Expectations versus Reality:
First-year Students’ Transition into Residential Living

Larry P. Ailes II, Natalie Alvarado, Stephen Amundson, Justin Bruchey, and Chelsea J. Wheeler

The study examined first-year residential students’ expectations regarding the residential experience prior to entering Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), an urban, largely commuter campus. Based upon a qualitative study of nine first-year students, the researchers explored how students navigated differences between their expectations and lived experiences. Findings revealed that each participant experienced a similar transition process. The research team developed an original model, the First-Year Residential Student Transition (FYRST) model to describe the transition process, which offers a number of implications for higher education professionals.

As higher education continues to transform, expand, and diversify, it has the potential to impact how students perceive the landscape of their college or university. Researchers have suggested that first-year students are coming to college with more “unrealistic or unrealized expectations” (Kreig, 2013, p. 635) and perceptions of what it means to be a college student (Kreig, 1999). As a result of these ill-conceived expectations and perceptions, many students feel emotionally stressed because their perceptions are incongruent with their environment and reality (Kreig, 2013; Stern, 1966). Furthermore, a number of factors including family, peers, educators, and students’ personal experiences with education are responsible for influencing first-year students’ perceptions of the collegiate atmosphere (Clark, 2005; Kreig, 2013; Meyer, Spencer, & French, 2009; Smith & Zhang, 2009). According to Clark (2005) and Meyer et al. (2009), there is a considerable amount of qualitative research, and a lack of qualitative data, for examining students’ perceptions of college and the effects these perceptions have on their matriculation into college. Clark (2005) stated that more qualitative research on students’ transition to college will give administrators better insights into what “internal and external contexts and factors” (p. 297) are influencing students’ expectations. Additionally, current research has mainly focused on students’ expectations as they relate to their transition to college and academic preparation (Feldman, Smart, & Ethington, 2004; Kreig, 2013; Pike, 2006). Thus, there is a need to investigate “how students perceive the factors that influence their transition experience” (Clark, 2005, p. 296) so that college administrators can better understand what specific factors play a role in impacting educational outcomes (Smith & Zhang, 2009). For this reason, the focus of our study is to provide a better understanding of the expectations of first-year residential students upon entering the collegiate environment and how these expectations have been formed. Our research questions are as follows:

1. What expectations do first-year residential students have of the residential collegiate experience upon entering Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI)?
2. What sources (e.g., peers, family, media, teachers, or administrators) have the greatest influence on the formation of students’ expectations?
3. How do first-year residential students navigate differences in the
levels of congruence between their incoming expectations and actual experiences during their transition into the university?

**Framework**

For the present study, Tinto’s (1987) Model of Institutional Departure and Holland’s (1997) Theory of Person-Environment Fit were used to guide our examination of the literature and findings. Tinto’s model highlights that students enter college with expectations and goals regarding personal and academic experiences that are based upon interactions with sources of information, such as peers, family, and media (1987). As students transition into college, these expectations and goals are continuously challenged and reevaluated through interactions with other individuals in their environments (Tinto, 1987). Depending on how students integrate their overall campus experiences with their pre-established expectations and goals, they will either decide to persist at, or depart from, the institution (Tinto, 1987).

Supporting Tinto’s Model of Institutional Departure, Holland (1997) states that a student’s personality, expectations, and experiences, are intertwined. These elements frequently interact with the student’s surrounding environment, resulting in a direct impact on their life.

**Literature Review**

In reviewing the existing literature regarding college student transition, three main themes emerged: first-year students’ overly optimistic expectations of their freshman year, the construction of student expectations by a variety of sources, and the fit between the students and their environment.

**“Freshman Myth”**

Research by Stern (1966) resulted in the notion of the “freshman myth,” which describes the phenomenon of first-year students having unrealistically high expectations of what their collegiate experience would entail. More recently, students tend to enter their institutions of higher education with optimistic expectations of their social and academic life, while having more pessimistic views of their transition and how they will handle stressors (Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, & Hunsberger, 2000; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). While the freshman myth is a phenomenon that most first-year students experience, the impact of the disharmony experienced by students can determine the ease of their transition and level of success achieved throughout college (Jackson et al., 2000; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). First-year students’ general expectations of their experiences upon matriculating often shape their behavior, specifically “academic performance and social adjustment to the college life” (Kuh et al, 2006, p.14). For students living on campus, higher expectations for the residential environment and the college experience are common (Miller, Kuh, & Paine, 2006). With this in mind, it is important to understand where these higher expectations come from.

