

The  
College  
Transition:

What Changes,  
Who Changes,  
and Why?  
*A Qualitative Approach*

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December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
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## Abstract

To assess changes in student behavior between high school and college, and any factors contributing to behavioral changes, eight students from the University of New Hampshire were interviewed. To determine if changes in environment, or a greater distance from home, lead to greater changes in behavior, half of participants interviewed were in-state students and half were out-of-state students. Participants were interviewed on their opinions toward college and differences between high school and college in four areas: relationships, alcohol use, academics, and group participation. Interviews with participants were recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions were then compared, looking for themes both within and among the interviews. The results showed that there were changes in these four areas but there were no differences in changes between in-state students and out-of-state students. On average, students' grades stayed the same from high school to college and participation in group activities decreased from high school to college. The most common change was an increase in alcohol use from high school to college. Changes in behavior seemed unrelated to whether or not a student was in-state or out-of-state. Changes in behavior seemed to be, in part, influenced by social relations, and also the freedom that comes with living away from home.

## Introduction

The cliché is familiar. A tearful mother embraces her son as a child for the last time. His father delivers an assuring pat on the back and the requisite, “Go get ’em son.” The family van is unloaded of the boy’s final possessions onto the curbside as the two parents climb back into the vehicle. “We’re proud of you son,” are the final words spoken before the engine sparks up and the van pulls away. The mother looks back until her boy is well out of sight, her sobs restrained only by the reassuring thought that the past 18 years have prepared him for this moment. *I know he’ll do great.*

The transition to college or university life for a student is one of America’s greatest symbols. Expectations run high for the privileged teenagers who attend institutes of higher learning all across the country. But what can leave an aging couple so confident that the son or daughter they have nurtured to adulthood will perform at any given level once they have entered this dynamic new city of academia, with its many side roads and alleyways? Research on the matter is abundant, as sociologists, psychologists, and all others interested in the well being of students look to tease out the pre-college influences that determine one’s behavior upon entering a post-secondary educational community.

The present write-up is an investigation into the behavioral transition of students from high school to college or university, based on a number of in-depth student interviews. The social and behavioral shifts from high school to college were probed in the specific areas of academics, alcohol consumptions, formal group participation, and relationships and peer groups. Additionally, distinctions and comparisons were made between in-state and out-of-state students. This approach led to the development of three primary research questions: How do students change between High School and College or University? How does residency status (in-state or out-of-state) relate to the changes between High School and College or University? And lastly, what unique individual factors contribute to a particular student’s change between High School and College or University?

The interview-based approach to this topic will allow for practical human insight into the transition between high school and college. Furthermore, comparisons between in-state and out-of-state students will reveal whether or not differing needs are being met with respectively appropriate responses. From an administrative perspective, understanding why certain students

adjust to the world of post-secondary education better than others is invaluable knowledge in the evaluation and implication of effective transition efforts and programs.

### **Review of the Literature**

The available literature on the subject reveals a number of links between students' high school lives and behaviors and their college or university lives and behaviors. The following investigations will overview articles that have (or have attempted to) establish indicators of academic performance, drinking and other risk behaviors, and formal group participation. Several articles are also presented that acknowledge various facets of in-state and out-of-state student statuses.

Larose et al. (1998) investigated the impact of certain nonintellectual characteristics on college success in a report on an interesting dual-sample study. The report featured two well-contained studies following the same procedure; the first was conducted using a sample of 298 traditional students from a French-speaking college in the Quebec City area. The second focused on a sample of 179 "high-risk" (admitted to the university's Learning Center as a result of low SAT scores) students from a rural university in the United States of America. The goal of using two very distinct samples was not comparative but rather comprehensive. Data was collected on students' nonintellectual beliefs (expectations) as well as behavioral and emotional (test anxiety) "systems". Figures were also collected on students' admission criteria, including standardized tests and high school marks. Finally, information on Grade Point Average in college was held as a measure of academic success (Larose et al. 1998:280-281, 283-285). It was concluded that, beyond what academic indicators accounted for, nonintellectual factors influenced the academic achievement of students (Larose et al. 1998:289). It should be noted that these findings were not meant to discount academic and intellectual precursors of academic performance in college, but rather complement them. The most serious weakness with this study was the American "high-risk" sample. These individuals had been singled out precisely because of low SAT scores, and therefore any academic success could hardly be accounted for by academic propensity to begin with. However, having used such unique samples to derive the same conclusion allows for a greater degree of generalizability than could not have been achieved with only one sample.

Expectations and nonintellectual influences on college behavior again cross paths when the parent-student relationship is considered. Agliata and Renk (2008) focused on this dynamic

in a study weighting the influence of discrepancies between parental expectations and student performance. The relationship between parent and child during the college years is noted as somewhat contradictory. “Although college students are in the process of transitioning to a more independent way of living, their parents remain a strong influence in their lives but are often discounted as such” (Agliata and Renk 2008:967). Self-discrepancy theory, as noted by Agliata and Renk (2008), states that three ideas are formed regarding one’s attendance of college: an ideal self, an actual self, and an ought self (expectations or obligations). If these three notions of “self” are not inline then negative feelings may result. The Agliata and Renk (2008) study consisted of 174 students and 210 parents. Independently, parents were asked of their expectations, perceived performances, and perceived discrepancies for their student-children. The students were asked the same information of themselves. The students then reported measures of self-worth, adaptation to college, and levels of social desirability. The researchers concluded that parent-student discrepancies among the various measures of expectations were significantly related to experiencing distress. It should be noted that the students who participated in this experiment were all from a psychology course and were all offered extra credit if they participated (Agliata and Renk 2008). This study complements the present research since in-state or out-of-state student status may lead to stronger or weaker bonds with family back home.

