

Resiliency from High School to Upper Education

A Review of Literature on the Resilience of Students: Transitioning from High School to Upper
Education

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INTRODUCTION

Does resiliency play a role in the transition from high school to upper education?

The transition from high school to upper education, such as at a university, is a big change for students. Many students experience some sort of challenge during these transitions. Resiliency, according to the Merriam Webster dictionary, is “the ability of something to return to its original size and shape after being compressed or deformed” and “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to adversity or change” (1). For this literature review, I will be using the second definition listed by Merriam Webster because students experience resiliency in that sense, which allows them to adjust and recover to change during this transition. During this transition, students experience all sorts of changes, some smooth while some life-changing. I want to explore the experience of resiliency during the transition from high school to college. My senior project partner, Chase Maurer, and I have been conducting interviews during our last two quarters at Cal Poly where we interview Cal Poly students and faculty. We asked the enrolled Cal Poly students “What is something you wish you knew before coming to Cal Poly?” and we asked the faculty “What is something that you wish your students knew before coming to Cal Poly?” These questions gave us a wide range of answers from better time management skills to utilizing more resources that Cal Poly offers for students. Faculty gave us answers such as reading all assigned material to not stressing too much and finding your support system. All of these answers helped us understand the importance of resiliency during the transition from high school to college. This transition is seen through mental, physical, and psychological changes in students after they experience resiliency to overcome problems. Resiliency is what keeps students going and helps them overcome the struggles and hardships they face during this difficult transition from high school to college. We want to dive deeper into the topic of transitions from high school to

university. In this literature review I will be reviewing 13 sources, all of which cover the topic of this transition and resiliency.

1. **UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS AND THEIR PROBLEMS** Kezar, Adrianna, and Joseph A Kitchen. "Supporting First-Generation, Low-Income, and Underrepresented Students' Transitions to College Through Comprehensive and Integrated Programs." *American Behavioral Scientist* 64.3 (2020): 223-29. Web.

- a. *American Behavioral Scientist* and their study take a look into college transition programs and their success for marginalized students. These programs are either comprehensive or integrated and give marginalized students opportunities to experience easier transitions to succeed in their new student populations. A challenge that upper education institutions continue to face is figuring out how to help marginalized students succeed, specifically low-income and racially marginalized groups, because these populations are significantly lower than other student populations. These marginalized populations are lower in population in colleges because they tend to attend high schools that are less rigorous, and because of the economic cost of attending upper educational institutions. These integrated and comprehensive programs aim to achieve higher retention rates and greater success for students than in past years. Many universities have courses for first-year students that build knowledge for these underrepresented students, these programs include contact with faculty and mentors. Some of these programs even include "financial literacy, advising, mentoring, and emotional support" (2). The problem these upper education institutions face is financial funding. This finance problem affects the number of students who can be admitted into these programs

because only some are admitted while many more students need and would benefit from these programs. Another problem these programs face is full integration between these courses and out of class university programs. The missing link is a connection that integrates the “comprehensive approach...and connect multiple existing interventions in an integrated approach, incorporating both curricular innovation and out-of-class support for students transitioning into college” (2). These comprehensive programs “offer a broad range of supports coordinated within a single program” while integrated programs “link students to several existing supports on campus so that they essentially become a comprehensive support program” (2). A California State University mentioned in Kezar and Kitchen’s study found that “aligned structures have the additional benefit of promoting greater reinforcement of validation through connected systems of support, as well as leading to innovation as institutional agents interact in ways not generated through current organizational structures” (2). The CSU system is a combination of summer programs, first-year experience, and a revised introductory STEM courses in an integrated program that supports thousands of underrepresented, low-income, and first-generation students at CSU schools. These types of programs allow students to experience smoother transitions into college and knock down some barriers that students may face. These programs also allow students to foster resilience and understand the meaning and importance of it, because all students will experience resilience during their transition and throughout college.

2. **SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAMS** Colyar, Julia E, and Amy E Stich. "Discourses of Remediation: Low-Income Students and Academic Identities." *American Behavioral Scientist* 55.2 (2011): 121-41. Web.