**Sources for Forming Expectations**

Students’ expectations of their first year of college and how they will navigate this transition are based upon a variety of sources of information. These sources can include family, media, peers, employees of educational institutions, and anything that can impart an idea of what college entails (Jackson et al. 2000; Keup, 2007; Maunder, Spencer, & French, 2012; Schilling & Schilling 1999). Many researchers have
suggested that peers and parents are the most influential sources on students’ perceptions of college life (Clark, 2005; Kreig, 2013; Meyer et al., 2009; Smith & Zhang, 2009). Past experiences, stories, the portrayal of college via the media, and the marketing of the university are all templates; in this case, a model of college life that influences students’ expectations (Keup, 2007; Kreig, 2013; Meyer et al., 2009; Schilling & Schilling, 1999). Templates provide a level of anecdotal knowledge for students about what they believe their experiences should be. However, the unrealistic expectations formed by these templates often fail to match the students’ actual experiences.

**Congruence**

Congruence refers to the degree to which a person and their environment match (Pike, 2006). Long’s (2014) research on students’ perceptions of their living environments, specifically residence halls suggested that many students obtained congruence when they felt a sense of satisfaction and stability within their environments. Students tend to be happier and have higher graduation rates when their expectations and experiences of college are congruent (Kuh et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2006; Schilling & Schilling, 1999). Those with incongruent expectations of their college experience often do not acclimate well in the academic and social environments, resulting in students seeking counseling, and/or departing from the institution (Jackson et al., 2000; Kuh et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2006). Given the existing literature, it is clear that a strong connection exists between students’ expectations of college and the level of congruence with their environment.

**Role of the Researchers**

Much of the literature that addresses the expectations of incoming college freshman is quantitative in nature. Many studies have used surveys to address student responses to different aspects of the college experience, including their expectations prior to entering college and what they actually experience after arriving on campus (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985; Jackson et al., 2000; Kreig, 2013; Long, 2014; Smith & Zhang, 2009). For this reason, we felt it was important for our study to utilize a qualitative research paradigm in order to share students’ stories and experiences. Narrative inquiry allows “for the in-depth exploration of the broadest possible range of student expectations, relevant college experiences, and resultant outcomes” (Keup, 2007, p. 7). Knowing this, we embraced the opportunity to include the voices of students from underrepresented populations in a way that shared their individual stories.

**Research Design**

We utilized Housing and Residence Life’s (HRL) listserv to send an email to 884 students residing in two first-year residential facilities, Ball Residence Hall (Ball Hall) and University Tower (Tower). We drafted the email that outlined the study criteria and invited students to participate in the research. Those interested in participating self-reported through a survey their personal and demographic information: contact information (name, email), residence hall, gender, race/ethnicity (optional), first generation vs. non-first generation, roommate status, and age of majority status (at least 18 years old).

We felt it was important for students to have the ability to self-identify their demographic information. Keeping in mind the limits of socially constructed identities (e.g., gender and race/ethnicity), we allowed students to write-in their responses for these questions. In addition, the survey allowed
students the opportunity to select more than one race/ethnicity. Students who were under 18 years of age at the start of their freshmen year (August 10, 2014) were excluded from the study because of their vulnerable status. Additionally, those who did not have a roommate were excluded because many interview questions focused on roommate relationships.

Sample
Of the 884 students who received the email, 43 students completed the interest survey: 20 from Ball Hall, and 23 from the Tower. Our research sample consisted of nine participants, which is in line with previous research by Keup (2007), where “the sample was intentionally limited to a small number of students to allow for in-depth data collection and analysis” (p. 9). The appendix table lists the participants’ self-identified information.

