

Title: First-generation College Seniors: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Transitional Experience of the Final College Year

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Abstract:

This study investigated the transitional experience of college seniors who are also first-generation status. This topic merits investigation because there is an increasing interest in various demographics of college students, and because college seniors represent an important retention demographic for American higher education, where the retention includes the cultivation of engaged alumni. This study breaks ground on a topic—first-generation college seniors—about which there is almost no literature. The Adult Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1984) was used as the theoretical framework, and an operational definition of transition was developed. A phenomenological approach was used, and the data collection incorporated individual and dyadic (two-interviewee) interviews. Data were analyzed using horizontalization, semantic repetitions, and frequency counting, resulting in the identification of organizing themes. Results indicate that certain archetypal experiences exist which help to define the transitional experience for this population and included (1) receiving institutional and formal communications regarding commencement; (2) engaging in focused post-college pursuits; and (3) changing personal relationships. It was also discovered certain mechanisms were used to make meaning of the phenomenon, such as (1) closure behaviors, (2) acknowledging emotions, (3) changing self label or identity, and (4) assuming a leadership role in the family.