- a. This article from *American Behavioral Scientist* takes a look at written assignments from students who took one remedial summer bridge course that included themes and rhetorical devices that show the “complexities of negotiating academic identities” (3). These summer bridge programs are designed to connect high school students to college campuses and the culture of college life. Some of these programs are specific such as “engineering or English as a Second Language Student” (3). The study showed that low-income students show uncertainty about their academic identities. This summer program lasted 3 weeks and it was created to facilitate students’ transition into the environment of college. These students were specifically selected because they are considered to be academically underprepared for upper education compared to their “middle-income peers” which led to lower GPAs, graduation rates, and persistence (3). Along with the study the psychological processes were also looked at, because this is a huge part of developing academic identities. The language the students used in their written assignment is analyzed because “according to Gee, how we use language reflects who we are in specific contexts” (3). This study is fascinating because it is not looking at GPAs and test scores, but rather it is taking a psychological analysis approach to how these underrepresented students use language to describe themselves and their experiences. Through this approach, the researchers were able to point out situations of conflict and struggle that these

students have experienced. The students were asked to write two papers to engage themselves in writing tasks and to give them an opportunity to analyze themselves on how they think and learn. In total 172 essays were studied from 86 students each essay was read and themes and words were analyzed. There were several similar themes in many essays such as insecurities about transitioning into college, college-level work, and the importance of a support system such as family and friends.

During our research when interviewing Cal Poly students we also heard several times from many students the importance of having a support system during their time at Cal Poly. These support systems fuel students with resiliency and the ability to overcome struggles. Most of the student's essays focused on the importance of these support systems being made up of friends and families, because they can find motivation and support within these groups. There was another aspect in these essays as well, such as the responsibility of making their families proud through academics. Many of these students felt as if they had to set an example for younger family members by succeeding in university and finding resilience through their families. Another theme that came up was choosing the right friendships to stay on track with academics, friendships that avoided excessive partying, and would help them get higher grades because friendships can point you in several directions some negative and some positive. Academic management was also a huge theme were these students wrote about the differences between the workload in university as compared to high school. Students mentioned that university professors are less hands-on when it comes to

tracking student's success and therefore college students need to be that agent for themselves. This was a theme that I also saw during my interviews, many students stressed the importance of time management, and most said that was the biggest struggle in their transitions. In my interviews and in this article, time management was the biggest factor in transitioning from the high school environment to the college environment. This period of transition is where students need to learn about resilience. Faculty and professors need to use examples of resiliency in the classroom, because it allows students to understand the importance and benefits of experiencing resilience.

3. **TRANSFER HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS** Sutton, April, Chandra Muller, and Amy G Langenkamp. "High School Transfer Students and the Transition to College: Timing and the Structure of the School Year." *Sociology of Education* 86.1 (2013): 63-82. Web.
 - a. This article covers the problems that transfer high school students face and how they affect their transitions into college. Through the use of Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS), the researchers found that after a transfer a student faces obstacles, specifically mid-school year transfer students, and they are less likely to attend a four-year college as compared to non-transfer students. ELS is a study of 10th graders nationally that studies the impact of a high school transfer student during their transition to college. Students who transfer over summer are less likely to attend a "highly selective four year college compared with their non-transfer counterparts" (4). This is due to the fact that college opportunities are shaped by "academic and social status positions in the years leading up to graduation" (4). The last two years of high school are the most

essential to earn standing in colleges, this includes extracurricular activities, grades, and involvement. Transferring high schools might affect and disrupt the track of students in regard to those factors. The research shows that students who transfer in the earlier years are less affected than those who transfer as upperclassmen. A factor that leads to this is that each school's curriculum is different: a student may feel behind after transferring because their school had not covered that material before and this affects their transition into college. There is a correlation between socioeconomic status and transferring stated in this study because many students who experience mental health issues might not have the support system to deal with their problems in a healthy way. Transfer students have "higher levels of behavioral problems, lower academic achievement, and lower educational expectations than non-transfer students" (4). The timing of the transfer has consequences on other transitions the student faces, such as extracurricular activities: a student may be less likely to continue an activity after a transfer due to the disruption this transition can cause. Transfer students may experience higher levels of resiliency before even transitioning into college because they have experienced prior transitions. It is important for transfer students to deal with their transitions in a healthy manner that supports them academically and as well as their mental health. Resiliency should be covered in high school's to allow students to be introduced to the topic before they make their biggest transition into college.