Interview Data Collection
When scheduling interviews, we were intentional about which of us interviewed specific participants. This was necessary because three members of the research team are employed by HRL in roles working directly with students within the residence halls. We conducted one-on-one interviews with each participant that averaged 30 minutes in length and took place during weeks ten and eleven of the semester. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing each of us to ask probing, follow-up, and clarifying questions. They were audio recorded by a handheld device or computer to be used solely for transcription purposes. Themes of the questions ranged from factors that influenced the decision to live on campus, to individuals and resources that impacted their expectations, to differences between the expectations and lived experiences in the residence halls. We asked open-ended question for the participants to be able to discuss their expectations and experiences in whichever manner they chose (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). According to Creswell (2012), it is good practice for researchers to follow data recording protocols, which ensure that research information stays organized and accurate. Therefore, we developed the following data recording protocols:
1. During the interviews, each of us asked the questions in a predetermined order that was designed to allow the students to reflect and build upon their previous responses. Probing questions were asked to facilitate participants’ expansion on their initial responses.
2. Each of us transcribed our 1-2 interviews into a Microsoft Office Document.
3. Each of us was responsible for retrieving further data from the participant we interviewed when information was needed to fill in gaps in their story.

These protocols were utilized as part of the data collection process and provided a strong foundation to begin coding and data analysis.

Data Analysis
Our data analysis was comprised of a three-part process guided by emergent-thematic coding. First, we initially coded our own interview transcripts to tag keywords or phrases, such as academic program/majors, convenience, and media (television, social media, et cetera), according to the larger themes they fit into. Second, after completing the initial coding, we came together and discussed whether to accept, reject, or add codes to each transcript. Since we all had a different lens when viewing the context of each participant's story, we discussed varying
interpretations and came to a consensus on which codes were appropriate. Finally, we began grouping together similar codes to determine major themes. For example, the codes involvement, support systems, and community were grouped under the larger theme of sense of community and belonging. From this process, we identified six themes: Sources, Freshman Myth, Dorm Experience, Campus Experience, Congruence, and Sense of Community and Belonging.

**Limitations**

While we used accepted qualitative research methods for our study, we acknowledge that our findings may be affected by certain limitations. Even though we took the necessary measures to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of our study, we recognize that our selection process was limited by only searching for participants for two weeks. A second limitation we acknowledge is that we asked clarification questions that were interview specific and often close-ended, which prevented participants from further expanding upon their experience. This limitation stems from using an interview protocol that followed a semi-structured interview process where researchers could, at their own discretion, probe further into participants’ answers. Therefore the interviewer reliability is impacted because of the biases and lenses of understanding that each researcher holds.

Finally, we recognize that the generalizability of our findings may have been limited by the nature of our study, because we focused on a very narrow population of students. Given that IUPUI is an urban, largely commuter campus, this creates a unique residential student experience, we recognize may not be readily applicable to other campuses. Additionally, our results may not successfully apply even to all first-year students at IUPUI, since first-year students are not required to live on campus.

**Findings**

The purpose of our study was to identify what expectations first-year residential students had upon entering the collegiate environment and from where these expectations had been formed. We discovered that all nine participants experienced a similar development, starting with the formation their expectations of college progressing to navigating lived-experiences with the college environment. Although each participant had a similar path of transition through our six themes, all had experiences that made their story unique. To explain this progression, we created a model that depicts how our participants transitioned into college (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. First-Year Residential Student Transition (FYRST) Model.](image-url)
Sources
We found that sources, which included peers, family, media, and teachers, played a significant role in influencing first-year students’ expectations before entering college. Participants shared that family and media were two of the greatest factors that helped form their perceptions of what college would entail. For example, Blake discussed his expectations of the residential experience: “I’ve just heard… from family and friends, about… how good and bad it is depending on like what happens to you.” While this shows that students are forming many of their expectations from family members and peers who attended college, the information provided by these individuals may not always be accurate, as individual experiences may differ.