Thus far, the literature indicates academic performance and adjustment to college and university life can come from within an individual as well as from the people who surround him or her. Both sociological and psychological factors are at work when a parent places undue stress on their child to perform. Indeed, the present investigation reveals that many aspects of a student’s pre-college or university life could be adjusted to maximize his or her experience at post-secondary school. On the other hand, precursors to deviant behavior can also be analyzed to anticipate and avoid a negative college or university experience. Deviant behaviors at colleges, such as heavy alcohol use and casual sex, are partly due to the changes in environment, the decreased amount of adult supervision, and the freedoms that college initiates (Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse 2008). While these certainly have an impact on a students’ deviance, there are other factors that can predict deviant behavior as well. Pre-college factors, such as the type of high school one attended, the type of community one lived in, and personal history of deviant behaviors, such as alcohol use, in high school, can be used to predict deviant behavior in college

(Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse 2008; Wechsler et al. 1995). Prior research has examined the relationships between certain pre-college factors and deviant behavior. Previous studies have found that many of these factors can significantly predict deviant behavior among college students.

Prior research done by Fromme, Corbin, and Kruse (2008) asks whether behavioral risks will change or stay the same during the transition from high school to college. This study also looked at environmental factors (i.e., type of high school and type of college residence) and whether they cause changes to behavioral risks during this transition. Demographics were also studied in relation to risk behaviors. The authors write, “If patterns of behavioral risks are established in high school, and perhaps share underlying causes, one would expect few changes during the transition to college” (Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse 2008:1497). Considering a primary research question posed earlier (regarding changes between high school and college behavior), do students who drank heavily in high school continue to drink heavily in college? And will a student who didn’t drink alcohol in high school continue to abstain in college, or will he or she be sucked in by the “college experience”? Prior research has shown that students who drink in high school are significantly more likely to continue to drink in college. However, this is not consistent among all deviant behaviors. While some behaviors increase, others decrease during college. The study by Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse (2008) measured six behavioral risks (alcohol use, driving after drinking, aggression, drug use, property crimes, and number of sexual partners) at three separate times: participant’s senior year of high school, and the fall and spring of freshman year. The results show that alcohol use, marijuana use, and sex with multiple partners significantly increased over time. The other 3 variables, aggression, property crimes, and driving after drinking showed a significant decreases over time. The authors offer explanations why certain behaviors from high school decrease with students’ transitions to college. Changes in peer groups may result in decreased aggression. Interviews for the present study specifically probed interviewees’ peer groups from both high school and college. Likewise, a wider variety of entertainment may lead to a decrease in property crime. The decrease in driving after drinking may be due to the opportunity to drink in dorm rooms and the limited access to cars on campus (Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse 2008). Therefore, is it likely that behavior will change under the right circumstances? College life produces circumstances in which aggression, property crime, and driving after drinking aren’t really needed. However, college life does produce opportunities for

alcohol and drug use (e.g., parties, bars). The findings of this study show that certain behavioral risks that students exhibit in high school, continue on into and even increase during college.

A study by Wechsler et al (1995) examined deviant behavior in high school and college and had similar findings. This study examined individual characteristics and college binge drinking and found that binge drinking during senior year of high school was a very strong predictor of binge drinking in college. The author goes on to write, “High school binge drinking is a major risk factor for college binge drinking, which suggests that drinking and binge drinking are behaviors with some history even for this young population” (Wechsler et al. 1995:925). These findings are consistent with the findings from the study done by Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse (2008).

Another study regarding deviant behaviors looked at alcohol consumption among freshman. Interviews for the present research specifically questioned interviewees about alcohol consumption before and during college. The study surveyed 385 college freshmen in a two-part survey (Bishop et al. 2004). The first part instructed subjects to answer questions normally, as they would themselves. The second part, performed 2 weeks later, instructed subjects to answer the same questions the way they would have when they were juniors in high school. The results showed 73% reported an increase in the amount of alcohol they had drunk from their junior year of high school to their freshman year of college. The study also showed that 31% of subjects who had abstained from alcohol in high school reported drinking during their freshman year of college (Bishop et al. 2004). This is consistent with other studies as it suggests that behavior in high school increases during college. It also shows that college can change people’s behaviors, demonstrated by the 31% who started drinking alcohol while at college.

These three studies (Bishop et al. 2004; Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse 2008; Wechsler et al. 1995) have all shown that deviant behavior in high school is a predictor of deviant behavior during college. Oftentimes the behavior increases at college, especially for alcohol consumption and the number of sexual partners. There are other pre-college factors that may account for deviant behavior in college. One study states, “If, however, behavioral risks are sensitive to environmental factors, such as decreased supervision and increased personal freedoms, they might change during the transition from high school to college” (Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse 2008:1497). Environmental factors, such as where one grew up, the type of high school one went to, and the type of residence where one will be living, can all affect behavioral risks. Further literature examines this subject.

Prior research has looked at type of high school as a predictor of deviant behavior during college. The study of Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse (2008), discussed above, also examined environmental factors that could effect behavioral risks during that transition period. These environmental factors were type of high school (e.g., rural; suburban; urban) and type of college residence (e.g., dormitory; with parents). Another study, by Schultz and Neighbors (2007), indicated that type of high school was a possible factor affecting the power of perceived social-drinking norms on college campuses. Interviews for the present research questioned participants about their high school, hometown, and living situation while at college. Both studies (Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse 2008; Schultz and Neighbors 2007) had similar findings. Students from rural areas, smaller towns, and who had smaller graduating classes, report higher alcohol consumption than did students who were from larger, more urban towns (Schultz & Neighbors 2007). Similarly, Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse (2008) found that students from rural and urban areas reported higher incidences of alcohol consumption, driving after drinking, and multiple sex partners. As far as the study's question of whether environmental factors cause changes to behavioral risks over time, type of high school did not predict changes for any behaviors. However, these two studies both show that deviant behaviors are higher among rural areas. There were differences between the two, such as the 3<sup>rd</sup> variable: suburban area, sample size, etc. but the overall findings were similar.

