that is convenient for them. In general, the ordering of questions followed in this way: an opening, an introduction to the topics discussed, transition questions, key questions, and concluding questions or statements. This way, the discussion was focused but allowed for the participants to express things in their own way,

without guidance to their answers (Krueger, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Throughout the focus groups, responses were recorded both by audio recorders and via handwritten notes and memos to record both verbal and non-verbal communication behaviors.

When interviews started, I made sure to alleviate any fears or tensions participants may have had by having friendly and engaging conversations prior to the start of the discussion. This way, I could abate any potential fear the participants had going into the study (Krueger, 1994). To start a discussion, I did establish some basic ground rules to allow for the participants to feel comfortable speaking. Participants were reminded at the beginning that this was to be a civil discussion about the topics at hand, and that while they did not have to agree or come to a consensus, they should be respectful of everyone in the study. During the discussion itself, I ensured that I was acting more as a moderator by limiting my verbal and nonverbal involvement in the study, in order to avoid guiding the participants (Krueger, 1994). I did occasionally ask follow-up questions, or asked if less responsive members of the group had any insights to the discussion at hand. However, I did so only to dig deeper into what was being discussed or if the group was less responsive in general. In addition, I was trained in empathic, person-centered interviewing and continuously monitored the nonverbal expressions of participants. I was responsible for keeping a keen eye for signs of discomfort while participants are disclosing information. If for some reason, participants showed signs of distress (i.e., crying, hesitancy, wringing of hands, increased physical distance, etc.), I was prepared to ask if the participant wanted to take a break or discontinue. However, at no time during the focus groups was there an indication of distress.

Transcription

Of the 4 focus groups that I conducted, the shortest was 42 minutes and 56 seconds, and the longest was 1 hour, 1 minute, and 52 seconds. On average, the interviews took 51 minutes and 40 seconds. In total, I had recorded 3 hours, 26 minutes, and 41 seconds worth of focus group interviews on the audio recorders. As a part of the analysis of data, all of the focus groups were transcribed verbatim. While the transcript can be helpful in understanding the verbal component of the focus groups, it severely lacks the nuance and richness that of the nonverbal and context of the focus groups. Therefore, in addition to these transcripts, I actively took shorthand notes and memos about the focus group interviews, in order to account for situational factors like the focus group's mood, eagerness, interruptions, etc. While this was a very labor-intensive process, this was the first step in ensuring that emergent analysis could be made, as I was able to reevaluate the content of the focus group discussions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Within the verbatim transcription, some codes were used to signify significant nonverbal cues were in the audio recordings of the focus group interviews (e.g., pauses, emphasis on words, overlapping utterances etc.). The total corpus was 125 pages of transcript, with the average length of 31 pages per focus group. Participants were given identifying pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality (i.e. T1P2 refers to focus group number one, participant number two).

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were transcribed, I went through validated that the transcripts were accurately transcribed as well as start developing open codes. Open coding is a process in which is where lines of the transcript and larger interactions were assessed to find chunks of data that may provide insight into my research questions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p 250-251). These codes were primarily descriptive labels to organize the large amount of focus group data. When

applicable, I also employed in-vivo coding, or codes that uses utterances that the participants used during interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p 251). In-vivo coding was useful in ensuring the validity of the codes and analysis. After my first cycle of coding was complete, I looked for trends in the codes and began to chunk data together in order to allow for more of an inductive process of evaluating data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Then I began to categorize themes based on those codes and focused weeding out the main concepts that were developing (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In particular, I examined the open codes and evaluated and revised them in order to account for broader concepts that may not have been accounted for in the literature review. In addition, I examined relationships between these categories to see what narratives would emerge.

Results

After planning, organizing, and transcribing all of the data, the results of the interviews conducted addressed many different concepts and five key concepts emerged. First, the participants noted that building meaningful relationships early on was an important thing and a primary means to do so was by getting involved with pre-existing groups on campus, such as Greek organizations, clubs, and sports. Once those meaningful relationships were built, they noted that they found a newfound sense of freedom or independence to be fully themselves, even though coming to a large and unfamiliar university campus can be intimidating. Moreover, out-of-state students mentioned the dangers of not finding those meaningful relationships and the risks they take to stay at the university over the course of their study. Lastly, they discussed various tensions of not being connected to their formerly established relationships but also wanting to establish and maintain relationships they created at the university.