Additionally, many participants discussed how media, such as movies, Facebook, television, gave them an inaccurate depiction of college, which led some participants to be disappointed, or frustrated with their college experience. We learned that all nine participants in our study found media, particularly movies, to have some influence on their expectations of college. For Alexis, Brittany, and Morena, first-generation participants, media was a primary source in forming their expectations of the college experience. Brittany described: “I didn't have a parent saying ‘Oh this is what college is...’ I really kind of had to judge for myself and so I mean, movies, a lot of movies about this is what college is going to be like.” Hans reinforced the role of movies by mentioning that they believed college parties would be similar to depictions in movies: “You know, college parties you see in the movies all the time... I thought it would be easier to make friends and like finding parties and things to do like that, but it’s actually so hard.” For Hans, movies informed what the college social environment could encompass.

Freshman Myth
As these sources shared information regarding what the overall college experience entailed, they often imparted an unrealistic expectation of what campus experiences might be like for students, thus reinforcing the phenomenon of the freshman myth. This formation of the freshman myth aligns with the stages that our participants experienced, as outlined in our FYRST model. Many of our participants described having a positive expectation of their roommate relationship. Lobos shared her expectation of her roommate relationship: “I was probably excited... I was going to bond with that person… probably have a friend for the rest of [my] life. Like most people do.” This quotation reinforces the sentiment of students wanting to enter their new collegiate environment and develop positive, long-lasting interpersonal relationships. Our participants’ optimistic expectations of their roommate relationship(s) mirrored their optimism of their potential residential experience.

Several participants frequently mentioned the idea of wanting the “dorm experience” when discussing their expectations of the residential environment. Our participants indicated that the dorm experience was a combination of various factors, including the social and physical environments, a sense of community and belonging, and the relationship with their roommate(s). Hans described their expectation that the Tower would be a more social community: “I really thought we were going to... do character building games and learn names... I thought... we would all hang out... but we don’t do any of that.” Hans highlights one aspect of the freshman myth involving overly optimistic expectations of peer interactions within the residence hall.

Although Lobos and Hans exhibited the
freshman myth regarding their specific expectations of their dorm and roommate experiences, Alexis, Brittany, and Michelle also held similar hopeful expectations. While our participants discussed the roommate relationship and dorm experience most frequently, other examples of the freshman myth included high expectations for the physical environments of the residence halls and involvement in extracurricular activities. As a whole, the breadth and depth of the participants’ expectations for their first year impacted their transition into the residence halls and the campus.

Dorm Experience

One of the major themes expressed by the participants interviewed was the desire to have a traditional dorm experience during their first year on campus. The social environment, which included opportunities for meaningful interactions with peers and other members of the university community, and the roommate relationship were important aspects of the dorm experience that our participants discussed. Many participants experienced dissonance, an inconsistency between the beliefs they held and their experiences, with these two aspects of the residence halls (Merriam-Webster’s, 2015). Many participants expected that their roommate would become their first and closest friend on campus. Hans exemplified this thought when stating: "oh my roommate, my best friend, we do this together, so it was going to be so much fun and I was like excited... she would be my first friend, you know.” Other participants, including Lobos, Steven, and Jack, also struggled when their expectation of finding a best friend in their roommate was not met.

In discussing the overall benefits of living in the residence halls, Lobos stated “if you're not really on campus, you're not really going to know about it as much, and you're probably gonna miss out.” In Lobos’ experience, living on campus gave her a way to connect with both the people around her and the campus, because she was able to establish a community within the institution. Finding a community was a central component that participants expected of the IUPUI dorm experience, although not all participants experienced living on campus in the same way. For our participants, perspectives differed between those who lived in Ball Hall versus the Tower. Morena, a Ball Hall resident, noticed that “people in the Tower... have closed doors and they don’t really talk... I like the way our hall [Ball] is... how social it is.” Blake and Michelle, also Ball Hall residents, expressed that Ball represented the true dorm experience with more opportunities for community interactions. However, those living in the Tower held a different perspective; Lobos said “Tower, I liked the idea of it. Mostly because it’s brand new, everybody wants to be in there...” Those who lived in the Tower felt they were getting a better experience than the students in Ball.