As mentioned earlier, an overarching aspect of the present research will be a comparison between in-state and out-of-state students and how (or if) each particular status will manifest itself during the transition to college or university life. The amount of research that explicitly draws links to in-state and out-of-state status, with regards to behavioral adjustments, is minimal. For example, Jones and Gloeckner (2004) compared academic propensities in college between children who were home schooled and those who were traditionally schooled; they found no significant differences between the two groups based on grade point averages and standardized test scores comparisons. Unfortunately, the study did not define the number of home schooled and traditional students classified as in-state or out-of-state (Jones and Gloeckner 2004). They analyzed a key interest of the present study, changes in, and comparisons of, academic performance, without maintaining the key distinction between in-state and out-of-state students. On the other hand, Curs and Singell Jr. (2002) adopted an economics based perspective and *did* explicitly compare in-state and out-of-state students. They determined that out-of-state students

were significantly more “price sensitive” in their decision to enroll in a particular school since they were considering a wider variety of institutions when applying, as opposed to in-state students who were more restricted by the cheapest options available, being their state schools. However, similar to the Jones and Gloeckner (2004) study, Curs and Singell Jr. (2002) only incorporated one area of interest (in-state and out-of-state statuses) while neglecting all others (behavioral/adjustment implications).

Other studies do exist with considerations similar to the present research, but prove to be less than satisfactory analyses for the purposes of this inquiry. Instead of comparing in-state and out-of-state statuses, both these studies analyzed distance from home, a still reasonable proxy. The first study by Henton et al. (1980) considered distance from students’ “family home” as a “related variable” in measuring “crisis reactions of college freshmen as a function of family support systems” (508,509). A questionnaire was designed which incorporated Halpern’s Crisis Scale and was administered to 182 first-semester freshman enrolled in orientation courses for a university. A positive correlation between a student’s “crisis score” and distance from home was a significant finding of the study (Henton et al. 1980). Major issues with this study include its relatively small sample size as well its being rather outdated.

The second study, by Mooney, Sherman, and Lo Presto (1991), also considered distance from home, this time alongside academic locus of control and self-esteem, in predicting college adjustment. No significant relationship was determined between distance from home and adjustment to college. Despite this study investigating many behavioral facets of interest to the present research, it is also somewhat outdated and used a grossly unsatisfactory sample. Only 88 freshmen female students were voluntarily recruited from a psychology course with the incentive of class credit for participating (Mooney, Sherman, and Lo Presto 1991). The gender bias and serious lack of generalizability leave much to be desired. Among the little available literature considerate of the divide between in-state and out-of-state students, especially with regards to students behaviors and college adjustments, no entirely satisfactory studies appear in circulation.

The amount of literature on group participation, another element of the present research, is even scarcer. One study (Cantor et al. 2002) took a psychosocial approach to the issue. Cantor et al. (2002) investigated the connection between students’ self-exploration/expansion and participation in campus groups. A 257-student sample responded to a questionnaire, which

probed campus group involvement, student “well-being”, and “personal growth”. Results indicated that identifying with a group was significantly related to “personal growth” (Cantor et al. 2002:179). Again, however, this psychologically founded study did not acknowledge any division between in-state and out-of-state students.

A comprehensive review of the literature reveals several central themes and omissions. Information is certainly made available on the relationship between pre and during college academic performance, as well as indicators of “deviant” behavior and especially alcohol consumption. These are all aspects of the college experience that the present study will build on. On the other hand, the present study will fill in for the lack of circulating research that focuses on formal student group participation, as well as the differing experiences of in-state and out-of-state students in all aspects of the college experience. Finally, the studies in the above literature review relied on quantitative methodologies. The qualitative, interview-based approach of the present research will shed meaningful individual-level light on these statistics.

### **Methods**

Qualitative methods were used to collect data for our research. A semi-structured interview was designed and carried out to determine changes or differences in students’ behavior between high school and college.

*Participants.* Eight students were recruited and interviewed. Of the eight participants, three of the participants were male and five were female. Four of the participants were in-state students and four were out-of-state students. Of the out-of-state students, two were from states within New England (Massachusetts and Connecticut) and two were from outside New England (New York and New Jersey). Four of the participants were freshmen and four were juniors. We wanted to interview underclassmen (non-seniors) and particularly freshmen since they would have a more accurate memory of their high school experiences. The first three participants interviewed were recruited from one of the researcher’s classes using quota sampling; they were asked because they were out-of-state students. The rest of the participants were recruited using referred sampling. A professor referred one and the remaining four were referred by the first students interviewed. Participants who were referred were contacted via email to arrange interviews. To protect anonymity, all emails were deleted after interview times were established. Additionally,

participants were asked to make up pseudonyms, which would be associated with their interviews rather than their real names. Table one shows the participants, listed by pseudonyms, along with their gender, year in school, whether they are an in-state or out-of-state student, their hometown and distance, reported in hours, from the UNH campus, and their major.

<b>Table 1: Participant Information</b>						
Participant	Gender	Year in School	In-State/Out-of-State	Hometown	Distance from UNH Campus	Major
Alyssa	Female	Freshmen	Out-of-State	Scituate, Massachusetts	2 hours	Undeclared Liberal Arts
Blair	Female	Junior	In-State	Plaistow, New Hampshire	40 minutes	Youth Drama and Elementary Education
Ella	Female	Freshmen	In-State	Dover, New Hampshire	10 minutes	Undeclared
Hansel	Male	Junior	In-State	Toughtenborough, New Hampshire	1.5 hours	Political Science, Justice Studies minor
James	Male	Junior	Out-of-State	Blairstown, New Jersey	6 hours	Mathematics
Kelly	Female	Freshmen	In-State	Pittsfield, New Hampshire	45 minutes	Business Administration
Langhorn	Male	Junior	Out-of-State	Long Island, New York	5-6 hours	Sociology
Riley	Female	Freshmen	Out-of-State	Tolland, Connecticut	2 hours	Spanish and International Affairs