4. **SLEEP** Doane, Leah, D. Gress-Smith, and Jenna Breitenstein. "Multi-method Assessments of Sleep over the Transition to College and the Associations with

Depression and Anxiety Symptoms." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 44.2 (2015): 389-404. Web.

- a. This article highlights the research about connections between sleep problems/anxiety/depression in young adults and their transition to college. Participants were studied at three points in time over one year, spring of their senior year of high school, fall of their first year of college, and spring of their first year of college. The study recorded that sleep minutes, sleep efficiency, wake time variability, and anxiety increased during the transition into college. There was a relationship between sleep quality and anxiety symptoms where anxiety increased and sleep problems did as well. The study showed that overall "sleep quantity and quality improved over the transition to college, although the overall amounts of sleep were still below developmental recommendations" (5). Although this is good that sleep improved, "the first semester of college may be a sensitive period for both sleep problems and symptoms of anxiety" (5). The study also found that depressive symptoms were stable across the study but there was a relationship with worsening sleep problems during the first semester of college. This might explain that overall sleep minutes and efficiency increased but the first semester of college students were faced with sleep problems because of the sudden changes in their lives. Sleep affects biological and psychological factors which then affect a student's academic performance. According to this study, at least 60% of college students are poor quality sleepers and reported to frequent in all-nighters, and first-year students have worse sleep than second-year students (5). Another factor that stood out was that although sleep quality increased these

students were still experiencing sleep below developmental recommendations. This might be caused due to the rigorous schedule and workload students experience in high school as they attempt to increase chances of enrolling in colleges; once they transition to college they are faced with more workload but not as many extracurricular activities. This is another factor where resiliency comes into the transition from high school to university in which students are highly affected by the new changes in their college environment.

5. **LONELINESS** Drake, Emily C, Michael R Sladek, and Leah D Doane. "Daily Cortisol Activity, Loneliness, and Coping Efficacy in Late Adolescence: A Longitudinal Study of the Transition to College." *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 40.4 (2016): 334-45. Web.
 - a. The psychological stress that students face during their transition from high school to the college environment is common for most students regardless of gender, race, socioeconomic status, and age. Loneliness is one of the most common stressors found in students during this transition and it is associated with many health problems (6). This study tested “the association between longitudinal change in loneliness from high school to college and diurnal cortisol activity (walking levels, cortisol awakening response, diurnal slope) by sampling saliva intensively 5 times a day for 3 weekdays in a US sample of late adolescents in their first semester of college” (6). The results showed that an increase in loneliness is associated with steeper cortisol slopes in college, as students transitioned into college their loneliness increased. During this time young adults experience a shift, especially in their social lives, leaving them to make new

relationships and friendships in their new college environment. This can be a stressor for many students because of the pressure to form new friendships fast. Researchers also found that students with a higher sense of self-efficacy might improve these health outcomes. Students whose confidence is higher and can handle stressors prior to the transition into college have a “protective factor” for the increase in loneliness in their future transition into college (6). “Our findings support the notion that one’s belief in his/her ability to cope may promote resiliency among late adolescents transitioning to a new developmental and social context” (6). This can be seen by experiencing resiliency because that is associated with self-efficacy, the ability to overcome a struggle which is a factor many first-year students are presented with during college.

6. **MINDFULNESS TRAINING** Dvořáková, Kamila, Moé Kishida, Jacinda Li, Steriani Elavsky, Patricia C Broderick, Mark R Agrusti, and Mark T Greenberg. "Promoting Healthy Transition to College through Mindfulness Training with First-year College Students: Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial." *Journal of American College Health* 65.4 (2017): 259-67. Web.

