2011

SEALING *the* GAPS

SUPPORTING LOW-INCOME, FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS IN TEXAS POST-TRANSFER

Abby Miller *and* Wendy Erisman
with Adolfo Bermeo *and*
Chandra Taylor Smith

THE PELL INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF OPPORTUNITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION
SUPPORTED BY TG THROUGH THE PUBLIC BENEFIT GRANT PROGRAM SEPTEMBER, 2011

The Pell Institute
for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education

ABOUT

The Pell Institute
For the Study *of* Opportunity *in* Higher Education

The Pell Institute, sponsored by the Council for Opportunity in Education, conducts and disseminates research and policy analysis to encourage policymakers, educators, and the public to improve educational opportunities and outcomes of low-income, first-generation, and disabled college students. The Pell Institute is the first research institute to specifically examine the issues affecting educational opportunity for this growing population.

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TABLE *of* CONTENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current administration depends on community colleges to fulfill President Obama's mandate for every American to complete at least two years of postsecondary education (Biden, 2010). Community colleges currently enroll over 10 million students annually and represent more than 40 percent of the nation's undergraduate population (Bell, 2006, Cochrane and Shiremane, 2008). However, only 11 percent of students who begin at community colleges actually complete a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Community college transfer students therefore play an important role in fulfilling the need for increased baccalaureate attainment.[1]

Although we are beginning to better understand the challenges facing community college students, we are still developing a clear picture of the institutional support mechanisms that allow for successful transfer and eventual degree completion. This study provides insight into the experiences and outcomes of low-income, first-generation and underrepresented community college transfer students at four-year institutions, to help guide policy and practice at the institutional, state and national levels.

The objectives of this research were to identify: 1) promising institutional practices for retaining and graduating low-income, first-generation community college transfer students at four-year institutions, including any transfer-specific support systems; 2) outcomes of transfer students (i.e., graduation rates) at four-year institutions in comparison with "native" peers who began their postsecondary education at the four-year institution; and 3) specific academic, personal or financial challenges faced by community college transfer students that impede greater success.

This research builds on The Pell Institute's recent study which documented promising practices at six community colleges in Texas that performed "better than expected" in transferring low-income college students to four-year institutions, based on institutional characteristics such as percentage of low-socioeconomic status (SES) students. Institutionalized academic and social support systems as well as effective articulation agreements with local four-year institutions were the keys to the success of the college-transfer cultures at these Texas community colleges. However, while the two-year campuses we visited were successful at achieving the transfer mission to four-year institutions, we felt that success did not end there. Rather, success culminates when a student completes his or her end-goal, which in most cases is a bachelor's degree.

This examination of community college transfer student support, experiences, and outcomes at four-year institutions in Texas aims to inform: 1) practitioners in programs and on campuses who work with community college transfer students, particularly with historically underrepresented populations; 2) institutional decisionmakers who are concerned with improving their performance in terms of transfer graduation rates; and 3) policymakers, particularly at the state level, who are interested in promoting transfer as a means for improving the baccalaureate degree attainment rate among their residents in order to ensure a more educated workforce. Ultimately, our goal is that low-income and first-generation students benefit from this research by getting the support they need to ensure success through bachelor's degree completion.

METHODS

A mixed methods approach guided this study. For the quantitative analysis, we collected institutional data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) which compared the outcomes (i.e., graduation rates and GPA) of transfer students to the "native" students who began at the four-year institution. Those data yielded a list of 15 institutions to which the majority of students transferred from the five predominantly low-income community colleges that The Pell Institute visited during the first study.

In order to make a fair comparison to transfer outcomes, The Pell Institute and THECB together selected a comparison cohort of junior students based on the

[1] According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 63% of community college students enter postsecondary education with goals of obtaining a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

number of credits with which transfer students in Texas typically enter four-year institutions (above 45). Since institutions typically measure six-year graduation rates of freshmen, we tracked the four-year graduation rates of juniors (who had already completed two academic years). This information was used to calculate retention and persistence rates of transfers in comparison with equivalent "native" juniors.

Using THECB data, The Pell Institute developed a "total transfer gap" rate which takes into account the "transfer gap" (difference between transfer and "native" junior four-year graduation rates) and the "state transfer gap" (difference between transfer graduation rate and the state average transfer graduation rate). The institutions visited represent a mix of both high and low performers on all three transfer gap measures. In all cases, "native" students outperformed transfers in terms of graduation rates.