Building Relationships Early

To answer the first research question, the importance of forming meaningful relationships early in college seemed to be the first big unifying factor for these students. While this seems to align with pre-existing research (Bowman et al. 2019) there was one aspect of finding meaningful relationships that seemed to imperative for the participants, which was finding some connection to the university quickly upon arrival. For example, when asked what may be unique in their experience as an out-of-state student one participant mentioned the following:

T1P2: Well, from being out-of-state and then living in the dorm freshman year, I didn't know anybody, or I knew one person from my high school, so I kind of came in like... blank slate almost. So, it really forced you to kind of be out there, I guess, to make... make friends. Like right at the start. That's kind of like I feel like that's like an extra pressure while entering college compared to in-state students that would possibly go to high school with people that would go to like the university because it's a lot more likely you to go to in-state because like maybe like the tuition. So I just feel there's a lot more people that will go for... a lot more people that will go in-state, if that makes sense to you, the more they know people in their first class and stuff.

Multiple participants noted the fact that they had an added “pressure” (T1P2) to establish relationships as quickly as possible. Participants asserted that out-of-state students “don’t really know anybody” (T1P5) when they first come to the university. The participants assumed the fact that many in-state students have an advantage because they “come here [to the university] and they already have their friend group like set” (T4P3), Therefore, when dealing with the major transition of migrating away from their permanent residence, they felt as if they did not have much social support. Participants confirmed this feeling, just like as they talked about homesickness within their first year of college.

T2P2: I feel like if I didn't have like the group of friends that I met when I first got here, I don't know if I would have been able to stay. You know, like if I didn't have people that were so like, because I was homesick for a while going that far away from home. //

T2P1: //Yeah

T2P2: But they like helped ease me into it, you know, like having people to like talk to you and stuff.

Participants emphasized the fact that at least in the early stages of the transition, there is some level of discomfort in their new surroundings. Whether it be “homesickness” (T2P2), “be[ing] hesitant to go see a teacher or go to an office” (T2P1), or feeling “intimidated (T2P2) at a large university, the early stages of being and out-of-state student can prove to be challenging.

Finding Relationships in Established University Groups

A primary means that out-of-state students established relationships was through various student organizations on campus. One of the biggest areas of focus for these students was through Greek Life. Of the 18 participants that I conducted interviews with, 10 of them reported to have some experiences making friends or being a part of a fraternity and sorority during their time at the university. Many of these participants reported finding very meaningful relationships within existing organizations on campus such as Greek Life and on-campus clubs. Participants found that even though the process of joining a group was stressful, the rewards of social support are far greater than the risk.

T4P4: Yeah, dude, I did like a rush. I rushed like in the very beginning... And while a little bit I was super stressful I'm like so happy I did that because that's like when I met like my best friend and like normally just my sorority is like other sororities, I like met so many girls that really close with.

This seemed to be consistent, for many of the participants who joined preexisting groups, especially at the start of their collegiate experience. Even if it wasn't in Greek Life, participants suggested that in order combat being "bored" (T4P3), students should "join a club, join a sorority or fraternity, join a sport, [and/or] get involved" (T4P4). It seems that joining a pre-existing group can have many benefits. These pre-existing groups were a means to "branch out" (T3P3) and often were a way for participants to springboard into meaningful relationships, just as T4P4 states. Many of the participants found close relationships, as they found their "closest friends" (T1P1) in organizations like these, whether they be romantic or platonic, in larger group environments.

Tensions with Independence and Interdependence

In regard to their transition to college, out of state students primarily noted the sense of independence and freedom to be themselves after being able to establish close relationships with others and the rewards that come with it. When asked about how their relationships shaped or changed their identity, this group of participants makes a note of how that dynamic worked for them.

T3P2: I feel like it hasn't changed my identity. It's just kind of made everything you know, I don't know how to say this. But like, just like all parts of me basically, you know, like, it just kind of...

T3P4: Made everything come out, I guess.

T3P5: Yeah.

T3P2: Like, everything's basically still the same.