Campus Experience

While the dorm experience was one aspect of our participants’ acclimation to college, their interaction with the IUPUI campus community was also impactful in their transition. Academics, finances, and resources were three of the primary components that participants mentioned when detailing factors influencing their campus experiences. For our participants, the academic curriculum and the proximity to academically related job sites were the primary reasons why they chose to come to IUPUI. Alexis, Brittany, and Morena all mentioned that the nursing program, combined with the close proximity to hospitals where they could gain work experience, created an ideal environment for
them in which to live and learn.

Finances were also important to many of our participants, influencing both why they chose to come to IUPUI and to live on campus. Michelle discussed that her rationale for living on campus was financially driven because her parents described it as “the cheaper option.” For Hans, Jack, and Steven, the cost of IUPUI and the number of scholarships they received were primary incentives for coming to the university.

Resources such as first-year seminars, academic support centers, and resident assistants (RAs), positively influenced the ways in which the participants interacted with the IUPUI campus. In his interview, Steven detailed one way in which his first-year seminar assisted him in navigating the demands of a college schedule: “We made a time budget in which we recorded all the ways we spend [our] time… there’s a lot that I pulled out… such as learning about the different resources…” RAs were also mentioned as resources that impacted the participants’ decisions to become involved on campus and utilize student support services. In addition to connecting students with campus resources, RAs impacted the ways in which Brittany and Steven navigated congruencies and incongruences of their campus and dorm experiences. For participants, the level of congruence with their college environment, combined with their sense of community and belonging, ultimately determined their level of satisfaction with the overall college experience.

Which Came First?

When detailing the cyclical aspect of the FYRST Model regarding Congruence and Sense of Community and Belonging, it is unclear which of the two themes our participants experienced first. As we began to code and discuss the information shared from the interviews, it became apparent that the two themes were separate but also intertwined. For example, a student’s congruence with their residence hall may lead them to seek out and interact more with those around them, developing a stronger sense of community and belonging. Alternatively, a student who is not be satisfied with their residence hall, but has a strong sense of community and belonging with their peers, may feel supported and begin to feel more congruence within the environment. A student can also have negative experiences, lessening their congruence and sense of community and belonging, leading to departure from the university.

Congruence

All nine participants discussed aspects of congruence and incongruence with their environment, primarily their residential spaces, that had greatly impacted their college experience. As participants shared their stories, it was apparent that incongruences with their environment and roommate(s) had the potential to create dissonance and force them to discover how they addressed adversity. For example, Brittany described not having a microwave in her room in the Tower as a “pain” because she was forced to utilize the microwaves in the common area. While this experience was incongruent with Brittany’s expectation of the physical environment, she stated: “we couldn't have a microwave and that was a pain… [but] if I didn't have to go in the elevator I probably wouldn't have met this one girl… It wouldn't have made me get more friends…” This experience, while frustrating at first, resulted in Brittany having a stronger sense of community and belonging within her residence hall as she made new friends and gained a greater support system. Brittany’s interview highlighted that incongruence creates
dissonance. However, navigating that dissonance has the opportunity to strengthen a student’s congruence with their environment and their sense of community and belonging.

**Sense of Community and Belonging**

Another important theme that defined the participants’ experiences within both Ball Hall and the Tower was their sense of community and belonging in each residence hall. Throughout the interviews, many of the participants commented on the community within the residence halls, and the relationships that were formed with roommates and neighbors. Participants stressed the importance of finding a circle of friends within the community early in the semester. Michelle emphasized this sense of community and belonging during her interview: “I enjoy that there’s always people outside of their rooms … It has the positive family feel but it’s also like looking-out-for-each-other aspect too.” Having a sense of community and belonging contributed to the participants’ ability to navigate dissonance during their first few months at IUPUI by providing interactions and the opportunity to use other individuals as sources of support.

Interactions with other students at programs facilitated by the RAs provided participants with opportunities to meet new people and form relationships. Participants also talked about the friendly atmosphere that was present in both residence halls. Although they had moved away from home to start their collegiate career at IUPUI, both first-year residence halls provided a supplemental family through connections with peers that reinforced the idea of a home away from home. As Blake stated: “it feels like home … it’s just one big community and everybody seems to get along, and friends with everybody so … that kind of helps me like with the whole dorm experience I think knowing I’m connected with others.”