We based site visit selection on these data to yield a diverse mix of institutions in terms of transfer performance, retention and graduation rates, degree offerings, size, locale, and student characteristics. In addition, site visit selection took into account the availability of institutions and willingness of institutions to participate and share data. We developed institutional profiles for each institution visited, utilizing data from IPEDS, THECB and institutional websites.

Each of the five site visits consisted of approximately two days of interviews with staff and faculty, and focus groups with students. A case-study approach guided the qualitative component of this study. While we analyzed interview data from site visits for common themes and factors that may either help or hinder transfer student success at four-year institutions, we took into consideration the unique combination of environmental factors at each institution that together contribute to its overall transfer performance (see methods for additional details).

FINDINGS

Completion of the transfer pipeline at Texas four-year institutions is a complex story, and one that entails a host of relevant factors at both the student and institutional levels. We originally hypothesized that institutions with transfer-specific services would be the most successful at retaining and graduating transfer students, but any pattern that may exist is not quite so simple. What we discovered is that one must take into account the institutional mission, leadership and culture to truly gain an understanding of the policies that ultimately affect transfer student success.

Data collected show that native students always graduate at a higher rate than their transfer peers at these four-year institutions in Texas. However, administrators at several of the case study institutions believed that transfer students were performing better than native students, because they were comparing transfer graduation rates to those of freshmen. This is not a fair comparison, given that transfer students in Texas most commonly enter the four-year institutions with 45 credits or more, at sophomore or junior status.[2] As a result, transfer students have already survived the attrition commonly seen during and after the first year of college and so can be expected to complete their degrees at higher rates than incoming freshmen.

While community college transfer students face a host of challenges typically associated with low-income, first-generation and nontraditional-aged students, a few challenges emerged as specific to the transfer experience and particularly salient among students at the institutions visited. Perhaps the greatest challenge faced by community college transfer students at these four-year institutions in Texas is a lack of engagement, or connection with the institution. Financially, transfer students commonly face either a loss of financial aid at the four-year level or lack of continuous aid due to missed deadlines and having to essentially "relearn" the financial aid system. In terms of state policy, Texas recently reduced the number of excess credit hours eligible for formula funding from 45 to 30, which has major ramifications for transfer students when the two-year and four-year degree programs are not properly aligned.

Transfer-specific practices identified include transfer centers, transfer-specific advising, required transfer orientation, transfer "ambassador" mentors, social and networking events for transfer students, transfer financial literacy workshops, and transfer scholarships. Perhaps more important than offering transfer-specific services, however, was the institution's overall approach to and understanding of students exhibiting characteristics common among community college transfers: namely,

[2] It is common for students in Texas to accumulate college credit through dual enrollment coursework in high school, so the comparison may warrant further refinement based on that assumption.

first-generation, nontraditional-aged, and part-time. For example, many institutions offered targeted student organizations, extended hour services, free transportation, and childcare support, which met the needs of transfer students, many of whom are nontraditional aged and work off-campus. Many administrators emphasized that seemingly minor logistical considerations can make a huge impact in a student's ability to persist.

Seamless integration between degree plans at the community college and four-year university levels also seemed to be a critical component in transfer success. Such institutional partnerships included institutional articulation agreements, curricular alignment, and reverse transfer agreements. Ensuring that students receive accurate, updated information about transfer of course credits is critical to timely degree completion at the four-year institution. Cross-institutional training, online degree audit systems, and joint admissions are some examples of additional ways that two- and four-year institutions can work together.

In addition to institutional practices, an unexpected finding that emerged is a stark contrast between two distinct transfer philosophies, both across and within the institutions. Leadership, staff, faculty, and students alike either express the need for transfer-specific support services to address transfers' unique characteristics and challenges, or, due to transfers in some cases comprising a majority of the student body, institutions do not see a need for separate services. Rather, individuals holding the latter philosophy design institution-wide programs and services with transfer student characteristics in mind (namely, low-income, first-generation, nontraditional-aged, working or commuter students), and express concern that creating separate transfer services would only serve to stigmatize or label these students, rather than facilitate their integration into the institution. Further research should explore the effects of any resulting difference in institutional policies on transfer success rates using a larger sample of institutions.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rather than a planned, concerted effort to support transfer students, the majority of institutions offer loosely connected transfer services that appear to be more of an afterthought in reaction to increased transfer enrollment. Our findings lead us to recommend institutions consider the transfer student population in their strategic planning and goals, particularly now that community colleges are becoming a common entry point into postsecondary education. Both in Texas and nationwide, it would serve institutions well to consider the entire transfer experience within the context of relevant state and institutional policies as they plan the programs and services that guide their transfer students toward bachelor's degree completion.