Moments like this indicate how participants felt that even just the act of establishing relationships in an unfamiliar environment can help make it feel easier to fully enact their

identity. Students felt like they became a “better version of [themselves]” (T4P4). In addition, participants noted that this independence was defined and enacted by acting “more mature” (T2P3) and having to “do it ourselves” (T1P4) more than they did prior to college. Whether it be having the confidence to “go to [professor’s] office hours (T2P1), or even “keep[ing] up on my laundry” (T3P5), students felt more comfortable doing these things once they established relationships.

However, establishing their identity and building relationships can be a quite scary. When asked if they acted authentically in the larger university community, some participants felt that they couldn’t be that “brave” (T1P1) all the time. This was to be related to what was “socially acceptable” (T1P5). Students felt that they were “pushed out of their comfort zone” (T4P4), because showing their enacted identity can be an act of disclosing “different parts of yourself” (T2P3). Even initial stages of enacting their identity can be scary, in the end “it was really worth it (T4P4) to meet new people and be authentic with them. Participants said that it was “easier for me to just like let go a little bit” (T2P3) and have congruence between their personal and enacted identity, rather than “holding back who I was” (T2P1). In an environment where you have not established who you are yet to one’s peers, this can really make or break a student’s experience.

Transition Setbacks

A few participants note the negative effects of not establishing meaningful relationships in the early stages of college. Students mentioned things like the following when discussing the adjustment to college:

T1P3: Yeah, I think that was like a big deal for me coming into it was I knew that to have a good time here, I was going to need to like immediately establish and build the social network. So, I think that if I hadn't done that I probably would have transferred by now.

This is important to note, as there are serious negative consequences to not establishing relationships quickly. Participants noted that going to college away from their home was “a huge decision (T3P4) and that not finding a reason to stay puts that decision at risk. Participants elaborated about these risks of going to school out-of-state and not finding social connection. Participants saw fellow out-of-state students “get way too into drugs” (T4P4) and have poor “mental [health]” (T4P1) after losing or not finding social connection. These out-of-state students placed a lot of value into finding meaningful relationships early on, as they saw peers “dropping out like the second semester” (T4P3) because of the aforementioned consequences of not doing so. This exchange shows how valuable these relationships are to these students.

T3P5: I have been wanting to transfer since freshman year. And the only reason I haven't it is because of my friends. And because of the people and the relationships I've made, and I know like going... I've been wanting to go back to like a school in California. And just it's been the back of my mind. Just always, but I'm like, then you have to create these new relationships and like//

T3P4: //Leave these ones behind. Yeah.

T3P5: Yeah, it's just like, it's hard to like, leave your friends behind. It makes such an impact on your life. Mm hmm.

T3P4: Going back to what I was just talking about, like the ex-boyfriend stuff my freshman year, I was a 100% going to transfer. He made me feel like I was stupid for coming out here and trying something new and all that and then I started meeting all these new friends and it was like, they're here with me and like we're all experiencing the same thing and no one's putting me down for wanting to experience new things and stuff. So that's like... my friends are the reason that I'm still friends with now are the reason I

stayed and I didn't transfer. So, if it weren't for them, I mean, long gone and probably hating wherever I was right now.

Beyond this, participants state that they saw fellow out-of-state students due to the lack of social support that they had. Otherwise, they will likely leave and find a different place to do so, but even that comes with the risk of leaving others behind that they started to connect with.

Identity Gaps Between Home and College

These negative consequences did not stop there. Participants mention a change in dynamic with their friends and family at home that results in dialectical tensions or identity gaps. Due to the nature of their migration from one environment to another, there was a unique dialectical tension that emerged when talking about their interactions at their permanent residence in comparison to their interactions in college. Participants like this one discussed the experience of going back and forth between their permanent residence and the institution they are completing their degree at.

T2P3 Yeah, it's definitely interesting like, like you said like having... because I still have... I always have to say goodbye and say hello to people you know? Like I've always leaving my family in Chicago, and my friends and then saying bye but also taking a three-hour plane ride and saying hello to like all of my people again, my other people. And like I feel like in-state students don't really have that 'cause like, you know, Phoenix, it's like an hour drive.

What this student discusses is having a lack of access to their family and friends at home in their permanent residence—which in this case is Chicago. The separation between their relationships at home and the ones that they have made during college is an area where they are pulled in two different directions. Participants like this one confirm this.