*Measures.* We hypothesized that students behavior would change between high school and college and that high school behavior played a role in students' behavior in college. We hypothesized that college students are more likely to engage in the same behaviors that they did in high school than students who did not take part in such behaviors (e.g., students who drank in high school are more likely to drink in college; students who did well in high school are more likely to do well in college; students who participated in group activities in high school are more likely to participate in the same activities in college). It was also hypothesized that in-state students are less likely than out-of-state students to change their behavior or engage in new behaviors. Additionally, we hypothesized students who had more ties to their hometown or "high school lives" (friends, location, etc.) were less likely to change their behavior than students who had fewer ties to their high school lives, and that in-state students are more likely than out-of-state students to have these bonds or ties to their high school lives. In order to test these

hypotheses, we developed an interview consisting of questions regarding students' lives and behavior in both high school and college, and any differences between the two, along with questions regarding relationships with family and friends. The interview also included question on college in general, including their feelings and thoughts on attending UNH, why they decided to attend UNH, factors that affect their decision, and how they felt about in-state and out-of-state students. To assess behavior, students were asked about their alcohol use, academics, and participation in group activities.

We chose these three behaviors since they are common of both high school and college students and may be influenced by environment. We asked students about their relationships, in both high school and college, to determine any changes in groups of friends, how important they thought it was to make new friends in college, and how important they felt it was to stay close to their friends from high school. Additionally, students were asked how they felt they had changed between high school and now and if there were any specific changes in their activities or personalities. The interview questions were split up into seven sections: general questions, in-state/out-of-state, relationships, overall changes, alcohol use, academics, and group participation. Certain questions that we felt were most important in collecting data or that were more specific were bolded. This was done in case there was limited time to conduct the interview so the interviewer would know which questions to ask over others. Sub-questions were also added to certain questions in case the interviewer needed the participant to elaborate on a topic or needed further information.

Participants were interviewed one-on-one, over a two-week time period. The interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder and later transcribed. As previously stated, participants were asked to give pseudonyms and any email correspondences were deleted to protect their anonymity. In cases where a participant could not think of a pseudonym to give, one was randomly selected for them during the transcription process. To further protect their identities, the audio recordings of the interviews were deleted after being transcribed and names of people or places were changed in most cases when transcribing the interviews. Most interviews lasted a little over an hour. The longest interview was an hour and forty-five minutes. A few interviews were only forty minutes due to participants' time limitations. The interviews were conducted in a building on campus, in a quiet, empty room and before leaving, participants were given both researchers' contact information and assured once again that their identities

would remain unknown and would not be connected to their interviews. One researcher interviewed three of the participants and the other researcher interviewed five. We chose to interview the participants we had recruited since we had already established a relationship, making the participant feel comfortable with the interview.

We then transcribed our own interviews. The transcripts of the interviews were then read and compared, looking for themes within each interview and among all the interviews. Both researchers read all the interviews separately and made their own notes then later compared their analyses, discussing common themes. The interviews were coded regarding five of the question subjects: relationships, alcohol use, academics, group participation, and lastly, questions dealing with in-state and out-of-state status and also their reasons for and thoughts on attending UNH. Within the first four areas, we coded for behaviors that had changed and behaviors that were similar or had stayed the same. The interviews were read and the researchers looked for information, statements, or quotes regarding these five subjects. This information was then compared and analyzed using an Excel spreadsheet (Appendix B). Information or direct quotes were entered into the spreadsheet which made it convenient to compare participants on a certain topic or area and to look for any similarities, differences, patterns, and themes.

A great advantage to conducting interviews versus surveys was that we were able to collect data that was rich with detail. Participants were able to elaborate on certain questions and give details on specific thoughts, feelings, or events during the interviews. These details helped develop each individual story and analyze the changes that had taken place between high school and college and any reasons for these changes. However, there were several limitations and disadvantages with conducting interviews. Most issues were related to time. Some of the participants were only able to give a short period of time or were only available between classes. These interviews were shorter than some of the others. These were situations in which the bold, more specific, or to the point questions were used and each section of the interview was shortened in order to ensure all areas were covered. As a result, participants did not have the chance to elaborate on certain questions, which was one of the benefits to performing interviews.

Scheduling was also an issue when setting up and coordinating the interviews. There were time conflicts between the researchers and participants when trying to work around classes and other obligations. We opted not to interview participants if they had an upcoming exam or

assignment because we did not want to take time away from their own schoolwork. This however limited the time available for interviews.

A disadvantage to the interviews was when participants deviated from the question being asked or included unrelated information. This made it difficult and time consuming when transcribing, and also when reading and analyzing the data. Another disadvantage is that participants may have been holding back information or certain details because of the fact it was an interview and not a survey. Even though participants were assured they would remain anonymous, some may still have been skeptical or weary of saying too much. It is also hard to tell if participants were being entirely truthful or if they were just forgetting certain details. Overall, while the time limitations were difficult, the detailed answers we were able to get made it worthwhile.

## **Results**

After analyzing and comparing the responses from the eight interviews, several overall themes emerged, as well as additional themes among in-state and out-of-state students and among the individual participants. We found that students' behavior changed from high school to college, but that in-state students and out-of-state students both changed similarly, rather than out-of-state students changing more than in-state students. This went against our original hypothesis. What we did find, however, was that friendships had a greater impact on behavior, and students, both in-state and out-of-state, who noted a change in their social groups also noted a change in behavior. As far as the three behaviors we assessed, alcohol use, academics, and group participation, there were changes, but again, both in-state and out-of-state students changed similarly. The most common change was an increase in alcohol consumption, followed by a decrease in group participation. For the most part, academics stayed consistent between high school and college. We found that students who engaged in a certain behavior in high school were more likely to engage in similar behaviors during college rather than extremely different ones (e.g., students who participated in a certain group in high school were more likely to participate in a similar group in college rather than to join a completely different group). This was consistent with our hypothesis that students engage in similar behaviors in college as they did in high school. If students were to start a completely new behavior or activity, it was likely the result of peers or friends.