**Discussion**

We found that several of our themes reinforced previous literature describing students’ transition into college. In particular, our findings related to sources and freshman myth aligned well with how previous literature has operationalized these terms. Our participants described a similar process to those in Stern’s (1966) study where they obtain “their information [about college] from friends, family, and high school counselors” (p. 411). This reaffirms the strong influential role various sources can have on students’ expectations. The participants in our study also shared experiences reinforcing that the freshman myth is still a phenomenon that can cause first-year students to experience dissonance upon entering college. While some participants, such as Hans and Brittany, recognized that they should not have let media’s depiction of college influence their expectations, media still had an impact on their expectations of college. Perhaps believing the media’s and different sources’ depiction of college can be seen as a coping mechanism to deal with the uncertainty of the transition process.

As Schlossberg (2011) describes, students who are in the transition process often engage in coping strategies that focus on information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior. Prior to college, our participants were engaging in information seeking behavior by taking in information from different sources, such as family, friends, Facebook, movies, and other forms of media. Once at IUPUI, these strategies ranged from conversations with their
resident assistants (information seeking), becoming involved with campus organizations (direct action), and purposefully avoiding developing a relationship with roommates (inhibition of action). Although these strategies can ease the transition, our participants highlighted that the most important aspect of managing the transition process is having an effective support system.

The support category of Schlossberg’s transition framework, in particular, reaffirms the need for students to have a Sense of Community and Belonging described in the FYRST model. In Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, support refers to social support, specifically from intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities (Schlossberg, 1981). Our participants mentioned having a strong friend network on their floors was a key way they felt integrated into their community, leading them to having higher congruence with their environment. Students’ integration into their environment is vital because it has the potential to predict “whether they are likely to remain enrolled in college” (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007, p. 804). While our study did not focus on students’ decision to leave the university, it did help to expand upon Tinto’s (1987) model by explaining how students that live on campus integrate their experiences with their pre-established expectations and goals. The integration of these experiences plays a significant role in a student’s decision to depart or persist at the institution (Tinto, 1987). This process of integration, depicted in our FYRST model (see Figure 1), offers a number of implications.

**Implications**

Given the cyclical nature of our model regarding congruence and the sense of community and belonging, intervention techniques, such as roommate mediations and seminars, can be impactful from both micro (roommate relationships) and macro (residence hall culture) perspectives. Such techniques may include how to navigate roommate disagreements, living in a shared environment, and suggestions for how to adjust to the institution’s academic and social environments.

In the course of our study, we found that Facebook played a large role in the formation of expectations for incoming students. Given this, it could be beneficial for HRL professional staff and incoming RAs to have a presence on Facebook and other social media sites. HRL could be more proactive by putting out positive, realistic messages about living on campus to prospective and incoming students and their families. This process would also help cut down on instances of misinformation, resulting in more students being congruent with their living environment.

We expected RAs to have a bigger role in the navigation of dissonance than they did for the participants in our study. HRL could provide additional training for their live-in staff about transitions that students are going through and how to help them cope in a successful way. It is important for RAs to know that not all students arrive expecting the same experience, and that not everyone experiences the same events in the same ways.

The majority of participants in the current study mentioned their academic pursuits and how much they valued them. Those that live in a residential based learning community (RBLC) specifically talked about how important their RBLC has been to them, in both academic and social domains. Previous research from Wawrzynski and Jessup-Anger (2010) indicates “that students in collaborative living-learning communities were more
likely to interact with their peers around academics and had more positive perceptions about the benefits of their residence hall environment” (p. 213). Based on our findings, we recommend that HRL staff expands current RBLCs and explore opportunities to create new ones.

Our study also uncovered the importance of physical space and the role it plays in forming relationships and a sense of community and belonging, since “a sense of community is important to the inhabitants of any environment” (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 28). Many participants indicated that minor to moderate inconveniences experienced in the residence hall were worthwhile when they contributed to the formation of relationships with others within the community. According to Strange and Banning (2001), “it is the transactional (or mutually influential) relationship between the human and nonhuman elements in the behavior setting that shapes behavior” (p. 19). Therefore, we strongly recommend traditional-style facilities (communal bathrooms, double-loaded corridors, common lounges, et cetera) when constructing new residence halls, as these characteristics help to create an environment that allows students to build relationships with others, achieve academic success, and personal growth.