T1P5: Feel like I couldn't pinpoint, like exactly how it's changed. But I've definitely noticed, like, now when I go home and see my friends from high school, like, I'm still super close with them, but like, it's a little bit different. Like everybody's sort of gone off to college and some of them go to college together. And you know, they're more similar than I was to them in high school now and then, even like, when I'm home sometimes I feel like I have like, two different identities. Like myself when I'm home and then myself when I'm here and you know, like when I'm home I miss being here, but when I'm here I still miss being home.

This participant describes an identity gap that they experience, as they feel a tension between how their friends from high school do not see the participant the same way as they once did. The lack of communication and interaction between the participant and their friends from home has caused the participant to feel like they have “two different identities,” where their personal identity and who they are in relationships at home are at odds. Multiple participants noted the fact that there seemed to be this dialectical tension, where their relationship dynamic with their friends and family at home would change once they went to school. Even when they went home, participants like this one would have a difficult time rekindling the same dynamic that they once did.

T1P3: I feel like on social media, it's like the only way that like my friends from home, they'll be like, "Oh yes on Instagram like that's you're roommate, right?" Like stuff like that is the only way. But I agree that it's like my friends here, or at least like my close friends whenever I talk to them. I'm like, "Oh, you remember when I told you about this and that and not person from home and how they're dating and this" and they all know that like whole thing. But then my high school friends are "Oh yeah, I think guys saw a

picture of you guys..." but it's weird you like grow a new identity and then some I remember I was kind of sad at first. Like my friends at home were like making... I was like making my own new life but so were they and it kind of makes you sad because you're like, do you feel like you're losing like your touch, like your hometown a little bit. But yeah.

There is a gap between how the student interacts with those people at their permanent residence and their actual experiences, creating a personal-enacted identity gap. This personal-enacted identity gap seems to occur for many participants, and participants dealt with this tension differently. For some participants, they focused more on one side of the tension by relying more on one side for social support. For this participant, they mention that having friends was like having a home away from home.

T1P4: I feel like if I like I felt something I always tell my family like, when I go home, it's like my friends here are like my, like family like away from my actual family. So, I feel like if I didn't have like friends here, I'd probably go home like... I would be so like lonely. So, I feel like it definitely like helps you to like to have like, like have like a real sense of like family away from your real family kind of in a way. So, I guess it like makes college feel like home.

For participants like T1P4, the relationships that they built during college could be used as a replacement for the gap they may feel with their older relationships that they had at home. Out-of-state students mention that their families and friends from home are often "a whole plane ride away" (T1P4) and that accessing their families was "something I couldn't do and it's kind of like tough" (T1P4). This is not always the case for all of the participants. For some participants, they had an easier time navigating these gaps because the access they had to family members changed

a bit during their time in college. For example, this participant describes how they miss family traditions they have at their permanent residence, and how they are integrating their new relationships into those traditions.

T3P5: Yeah, I feel like being an out of state student. You get the sense of like FOMO where like I get, I'm super close with my family. And like when I miss like, a birthday, or like, a little holiday, that's where it's like not big enough to fly home, but it's big enough to celebrate. And like, or like Valentine's Day or something, just like whatever and you want to like be with your family and like you have your little traditions. So, like, that could be really tough. [asks questions of the interviewer] Like I have a bunch of people visiting me for like the Fourth of July, which is like a huge deal for us. And it's like a rite of passage. Like if you're going to visit you got to visit then in like a friend of mine is already like booking your trip and stuff. So, it's gonna be like, super fun. She's from here, Arizona, so she's like excited to experience that stuff.

For some participants, a way that made navigating this tension was by integrating the two different relationships, both old and new. For T3P5, integrating these relationships meant introducing their relational partners to their family traditions at their permanent residence by having them visit and meet their family. Other participants had the ability to have their family and friends from their permanent residence come to their college and visit that way.

Discussion

The results of this study have significant implications on how higher education professionals can continue to support students in this specific population. By looking at how out-of-state students form meaningful relationships and where they experience dialectical tensions, higher education and student affairs professionals can alter their practices to better support this

population of students as institutions continue rely on them for fiscal reasons. Understanding and utilizing the information gathered from this study, and studies similar to this, can have positive benefits for out-of-state students, their relational partners, and colleges across the board.

