

Partnering for Success: Reenvisioning the Undergraduate Student Transition Experience Through the Lens of OT

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PURPOSE: Occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) are experts at facilitating transitions for predicted and unexpected life events, emphasizing meaningful participation and occupational performance (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020). Supporting transitions from high school to college is one area of practice that is still developing (Abbott & Provident, 2016; Kardos & White, 2005; Keptner & McCarthy, 2020). There are many factors related to daily occupations, health and wellness, and self-care that influence a successful transition into secondary education. This study explored first- and second-year undergraduate student ratings and discussions on what supported college transitions from three perspectives: a) internal and external factors and occupations benefiting all students; b) satisfaction with personal routines and occupations; and c) university resources and opportunities.

DESIGN: This pilot study used a descriptive, sequential, mixed-methods design that included two phases. Using convenience sampling to recruit participants (first- and second-year students on campus who voluntarily elected to participate), the first phase involved obtaining quantitative data through an electronic survey and the second phase included a focus group.

METHOD: An original 74 item survey was designed and distributed to explore student routines, personal success habits, satisfaction with habits, and university resources. Following closure of the survey, a single focus group was conducted with six semi-structured questions to further understand students' perceptions of the transition experience. Quantitative data analysis included descriptive statistics using IBM SPSS Statistics 25. For each survey section, the mean and frequency were calculated based on the 5-point Likert scale rating. The survey response items were ranked from highest to lowest score based on the mean score. Data Analysis Spiral Activities by Creswell and Poth (2017) was used to analyze qualitative data. Themes were discussed and agreed upon as a group on two separate occasions to preserve the validity through triangulation. Once themes were validated, researchers collectively extracted important details for further categorization and support of final themes to improve the quality of analysis and reduce bias.

RESULTS: A total of 47 students completed the online survey and four students participated in the focus group. Overall, results indicated that students desired support for organization and time management skills, social engagement, and self-care routines. Results suggested that students identified being organized (94%) and having effective time management skills (96.5%) as critical to supporting transition success. Survey responses also indicated university resources and the environment did not adequately support routines and habits toward healthy eating and sleep.

CONCLUSION: Basic health and wellbeing needs such as nutrition, rest and relaxation, and participation in leisure activities are essential to the transition process, but so are social supports, time management and organizational skills, and adaptability. Importantly, OTPs can work with universities to foster a sense of partnership and collaboration with students to address these essential areas.

IMPACT STATEMENT: These results support OT practice in post-secondary settings. OTPs expertise can provide students with resources to facilitate time management/organization, encourage engagement in self-care occupations, facilitate relationship-building and social interaction to address transition challenges.

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