*In-State and Out-of-State Students*

While there were not many differences between the behaviors of in-state and out-of-state students, their reasons for attending the University of New Hampshire, and for attending either an in-state or out-of-state school were different. For out-of-state students, motives for going out of state and for attending UNH were similar. All four out-of-state students (Alyssa, James, Langhorn, and Riley) noted they wanted a change in location, to get out and away from their hometown, or to meet new people. As Alyssa stated, “there was no way I was going to attend an in-state school ha, so I was really happy about that; I just wanted a change, even though its still new England its still a change, ya know”. James echoed this with, “Well I definitely wanted to leave New Jersey and you get to meet a bunch of totally new people from somewhere else so that’s kind of why I wanted to leave, just to get a whole new experience”. Even though all four out-of-state students wanted to be in a different location away from their hometown, James was the only participant who did not apply to any schools within his home state (New Jersey). Alyssa and Riley both applied to in-state schools and Langhorn actually attended a school on Long Island, New York, right by his house, but wanted to move to the New Hampshire-Vermont area and chose UNH for academic reasons. Additionally, out-of-state students said that the campus and academics were two important factors in deciding to attend UNH.

On the other side, all four in-state students (Blair, Ella, Hansel, and Kelly) had different responses on attending UNH and in-state schools. Ella was the only in-state student who mentioned attending UNH because she wanted to stay close to home. Blair transferred to UNH from Keene for academic reasons, but stated that cost was the main factor in choosing an in-state school. Kelly had wanted to go out of state, but like Blair, cost was a factor. UNH was a backup for Kelly who said that she now loves it, “in the beginning, I was, like, I kind of just wanted to get out of New Hampshire. But now that I'm here it's not a huge deal at all. I'm away from my house, I'm away from home. So it doesn't make a huge difference anyways.” Hansel said that he chose UNH because it was an in-state school, but did not explicitly say what made it appealing. He solved this mystery during a different question regarding familial influences on his decision to go here:

“The fact my brother went here, he had good experience for the most part. He somewhat influenced my decision. My parents, particularly my mother, wanted me to not go so far

away from home because we're a very close-knit family etc. etc. had I chosen, I could have applied to other schools. I considered it but, eventually it was mostly because I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. And I felt it was better that I go to a place where I could just do anything. The other schools I was think of applying to where music schools, where you can't really do too much outside of music."

His decision to go to an in-state school was partly influenced by his family. Hansel's responses, at many times during his interview, gave the impression that he would have rather gone out of state or somewhere further away from home. When asked if he was happy with his decision to attend an in state school, he replied, "I was mostly okay with it, I'm not that far away from home. The older I get, the more I'm thinking I should go somewhere farther away. I'm totally okay with it, was and am." He echoed this feeling of wanting to get away from home throughout his interview, and actually did as he studied abroad during his sophomore year, which we feel made the case that he did want to go someplace new. Overall, in-state students chose to go to in-state schools for a mix of reasons, why out-of-state students had one in common: new location, new people, new experiences. The motives students' had are important to analyze, as to determine if they followed through and if their motives had any effect on their behavior.

One major difference between in-state and out-of-state students is how often they go home. It makes sense that in-state students go home more often for the simple fact that they are closer. However, there is more to analyze here than simply who went home the most. Interviewing participants allowed us to explore this topic and participants were also asked to list the circumstances or reasons why they went home. In-state students went home frequently, which was to be expected. Blair went home once a week and Hansel, once every two or three weeks. For both of them, it was to see their families. Neither saw their friends when they went home. Ella went home the most, "I go home every weekend. Usually it's so I can have my car so I can go back and forth to work the whole weekend, but I also go home for dinner a lot on the week days. It's nothing bad it's just nice to get away sometimes." This seemed to make sense for her, since she chose UNH because it was close to home. Our other in-state student, Kelly, has only gone home twice during her first semester at UNH. It seems that students who had closer ties to the people at home, went home more often. Blair, Hansel, and Ella all noted going home to see their families. Even though Kelly had mentioned being very close with her whole family, she only went home twice. As we will discuss in the following section, Kelly has become very

close with the friends that she has made here at UNH and this may have contributed to why she goes home less often than the other in-state students in our study. This pattern was also seen among out-of-state students. With the exception of Thanksgiving, Alyssa and Langhorn had not gone home at all this semester and Riley went home twice, both times it was to be with her high school friends. James was the one who stuck out among the out-of-state students. James is a junior this year and when asked how often he went home, he responded, “Freshmen year, I had a girlfriend back home so I went home a lot and then that fell through so then sophomore and junior year I only went home for breaks”. James stopped going home during the semester once he no longer had that connection back home. Therefore, we concluded that those students who had closer ties back home, went home more often than students who had fewer ties, or possibly students who had more ties to their friends at UNH.

Another topic with an obvious difference among in-state and out-of-state students is the number of friends and people from their high school that attend UNH. As was expected, none of the out-of-state students had friends that go here, and only Alyssa and James have other people from their high school that go to school here. Two girls from James’s high school go to school here. He said he’s seen them a few time but that’s all. Alyssa had said that one girl she used to be friends with in high school but fell out of touch with goes here, along with three students who are a year older than her. These three are people she said she never would have hung out with in high school but hung out with a bit when she first got to school at UNH. And while she no longer hangs out with them now, she was happy that they were here to bring her to parties and introduce her to other people. James and Alyssa both wanted to go to schools where they did not know anyone and where they could meet a whole new group of people, with Alyssa being especially enthusiastic on this point. Langhorn and Riley did not know anyone at UNH. Riley had different feelings about this and said, “I wish some people from my high school were here” and “I would have appreciated one or two of my friends here”. This is consistent with the number of times the out-of-state students went home, since Riley missed her friends, it makes sense she has gone home twice to visit them.