The methods out-of-state students employ in order to establish relationships early indicates the significance and stress of the initial transition to college and how their identity is still being established along with their relationships. Students very clearly noted that at least within the first year of being in college, they needed to find relational partners or a group of people in which they felt comfortable. For these students, finding relationships or groups where they could be themselves was a way of proving that their decision to go out-of-state was justified, and that they could fully enact their identities. When students can enact their identities fully with their relational partners, they felt more comfortable in this independence and individuality. Moreover, there may be some benefits in finding relationships in large groups, as it may help students establish communal identities. Many of these clubs and organizations interact with entities outside of the University of Arizona's main campus, as they may integrate philanthropy efforts, service-learning opportunities, or even ways to learn more about the culture in their new state of residence. In this way, these organizations provide a way for students to develop their communal identities in a new way. The work that higher education professionals put in to provide opportunities for relationships building in larger group settings is paying off for these students, and more work can be done to ensure that these relationships continue to assist students in transitioning and feeling like they belong in college. Offices that provide peer-to-peer relationships or mentoring should continue to do so, especially in group settings such as Greek Life. However, a bigger hurdle that professionals may need to address is how to continue to provide these opportunities for relationship building in ways that transcend face-to-face

communication, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilizing other communication methods such as computer-mediated communication may be useful, but only if those interactions can provide the richness needed to build strong relationships with.

The negative setbacks to not finding social connection are especially concerning, as these behaviors act as a gauge for students to determine whether or not it is worth it to stay at the institution they chose in the long run. As these students stated, they chose to leave their permanent residences and go to a large university for a variety of reasons. Whether it be escaping life at home, finding an opportunity for learning, or gaining a new perspective in life, this migration and establishment of new relationships is a big deal for out-of-state students. When they can't establish meaningful relationships that help them enact their identity authentically, it very clearly reflects in their behaviors. In order to assist this transition, it is imperative that higher education professionals take into account that establishing social connections are pivotal for out-of-state students in the early stages, even if it is small at first. The impact that these relationships have can help boost retention for these students and help students feel freer to be themselves in college. However, it is equally important to note that the nature and strength of these relationships can also affect how comfortable students feel at the institution and how they behave in the long run. As participants state, relationships that fizzle or ones that are toxic can make them feel as if they are disconnected and may even lead to engaging in negative behaviors such as substance abuse. While I was not able to capture the voices of the out-of-state students who decided to leave the University of Arizona, their fellow out-of-state students perceived their departure as a direct result of these negative behaviors. These findings align with previous studies, as some research has indicated that behaviors such as drinking usually escalates in college students' first year in college due to stressors with transitioning to a new environment

(Hummer et al., 2012). Based on the findings of this study, there may be an increased risk of these behaviors for out-of-state students. Especially for the participants who found relationships in group settings, it is imperative that the culture of these groups fosters relationships with peers that promotes authenticity and vulnerability, rather than allowing coping mechanisms that may have disastrous effects on student development, such alcohol and drug use.

The interactions that the participants had during the focus groups regarding their relationship dynamics with the people at home indicated that they had significant identity gaps in that area. The primary identity gap that emerged as a part of the focus groups was the personal-relational gap. By migrating between the two different locations—school and home—the relational dynamic shifted as a result. With such a big decision to move out-of-state for college, students indicated the fact that they simultaneously wanted to feel that they were still a part of their home life while also being independent and building new relationships as a young adult. This often created new tensions with relational partners at home, as out-of-state students focused more time on the relationships they were building during college. The relational partners participants had at home do not get as much access to the stories and events that are happening in out-of-state students' life. Moreover, these relational partners do not get to see how the out-of-state students act on a day to day basis due to the lack of proximity and communication barriers that are presented with long-distance relationships. While at times out-of-state students feel distant from people at home, they also try to capitalize on the in-person interactions they have with those at home, because these interactions are scarce. However, just as scholars in the realm of higher education note, it is important to redefine the relationships students have with people at home so they can have increased sense of autonomy (Harper et al. 2015, p. 39). By assisting this transition by laying out expectations for both the student and their relational partners, higher

education professionals can help students avoid having those dialectical tensions reach a breaking point.