- a. From the interviews I conducted during my research I found that most students experience some sort of added stress and anxiety during their transition into college. Across the US there are high rates of mental health issues for first-year college students and this population is also vulnerable to stress and adversity (7). This study evaluated how mindfulness training promotes health and wellbeing for first-year college students. The results of this study showed that mindfulness training significantly increased life satisfaction (7). This study also found that

there was a significant decrease in the participant's sleep issues and alcohol consequences (7). This guides us in the direction of investing time in mindfulness-based programs to ease the transition from high school to college. Many students resort to alcohol when faced with issues in college, mindfulness training can guide students on a healthy path to practice resilience instead of relying on alcohol and other negative factors.

7. **PARENTS AND YOUNG ADULT EXPECTATIONS** Baete Kenyon, Denyelle, and Susan Silverberg Koerner. "Examining Emerging-Adults' and Parents' Expectations about Autonomy During the Transition to College." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 24.3 (2009): 293-320. Web.

- a. This study researches parent's and student's expectations for behavior during a student's transition to college. This research study collected data from 204 incoming freshmen, (150 Females and 54 males) before they made their transition to college, questions about emotions and functions were asked to the students and their parents based on their expectations for college (8). The study found discrepancies "on autonomy expectations between parents and students and parents sometimes hold higher expectations for autonomy than their children" (8). To solve these discrepancies about expectations the study suggests implementing interventions to facilitate these communications. Students reported that they would be more emotionally dependent on their parents than their parents thought and that they would be more homesick than their parents thought. This is an important study because it is able to open the eyes of parents to show them that their children will still need their emotional support after transitioning to college.

During our research students said that they missed home and their families, it is interesting to compare our research to this study because it shows that parents may not realize that students need a support system after their transition. This study can help solve communication and expectations for parents and students clearly showing that students need their parents and a support system to overcome problems and practice resilience.

8. **LATINO COLLEGE TRANSITIONS** Pino, Nathan W, Gloria P Martinez-Ramos, and William L Smith. "Latinos, the Academic Ethic, and the Transition to College." *Journal of Latinos and Education* 11.1 (2012): 17-31. Web.

- a. This was the first study that researched the academic ethic and the transition to college for Latino students due to the increase in college enrollments of Latino students. The Latino population in the US is relatively young, in 2008 the median age was 27 (9). This study highlights the importance of the research of college transitions for this population because Latino's (along with Black's) are more likely to be first-generation college students and are more likely to experience "racial and ethnic educational disparities" (9). Many Latinos, 40%, have not completed high school and only 12% are college graduates, this might be because of the language barrier that their parents experience, preventing them from assisting their students in school and the college application process (9). Latino families value upper education, but students tend to attend high schools that are underfunded and understaffed, which limits their chances of acquiring four-year degrees (9). This research addresses factors that Latino students face during their transition into college such as coursework, relationships, social environments,

college environment, emotional health, sense of belonging, and extracurricular activities. These students face many struggles academically because they attend underperforming high schools that do not prepare them for college courses.

“Social support networks are important factors in helping students cope with the transition experience” (9). The study showed that Latinos with a college academic ethic were “more likely to be first-generation college students...have lower SAT scores, more likely to study in high school, and less likely to socialize, party” (9).

Universities need to “work more on fostering an academic ethic in all of their students and assisting minority students with an academic ethic to succeed in college at the same level as their white peers” (9). We can see that traditional methods are not working for minorities so programs need to become more accessible, inclusive, and comprehensive in order to support these minorities and their struggles. When these students feel represented and heard in their own school’s they are better equipped to experience resilience and overcome adversities.

9. **PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENTS** Pittman, Laura D., and Adeya Richmond.

"University Belonging, Friendship Quality and Psychological Adjustment During the Transition to College." *Journal Of Experimental Education* 76.4 (2008): 343-61. Web.