On the other side, one would expect in-state students to have previously known many fellow UNH students from high school. However, only one of Hansel’s friends from high school goes to UNH and only one girl from Kelly’s high school class goes to school here. Both of them were okay with this. Blair and Ella (especially since she went to high school ten minutes away

from UNH) knew a lot of people here but had different feelings about the situation. As Blair, who is a junior this year, said, “A lot of my friends go here. I went to Timberlane high school and we call UNH Timberlane College. Two of my best friends go here and a couple of my best guy friends. Then about 100 other kids from my high school... I originally didn’t even apply to UNH because I knew so many people from Timberlane were going to end up here”. She also said that some of her friends now had only been acquaintances in high school. Blair also mentioned in her interview her ex-boyfriend from high school goes to UNH as well, “One of the guys I dated in high school for a long time goes here, the one I said before, living only down the street has caused us to keep a close friendship. Sometimes this is a good thing but we have gotten back together in college; I sometimes think that if we didn’t go to the same college I wouldn’t find myself back with him as frequent as I do now”. Going to high school a lot closer to UNH than did Blair, Ella had even more students from her high school that came here. In addition to the forty students from her graduating class, she said there are many people here that are older than her and she is friends with a lot of them. She described her feelings on the situation, “I like it. If some people from my high school go here that I didn't get along with, it's not like I ever even have to see them”. Ella also said she was very happy that there were people here she knew because it helped her feel more comfortable and get situated in the beginning.

Whether or not participants knew other UNH students from high school, as well as their reasons for choosing to attend UNH, and how often they go home, are all important because they reveal information on how attached the student is to the University. If they knew, from high school, students prior to coming here, that would indicate they had more ties to their hometown here at school, than someone who did not know anyone before coming here. All this information is important in testing our hypotheses, but it needs to be compared to the other information we collected and analyzed.

### *Relationships*

We assessed friendships and relationships because we felt it was an important factor that affected behavior. We also thought that remaining close to one’s high school friends, as well as making new friends in college would have an impact on students’ behavior, and that students who stayed close to their high school friends would have more ties to their hometown and

students who became closer to college friends would have fewer ties to their hometown, or at least, will have formed new ties.

We found that, on average, students had similar groups of friends in college as they did in high school, both in structure and personal traits and interests. Most students, both in-state and out-of-state reported that they had a close group of best friends in high school and other more casual friends or acquaintances, and most kept this same structure in college of a close group of “best friends” and additional acquaintances. All students stated that it was important to remain close to their friends from home, but also to make new friends while at college. When asked if it was important to make new friends at college, Blair responded, “Without making new friends you’ll end up following around your friends from high school or going home every weekend and not hanging on campus so you don’t experience college life”. Both in-state and out-of-state students had made new friends while at college, so we were unable to compare Blair’s statement to experiences of our students. Alyssa also had a similar answer to the same question,

“Vital, gotta do it Cause what are you gonna do, like sit in your room all day. And its like practicing making relationships out in the real world too, you know. What are you gonna do... That’s why I think its dumb if you all are from the same school and you like only hang out with each other. Like I have girls on my floor like that. Like they’re roommates, they went to the same high school, they hang out with people who are older than them from their high school, like I just don’t see why. Like I mean its cool if you have like you’re friends from back home and everything but I just think its dumb to stay confined”

This seemed interesting because, when asked if their relationships with their high school friends had changed at all, more in-state students reported drifting apart from their high school friends than out-of-state students. Even Ella reported that she felt like she was drifting from her friends from home even though they were right around the corner. It almost seems as though the in-state students feel a greater need to distance themselves from their high school friends and make new ones to prove their independence. Overall, most students reported still feeling closer to their friends from home, simply because they had known each other longer, but they could see themselves becoming closer to their college friends.

As far as making new friends at college, the four freshmen we interviewed reported having an easy time, while the juniors reported more difficulties in the beginning. This may be due to benefit of hindsight, or because the juniors formed more relationships since their first

semester. Most students gave similar answers when asked for good ways to meet new people and make friends. A common theme was that making new friends depends a lot upon one's personality, and ideally a student should be outgoing rather than shy. This was found to be true in Riley and Alyssa's case. Alyssa has stated multiple times that she is very outgoing, and has become even more outgoing since starting school. Riley, however, is shy and therefore found it hard to meet new people and stated that she often relied on Alyssa to introduce her to people. James went even further and mentioned high school friends and personality as factors in his response,

“I think it probably depends on, like if you're an outgoing person, and you have been all through high school, it'd probably be a lot easier. But if you're more reserved and shy and you're really, really attached to your friends in high school its probably tougher to meet people in college... but, like I said, everyone's in the same situation, so you just got to go out there “

Other common responses were to get involved with groups or sports, to meet people through classes, through parties, or through other people, or to meet people on your floor or through floor socials. It is interesting because group activities, classes, and parties are three situations that related to the three behaviors we looked at and all seem to be good ways to meet people. Of our participants, two said that they made friends through groups; 4 said they made friends through classes; 3 through parties; 2 through meeting people on their floor; and the most common way was 5 reported meeting friends through other people. Langhorn was one of the participants who met most people through classes. He stated that because of the age gap between him and most college students, it had been difficult to make friends here. James also reported having a difficult time meeting people at first, but this was because he lived in a single,

“Yea, yea... like I thought it was kind of tough cause when you have a roommate you're kind of forced to meet at least one person. And then but you really just got to like go talk to people is what I learned and you can't really be shy about it cause everyone's pretty much in the same situation as you so... I don't... you just gotta go do it and go make friends”

He then made friends with people in his dorm by attending floor socials and playing basketball with people on the court behind his dorm. Hansel and Blair also reported having a somewhat difficult time, both due to their living situation. Hansel because his freshmen year, he lived in a

freshmen dorm and did not get along with other freshmen and Blair because she lived with her brother and was stuck hanging out with his friends. She reported that once she moved out, she began to make her own group of friends. It is interesting that Blair and Hansel both had trouble in similar ways because they were the two who reported making a lot of friends through the groups they were in.