However, some out-of-state students have navigated through identity gap to their benefit. Some students were able to connect both types of relationships between their relational partners from home and their relational partners that they built while in college. Whether that be by having family or friends from home come to the university, or by having college relational partners join in them in rituals or traditions they have at home, out-of-state students were creative in having these two different relationships co-exist and interact. In this way, they were able to avoid tensions from identity gaps altogether. By integrating both relationship types—old and new—out-of-state students are able to not only build their social networks but continue to build congruence between the different facets of their identity, whether that be personal or relational. This lines up with research in higher education, as professionals have made note of how family and parent programming can benefit student development overall. Scholars have stated that especially within the first 2 years of college, having that social support from home is closely related to how students feel in terms of adjusting to college (Harper et al. 2015, p. 39). Knowing how big of an impact this can have on out-of-state students in particular, there should be more efforts made towards helping the families and friends of these students redefine their relationships and set expectations as they migrate. In addition, more discourse is needed to see how higher education professionals can help integrate friends and family members into out-of-state students' life, while also allowing out-of-state students to develop a sense of autonomy while in college. Striking this delicate balance will be difficult, as it may require establishing clear expectations for how parents, friends, and families can maintain relationships with the students that are going to college.

Limitations of Study

Findings from this study add insight into the out-of-state student experience, however there are some considerations that should be made when interpreting the results. First, this study lacks specific demographic data helpful in transferring results. In hindsight, a small demographic questionnaire prior to the focus group interviews would have been very helpful in the analysis of the data. In the future, I would suggest conducting a brief questionnaire that asks participants for more background information, such as race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, major etc. This self-identifying survey prior to the focus groups would be helpful in making sure any inferences made are representative of the population. Because of this reason, while there is a lot of interesting concepts to continue to pursue, I am unsure if it is entirely representative of all out-of-state students at the University of Arizona.

This study is also limited because it assesses students' experiences at only one point in time, rather than over the course of their collegiate experience. Further research should gather longitudinal data to assess how out-of-state students to college over the course of their undergraduate studies —whether that be 2-5 years. Longitudinal data would offer more insight into how relationships and identity may build over time. Moreover, by learning more about these potential stages of their experience, higher education professionals may have the opportunity to see where they are succeeding in supporting these students or seeing where support is needed.

In addition, future research in this area should also consider how these concepts may apply to different institutions. Each higher education institution is different, and to say that this study may apply to all of them would be incorrect. Some institutions have a bigger incentive to recruit out-of-state students than others. Moreover, the culture at each institution really contributes to how students connect with the community there. Therefore, conducting studies

like the one done here will further clarify the overarching experience of out-of-state students, as well as how individual institutions address their needs. Conducting studies similar to this will be helpful in not only pilot testing programs that cater to the experience of an out-of-state student, but it also may qualitatively assess the progress of pre-existing programs that do this.

Lastly, going forward, it will be important to note how the current times may have affected this group of students. No matter who they are, students in higher education across the country have been affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The same can be said for out-of-state students, many of which have had to go back to their permanent residence in different states or may be disconnected from their friends at their institutions. This great shift in operations may have had effects on these students, and because the interviews I conducted occurred prior to the closures that happened in the U.S. it is unclear how this major event has affected them. Moving forward, scholars and higher education professors should consider how major events like this may have affected the nature of out-of-state students' relationships and interactions with the larger collegiate community.

Areas of Further Study

As far as the results go for this study, I think that there are a lot of areas that still need to be explored. One of the primary areas that should be explored in depth with this population of students is how they interact with their life at permanent residence after they have migrated away from it. While participants in this study touched upon the relationship dynamics they had with their friends and family at home, more investigation could prove useful to understanding how students want to integrate or not integrate those relationships into their college experience and beyond. Moreover, there should be more follow-up on why out-of-state students may leave the institution, especially if it may be related to their experiences finding connections on campus.

This information would also prove useful to student affairs professionals who integrate family and parent programming and how they can provide meaningful moments for students and family to continue to connect throughout their collegiate careers. Beyond this, based on the amount of reflection that students had in regard to the first few semesters of college, more research in the area of first-year transitions may be useful in understanding more about the specific stages they undergo. What kinds of stages, relational or otherwise, do out-of-state students go through in the first year of college and how do they navigate them effectively? They were touched upon briefly in this study, however more probing and investigation is needed to fully understand their experiences.