- a. This study collected data from 79 college students twice during their freshman year to see changes in: “sense of university belonging, quality of friendships, and psychological adjustments” (10). The study showed that students who had positive experiences also had positive self-perceptions of themselves. Students who participated in “interventions focusing on developing social support among

peers and assistance in formation of social ties” as compared to those who did not experience a better transition into college their first semester. Mental health and resiliency go hand in hand, a student who has a history of mental health will benefit from university programs that ease their transition into college while supporting their mental health.

10. **NICHES** Azmitia, Margarita, Moin Syed, and Kimberley Radmacher. "Finding Your Niche: Identity and Emotional Support in Emerging Adults' Adjustment to the Transition to College." *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 23.4 (2013): 744-61. Web.

- a. This mixed-method longitudinal study looked at the student’s mental health and the emotional support that students receive from their family, friends, and professors as they transitioned into college. The study had 167 socioeconomically and ethnically diverse participants, they were interviewed twice during their freshman year of college. Students who maintained or improved their mental health over the first year of college had more support from family and friends than those with declining mental health (11). The support from friends and family gives students the strength to practice resilience during their transition to college. It is also important for universities to create programs where first-year and transfer students are introduced to other students so they feel comfortable forming their own niches. Niches allow students to feel a sense of belonging in their social lives which helps during the transition periods of their life such as entering college. Support systems like these allow students to lean on each other when they are faced with problems and they increase the ability to experience resiliency.

11. **ETHNIC STIGMAS** Huynh, Virginia, and W. Fuligni. "Perceived Ethnic Stigma Across the Transition to College." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 41.7 (2012): 817-30. Web.

- a. Students who receive negative treatment based on their ethnicity during their transition to college may experience a long-term adjustment (12). This negative treatment based on a student's ethnicity negatively affects their transition to college due to student's vulnerable character during this time of change. Latino students had the highest "perceived discrimination and societal devaluation" (12). A reason for this is past discrimination that these students have faced in their prior schooling that they hold on to while they transition into college. The results showed that "ethnic minority emerging adults' report of perceived discrimination decrease across the transition to adulthood, their perceptions of society's negative opinion of their ethnic group increase" (12). These young adults still feel devalued by society and discriminated against, this is another burden that these students have to face and overcome while they practice resilience during their transition into college and new cultures. Steps that parents and high school teachers can take to ease this transition is to admit that this discrimination is present on college campuses, and to speak about it so these students feel heard. Speaking about this allows other students to be more conscious of this discrimination and educates everyone on the struggles ethnic minorities face.

CONCLUSION

Every college student will be faced with obstacles as they transition from high school to college but it is important to take the importance of support from family, friends, professors, niches, and

college's into account during this transition. Resiliency can be achieved by knowing you are not alone. Many colleges have transition programs or have added classes or seminars that help specific minorities whether this is socioeconomic, ethnic, or social assistance. Resiliency is the push that helps students overcome these problems and adversities. Equipping students with the right tools and strategies to deal and experience resiliency is something new that colleges are trying through a number of programs. Struggling with mental illness is difficult especially when transitioning into college and a completely new culture. Resilience can help those who struggle with mental illness to find a way out of their struggles in a healthy and constructive way.

Mindfulness and social support systems make a student's transition into college easier and smoother. Universities, high schools, parents, and peers should encourage the use of resiliency through education, conversations, and social supports groups. We need to normalize resiliency and encourage it in our society, specifically for college students as they create new friendships and experience new cultures during their transition into college. There is a side to resilience that is backed by support systems. Students rely heavily on support systems to overcome struggles and hardships during their transition to college and during their college years. When you are equipped with the right tools to experience resilience you come out of a situation and you are able to conclude that experience. Colleges should all be implementing courses that help students understand the importance of resilience to aid their transition into college and their new lives.

When you have someone to lean your problems are easier to face, you are strengthened through your support system. Social resiliency is "about social entities and their abilities to tolerate, absorb, cope with and adjust to environmental and social threats of various kinds" (13).

Resiliency is seen throughout all stages of life and all cultures, it allows us to overcome hardships and problems we face.

SOURCES

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