It is important to note that among participants, three of them are close friends with each other. Alyssa and Riley are roommates, as previously stated. But Kelly, an in-state student, has become close friends with them through her roommate, Kasey. They all mention one another in their interviews and their friendship with one another seems to have influenced them, at least partially. Riley stated that she feels she's developed Alyssa's sense of humor and is more outgoing now.

After establishing their group of friends at school, most students reported that their new group was similar to their group of friends from high school, leading to the conclusion that even in new and different environments, people are drawn to the same types of people. James was the only one who noted major differences between the two, and that difference being his friends in high school did not drink alcohol and his friends in college do. This seems to have had an influence on his behavior.

### *Alcohol Use*

Overall, all students reported an increase in alcohol consumption, both in amount and frequency. Most said the reason for this increase was because there are more opportunities to drink at college and students have more access to it. While alcohol consumption increased from high school to college, it changed similarly between in-state and out-of-state students. It seems that social relations are more likely the reason for a change in drinking behavior, rather than the change in environment. James, Hansel, and Riley are all examples of this.

James and Hansel were the only two participants who did not drink in high school. Both stated that they had no interest in drinking during high school and both started to drink during their sophomore year. Langhorn, who had already been to school and is older than the other participants, noted that when he first attended college, his drinking increased from high school but that academics are more important to him now and he does not drink as much as he used to. Excluding James and Hansel, all participants drank occasionally in high school, noting every

other weekend or a few times a month. It seems, however, that students' college alcohol consumption increased proportionately to their high school alcohol consumption. Who drank more (in quantity and frequency) in high school also drank more (in quantity) in college than students who did not drink much in high school, which is consistent with our hypothesis. Blair and Ella both said they did not drink that often in high school, and both seem to limit themselves more now in college. Kelly and Alyssa both drank every weekend or every other weekend in college, and now in college, drink Thursday-Saturday, with Kelly reporting drinking 7-12 drinks per night and Alyssa 4-6.

The only student who does not fit this pattern is Riley, who described her high school drinking as "sporadic", and now drinks Thursday-Saturday as well. When taking into account her close friendship with Kelly and Alyssa, it seems that their drinking has influenced her. Alyssa reported that while she does drink more now, she is more responsible about alcohol consumption. When asked about drinking in high school, she responded, "Yea I got too drunk and like I'd push my limits, especially being around my friends who could drink more than I could and I don't know, I just didn't care." It could be that being around Riley and Kelly, who were on the same level as her, kept her from pushing her limits, as she said. Kelly mentioned that she spoke with her roommate, Kasey, about her drinking,

"I talked to Kasey, like about how much she used to drink when she was at home and stuff. And, she was basically the same as me. Like, over the summer obviously we did as much partying as we could with our friends. Cause everyone was going in their own direction. Cause I think coming into college we both drank the same amount. And I think, like, together we have just started drinking more."

Another example of friends having an effect on alcohol consumption is James, who first began drinking alcohol during his sophomore year of college. When asked what factors he thought contributed to his decision to first consume alcohol, he responded,

"Well, it was kind of a combination of things. One, well freshmen year I didn't go out at all because I wasn't really interested in it and two, I was kind of whipped and my girlfriend didn't want me going out and... but then sophomore year she was like, oh I'm cheating on you and I was like... you're a bitch. So then my friends were like, yo you gotta come out with us, go meet some girls and I was like alright whatever and I just went

and got drunk so it was kind of to spite my ex and also to go out and start meeting new people.”

This is important since a change in his behavior is seen following the end of his high school relationship, one of his ties to his hometown, and was also influenced by the new friends he had made here and their behaviors. When asked if he would have gone out more freshmen year had he not been dating his high school girlfriend, who was two years younger than him, he responded that he most likely would have. His closeness with at least one of his old friends from home kept him from changing and experiencing new things at college.

Hansel’s situation is also important to look at. Like James, Hansel did not consume alcohol in high school, apart from situations with his family. He considers his first experience with alcohol to have been while he was studying abroad in Europe. He cites a combination of reasons for this decision,

“It was a number of factors. Probably the primary ones being the legality of it. Also, it's just part of the culture out there. And, it was fun. The beer tasted good, that's a nice one too. And I was with people that I enjoy drinking with. Well, not all of them but many of them were people I enjoy drinking with. It was enjoyable to go out with them.”

It would appear the change in environment lead to a change in Hansel’s behavior. While he mentions that the lower drinking age in Europe was one factor, he also mentions the culture and the people he was with. Hansel made comments throughout his interview on the importance of getting away from home and becoming more independent. It’s possible that going abroad gave him that opportunity and with that, a change in his behavior occurred. It’s also possible that the social relations he developed while abroad influenced his decision to change a part of his behavior. Whatever the exact reason, its clear that a change in environment, one that he had been lacking before going to an in-state school, lead Hansel to change a part of his behavior.

### *Academics*

When comparing students’ responses on academics and the grades they typically received, no patterns or themes were found. All but two students reported receiving similar grades in college as they did in high school. Blair reported getting better grades in college than in high school and Ella said that her grades had gotten worse,

“I did better in high school and because I never had to study it came easy to me. It doesn’t come as easy in college. I think it’s easier to be lazy in college. I’m not good at time management because I almost think there’s too much free time that I think I’ll never get behind and then I definitely do. I study more but it hasn’t paid off yet.”

Both are in-state students however and there were no differences between in-state and out-of-state students as far as grades. The change in Ella’s grades do not seem to be from changes in her environment and the change in Blair’s grades are most likely because she pays for college herself and therefore is putting in more effort.

All students said that academics were important to them and most thought it was important to find a balance between school and their social lives. Langhorn’s views on academics had changed, and school had become the main focus in his life. He stated that he put his social life on the “backburner” for now. While he mentioned the reason for this was his age, the change in environment could have something to do with the change in his outlook. Langhorn moved from suburban Long Island, New York, to rural New Hampshire with his girlfriend, leaving his friends, family, and job behind. While he reported receiving good grades in high school and college, the change in location may have lead to a change in his outlook.