Conclusions

The work that higher education and student affairs professionals need to do for this population of students is far from over. This study still leaves questions unanswered in regard to out-of-state students and their experiences as they transition from the K-12 system to secondary education. Moreover, with more inquiry into identity gaps, more research into these students should focus on the long-term effects of these transitions for out-of-state students even after they complete their studies in college. However, it is clear from this study is that the transitions that out-of-state students navigate continue to be a point where they can negotiate who they are and ultimately work towards self-actualization. Therefore, out-of-state students capitalize networking in larger peer groups that have been established on campus in order to feel more comfortable.

Professionals in the realm of higher education can continue to work and make these transitions smoother not just for out-of-state students, but students overall. Moreover, this study illuminated the potentially disastrous effects of not effectively establishing relationships and how those relationships can help prevent negative behaviors such as substance abuse. In regard to this

transition, one of the largest findings was their struggles with personal-relational identity gaps that out-of-state students experience as they simultaneously try to maintain relationships with people from their permanent residence and establish new ones during college. This has interesting implications how higher education and student affairs professionals can bolster efforts to connect out-of-state students' lives at home with the life that they are developing while in college. Students that can successfully navigate through this identity gap by maintain old and new relationships indicated that this had positive benefits to their transitions in college. By creating creative solutions to build opportunities to maintain these relationships, higher education professionals may be able to provide an environment that is more conducive to out-of-state students staying at their institutions. However, while this study revealed how out-of-state students at the University of Arizona needed to establish relationships early and how they navigate the separation between their college and their permanent residence, it is only when these findings are followed up by asking more questions about this population of students and integrating these findings into higher education practices that we can continue to support these students.

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Appendix A: University of Arizona**Consent to Participate in Research**

Study Title: Identity and Relationship Formation for Out-of-State Students

Principal Investigator: Rachel Rabenstine, Undergraduate Honors Student, Department of Communication, University of Arizona, rrabenstine@email.arizona.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

Purpose of Study: This is a research project being done for the completion of the Rachel Rabenstine's Honors Thesis. The Honors Thesis focuses on the key relationships that out-of-state students have, and how they affect their experience throughout college. The goal is to understand how these relationships—whether they be romantic, friendships, mentoring or otherwise—help university students' transition to college with respect to their sense of identity and community.

Your Participation: If you choose to participate, you will engage in a focus group discussion with a small group of your peers. The interviewer (Rachel) will ask you about your relationships and adjustment to college as an out-of-state student or in-state-student.

Duration and Location of Participation: Interviews should take no more than 60 minutes of your time. The principal investigator will designate various times when the focus group interview will take place. From that point, you will be able to choose which available time will be appropriate for you, using the Calendly link that Rachel will send.

Eligibility Criteria: There are 4 eligibility criteria for this study. 1) You must be at least 18 years of age to participate, 2) you must be a student at the University of Arizona. 3) you must be comfortable responding to questions and speaking in English, 4) you must be in a friendship with a college student that began in college.

Risks/Benefits: There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study beyond what you would normally encounter in talking about a personal relationship in a small group of acquaintances. While you may not benefit directly from participating in this study, most people find that discussing their personal and relational development as potentially beneficial. You might be eligible for research credit if you are participating in this study as a COMM course requirement.

Confidentiality: With your permission, the PI would like to audiotape your interview so that I can make an accurate transcript. Once I have made the transcript, I will erase the recordings. Your name will not be in the transcript or our notes. During transcription you will be assigned a pseudonym and neither your name, nor your partner's name, nor your identifying identification will be included in the transcript. Your name will not be used in any report. Identifiable research data will be encrypted, and password protected.

Withdrawal from Study: By signing this form, you acknowledge that this study is entirely voluntary and that you may withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. In addition, if

you are participating in the study in order to receive research credit in a Communication course at the University of Arizona, you acknowledge that by withdrawing you will not receive the credits. If for any reason you wish to withdraw, please contact the principal investigator with the contact information listed below.