Finally, as we recognized previously, the findings from our study can only be directly applied to students at IUPUI. Given that IUPUI is an urban, largely commuter institution, the findings of this study may not apply to students at other institutional types. In order to determine which students the FYRST model can be applied to, further research needs to be completed with different institutional types and student populations.

**Conclusion**

Although we indicated that first-year residential students experienced similar phases in navigating their transition into college, further research should be conducted to confirm the efficacy of the FYRST model. Therefore, we propose a longitudinal study assessing the FYRST model, as well as, students’ persistence and satisfaction with the collegiate experience. Our study focuses on assessing first-year residential students’ transition, however many first-year students at IUPUI are commuter students who do not live on campus. Additionally, further research should be conducted to analyze the experience of students from underrepresented groups, such as racial minorities and first-generation students at IUPUI. While it is likely that many students experience a similar transition process, research is needed to substantiate this claim.

Lastly, our study found that forty-three participants, or 5%, were willing to share their stories surrounding their experiences, thus indicating that many students were eager to have their voices heard. We believe that sharing these stories with administrators will allow for HRL staff to provide future students with an enhanced living experience.

If students are able to enter college with more realistic expectations of their upcoming experiences, we believe this will decrease their level of dissonance and provide a smoother transition into the institution.

**References**


Larry P. Ailes II earned his B.S. in Psychology from Indiana University – Bloomington in May of 2011. He plans to graduate with his M.S.Ed in Higher Education and Student Affairs from Indiana University in August of 2015. Currently, Larry is employed as a Residence Coordinator in Ball Residence Hall for Housing and Residence Life at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis.

Natalie Alvarado plans to graduate from the IU HESA master's program in 2015. She received a B.S.W. and double majored in Social Work and Spanish cum laude from Seattle University in 2013. At Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), Natalie serves as a Graduate Hall Director for Housing and Residence Life in the Riverwalk Apartments and Townhomes.

Stephen Amundson received his B.S. in Public and Environmental Affairs, with Distinction and Honors, from Indiana University-Bloomington in May 2008. He also graduated with his Masters in Theology from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in June 2010. Stephen currently works as a career advisor at IU’s Career Development Center in Bloomington. He will graduate from IU-Bloomington with his Masters in Education in May 2015.

Justin Bruchey received his B.S. in Psychology, Manga Cum Laude, from Towson University in May 2013. He plans to graduate with a M.S.Ed. in Higher Education and Student Affairs from Indiana University in May 2015. Currently, Justin works as a Graduate Hall Director with the Department of Housing and Residence Life at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis.
Chelsea J. Wheeler earned her B.A. with Distinction in Psychology from the University of Michigan-Dearborn in April 2013. She plans to graduate with her M.S.Ed. in Higher Education and Student Affairs from Indiana University in May 2015. She is currently the Graduate Assistant for Fraternity and Sorority Life at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). Chelsea plans to pursue a career in fraternity and sorority advising.
### Participant’s Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Residence Hall</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Generational Status</th>
<th>Race/ Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>Ball Hall</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>African American/ Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morena</td>
<td>Ball Hall</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>Latino/ Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Ball Hall</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Non first generation</td>
<td>Caucasian/ White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
<td>Ball Hall</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Non first generation</td>
<td>Caucasian/ White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittany</td>
<td>Tower</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>Caucasian/ White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobos</td>
<td>Tower</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Non first generation</td>
<td>African American/ Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hans</td>
<td>Tower</td>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>Non first generation</td>
<td>Caucasian/ White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Tower</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>First Generation*</td>
<td>Caucasian/ White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Tower</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Non first generation</td>
<td>Caucasian/ White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. We used biological sex terms as the options for the gender question on the survey.

*aJack self-identified as a first generation student but indicated that his father attended a "vocational school."