### *Group Participation*

All but two participants reported being less active in group activities, such as clubs or sports, in college and more involved in high school. In high school, seven participants played a sport and four were involved in a club or different type of group (e.g., student council). In college, none of the participants reported playing a school sport, three reported being involved in a club or group, and four play intramural sports. The four students who play intramurals, James, Alyssa, Riley, and Kelly, all play soccer, with James, Riley, and Kelly having also played in high school. The three people involved in another type of group activity are James, Blair, and Hansel. The activities that they are involved in are similar to the activities they participated in during high school. James is on ski club here, which he also did during high school. Blair sings now in college and did in high school. Hansel has been involved in theater-related groups in both high school and college. This is consistent with our hypothesis that students are likely to participate in the same behaviors from in high school than participate in new behaviors. However, there was no differences or patterns when comparing in-state and out-of-state students. Most stopped

playing a sport because they did not feel they were good enough to play on a college level and common reasons for not being involved were not having the time or they just have yet to get around to doing so. Peer influence seems to be responsible for Alyssa's decision to play intramural soccer, as she did not play in high school, but had friends (i.e., Kelly and Riley) who decided to play in college.

Participants reported group participation being a positive activity and a good way for students to meet new people and make friends. Blair reported on her experience in a group, "I'm in the NH notables, its UNH's female a cappella group on campus. I have always been in an a cappella group... at Keene and during the summer on the cape. I met great girls from it and it gives me things to do on the weekends and week nights". She's made many friends through her group, as has Hansel, who says that fifty percent of the people he hangs out with are part of his sketch comedy group, "Sketched Out".

Our research found that students' behavior does change from high school to college, but not as drastically as one might think. High school behavior does have an influence on college behavior, as we found when we compared students' group participation, grades, and alcohol consumption in high school and college. Most students' grades stayed the same between the two, those that continued to be involved in a group were involved in similar groups as they were in high school, and alcohol consumption increased in college, based on high school consumption. These findings were consistent with our hypothesis and answered our question, "how much do students change between high school and college?".

As far as who changes more, in-state or out-of-state students, we found that there was no differences or patterns that indicated one changed more than the other. There were similar changes in grades, group participation, and alcohol use. Even though more in-state students reported feeling distant from their high school friends, both in-state and out-of-state students said they were ultimately closer with the friends from home. Students reported changes in their personality, and most said they had become more grown up, outgoing, and independent since starting college. These findings were inconsistent with our hypothesis that in-state students would change less than out-of-state students.

As far as factors that contribute to changes in behavior, we found that social relations and friendships were the most likely causes. Changes in drinking, while mostly related to the freedoms of college, could be attributed to peer influence for four participants: Riley, Alyssa,

James, and Hansel. Riley's drinking increase and Alyssa's became more responsible because of each other. Hansel started drinking because of a change in environment while studying abroad in Europe, and because he was around people who he enjoyed drinking with. James began drinking because his relationship with his high school girlfriend ended, and he started spending time at school with friends who drank. This was consistent with our hypothesis that students' who have more ties to home will have less of a change in behavior than students who have fewer ties to home.

### **Discussion**

A recapitulation of the major findings is in order. To begin with, out-of-state students recalled a desire to branch out, influencing their decision to "leave home" and attend a university outside of their home state. For in-state students, proximity and cost were factors that kept them relatively close to home. This finding is inline with those of Curs and Singell Jr. (2002), as they noted in-state students to be less sensitive to the cost of school, and therefore more restricted to affordable in-state post-secondary education options.

For interviewees, academic performance in high school set them on a similar trail for performance in college. Larose et al. (1998) noted this in their dual-sample study as well, although they also investigated non-intellectual indicators of post-secondary performance.

All interviewees, regardless of residential status, who indicated they consumed alcohol in high school continued to do so in college, oftentimes more frequently and in greater amounts. Authors previously cited in the literature review indicated similar findings, especially with regards to binge drinking (Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse 2008; Wechsler et al. 1995).

Finally, in the area of group participation, for which almost no literature was found, most interviewees who participated in formal or organized group activities in high school discontinued such behavior in college. This was an unfortunate finding, especially since the students were giving up these activities as opposed to simply not engaging them in the first place. If this trend were to be proven on a larger scale, administration and transition personnel may want to consider programs or initiatives that could help students "bridge" their extracurricular group activities from high school into college.

Overall, despite evident changes in all interviewees, in-state or out-of-state, no one's transition to university life was particularly rapid or drastic. Also, the division between in-state

student experiences and out-of-state student experiences was not as salient as originally hypothesized. Instead, changes in peer and friend groups between high school and college were more influential than the shift in physical and geographical environments.

### *Weaknesses and Strengths*

The study's biggest weakness was its sample. Consisting of only eight students, it was incredibly small. Also, the "snowball" sampling technique employed meant that some of the participants were very similar to each other, since friends who were already involved had referred them to the study. Also, geographically speaking, many of the out-of-state students still did not come from extremely far away places. Any study building on the present research should consider integrating participants from several different regions of the country, and possibly even interview international students. That said, the major benefit of conducting a qualitative research study was the extremely rich and detailed data produced through the interviews. This sort of information can prove extremely useful, especially when trying to establish the actual meaning behind impersonal statistics and numbers.

### *Conclusion: Implications and Future Research*

Interview-based approaches to social research, despite any flaws and restrictions, are essential in forming the whole picture of an issue like the transition to college life and the college experience. Interviewees revealed a multitude of individual characteristics that could sometimes be drawn out over other participants while other times remaining unique to that person. But these personal accounts and anecdotes are, admittedly, not enough to mobilize scarce resources around. Future research on the subject would benefit most from a dual-method approach. Quantitative investigations can establish the aggregate trends for qualitative methodologies to paint a more personal picture in.

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