The principal investigator will make any determination about sharing these de-identified data with scholars who request data for separate analyses (e.g., meta-analysis) if it is deemed ethical and related to original data collection/research purposes without additional consent.

The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. The University of Arizona Institutional Review Board may review the research records for monitoring purposes.

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you may contact Rachel Rabenstine at rrabenstine@email.arizona.edu

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at 520-626-6721 or online at <http://rgw.arizona.edu/compliance/human-subjects-protection-program>.

Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date

Appendix B: General Recruitment Script

Note: Recruitment will be informal and will occur primarily through personal networks and through courses assigned through the Communication research pool. Research team members will include this information in their recruitment message in person, on paper, or via electronic communication.

Script – to be tailored to specific individuals and organizations

I am conducting a research project for my Honors Thesis at the University of Arizona. I am interviewing both in-state and out-of-state students who have meaningful friendships and how they've adjusted to college.

I am contacting you because I have a unique opportunity to participate in research in the Communication Department. I would like to learn from you as a college student. More specifically, I want to investigate how to successfully manage being a student and how your relationships affect your college experience. If you decide to participate, I would like to interview you in a focus group. I have only a few questions that guide our conversation. I expect interviews to last approximately one hour. I have a variety of times and dates for these focus group interviews available via a Calendly link upon request.

Of course, participation is entirely voluntary, and you can discontinue participation at any time. I will maintain your privacy and confidentiality throughout the research process and will never disclose your identity in any reports or presentations of the data. I should also let you know that while I cannot compensate you for your time, many people find that discussing their personal and relational development as potentially beneficial. If you are a part of the Communication major, you may receive research credit for your participation in this study. If you do not fit the criteria of this study and are a part of the Communication major and are participating in order to receive research credit, you will be provided with an alternate assignment in order to complete your research credit.

If you would like to participate, please email Rachel Rabenstine at rrabenstine@email.arizona.edu and she will send you the Calendly link to schedule your focus group session.

Would you be willing to participate?

APPENDIX C
Interview Protocol

1. Tell me your name, where you are from, how long you have been at the University of Arizona, and your favorite part about that place.
2. Tell me about your experiences since your arrival at the University of Arizona. How might that differ from an in-state student? An out-of-state student? (cater the question to specific focus groups)
 - a. How has your social network influenced your adjustment to college?
3. Do you think that your social network is unique as an in-state student/out-of-state student? Why or why not? What was your experience like developing meaningful social relationships as an out-of-state student or in-state student?
 - a. how did they develop?
 - b. what role did they play in your transition to college?
 - c. How did that change your sense of self?
4. In what ways did the relationships that you built when arrived at the UofA influence (a) your sense of belonging and (b) your sense of self?
5. How has your experience since your arrival in college shaped your identity [your sense of who you are]?
 - a. How has this changed how you interact with others on a day to day basis? Do you feel like you act as your authentic self for the most part? Why or why not? How have you seen your identity [sense of self] change?
 - b. How has this changed how you interact in your friendships? Do your friends see the real you? In what situations or relationships do you feel like you are most acting like yourself?
 - c. In what situations or relationships (or contexts) do you feel like you are less true to yourself?
 - d. Describe to me any times that you might feel your true self being pulled in two different directions (like there are 2 authentic yous, but you can't express them simultaneously)?
 - e. Do you feel like you act as your authentic self for the most part? Why or why not?
 - f. How confident are you that the people in your closest relationships here at the UofA see the real you?
 - i. How does that influence your sense of self?
 - ii. How has this changed how you connect with the community at large (i.e. the university, its communities, Tucson)?
6. [Out-of-state student specific] What does being an "out-of-state student" mean to you?
 - a. Tell me about the times where you have felt more or less like an out-of-state student.

- b. How strongly do you identify with being an “out-of-state student?
 - c. How important is this identity to you on a day to day basis?
- 7. Do you feel like you belong and can be authentically you at the University of Arizona?
If so, in what way? If not, why?
 - a. How has your sense of belonging here at the UofA changed over time? What has influenced that change?
 - b. Can you talk about how your social relationships might have influenced your sense of belonging?
- 8. What advice would you offer to incoming students about optimizing their experience at the University of Arizona?
- 9. Is there anything else about your student experience that you would like me to know?