Moreover, our findings lead us to endorse the need for Texas and other states to identify transfer as a state priority. The current structure of Texas's higher education accountability system does not place sufficient value on community college transfer success. Successful transfer by community college students should be tracked, and systems put in place to reward community colleges that promote transfer. In addition, recognizing four-year institutions for their role in assisting community college transfer students in completing a bachelor's degree will provide them with additional incentive to develop policies and practices that promote transfer student success. While universities are currently required to report to the state the four-year graduation rates of transfer students, little emphasis has been placed on these data by policymakers. Public universities should be required to report these graduation rates in comparison with "native" juniors, and successful institutions should be recognized for their work in this area.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Finally, this study, while gleaning a great deal of insight into the transfer experience at four-year institutions in Texas, is exploratory in nature and merely scratches the surface on a number of challenges and strategies at student, institutional and state levels. A larger sample size at the national level would allow for a more definitive connection between institutional transfer philosophies and transfer success rates. Further research into the connection between practice and outcomes is critical to the success of economically disadvantaged students who begin the postsecondary pipeline at the two-year level with aspirations of achieving a bachelor's degree.

INTRODUCTION

Through the research discussed in this report, The Pell Institute examined the experiences of community college transfer students, many of whom are low-income and first-generation college students, at four-year institutions in Texas. The objectives of this research were to identify: 1) promising institutional practices for retaining and graduating low-income, first-generation community college transfer students at four-year institutions, including any transfer-specific support systems; 2) outcomes of transfer students (i.e., graduation rates) at four-year institutions in comparison with "native" peers who began their postsecondary education at the four-year institution; and 3) specific academic, personal, or financial challenges faced by community college transfer students that impede greater success.

This research builds on The Pell Institute's 2009 study, *Bridging the Gaps to Success: Promising Practices for Promoting Transfer among Low-Income and First-Generation Students,* which documented promising practices of six community colleges in Texas that performed "better than expected" in transferring low-income and first-generation college students to four-year institutions, based on institutional characteristics such as percentage low-socioeconomic status (SES) students. Institutionalized academic and social support systems as well as effective articulation agreements aligning coursework requirements between two and four-year institutions were keys to the success of the college-transfer cultures at these Texas community colleges. A comprehensive knowledge about the experience of transfer students by the leadership in the highest levels of the institution was also confirmed to be important. Therefore, for the first study, we identified three common themes among successful institutions:

- ***Structured academic pathway:*** *The institutions we visited emphasized the academic mission of their institutions and the importance of academic rigor as an essential component of the transfer pipeline. Each has infused into their college campus the notion and importance of transfer, and thus they work with all students to develop realistic four-year degree plans, regardless of whether or not the students initially aspire to transfer upon enrolling in college. Elements of the structured academic pathway included subject-specific articulation agreements and accelerated developmental coursework.*
- ***Student-centered culture:*** *Each of the institutions emphasized personal attention, ease of service, convenience, collaboration, and innovation. A culture of change, access, and availability permeated all of the campuses we visited. Each is constantly innovating and developing new ideas and programs. Elements of this student-centered culture included customer service focus, specialized advising, and flexible scheduling.*
- ***Culturally-sensitive leadership:*** *The college presidents we interviewed displayed strong leadership, energy and dedication to their institutions and students. Many come from similar social, economic, and/or racial/ethnic backgrounds as their students. Their own personal experiences allow them to understand their students' lives, which helps shape their insights and expertise. This common background helps foster a campus culture and environment that encourages students to take ownership of their academic experience, to participate as active citizens of the institution, and to use their education to improve their individual lives and those of their families and communities. Elements of the culturally-sensitive leadership include staff and faculty role modeling and data-based decision making (Taylor Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009).*

While we developed instructive characteristics of effective community college transfer cultures through our initial quantitative and qualitative analyses, the question remained as to how these students are succeeding once they reach the four-year campus. During our focus groups, we heard repeatedly from staff and faculty at the community colleges that their students were receiving a great deal of "hand-holding" at the community colleges to help facilitate success, and we shared their concern that students may feel lost without that same level of support at larger, potentially less personal four-year institutions. In some cases, students were anxious about attending a big campus where they worried that they could end up feeling like "a number." Thus, while the two-year campuses we visited were successful at achieving the transfer mission to four-year institutions, we felt that success did not end there. Rather, success is complete when a student completes his or her end-goal, which in most cases is a bachelor's degree.

The dissemination of these findings centering around community college transfer student support, experiences, and outcomes at four-year institutions in Texas will enhance the practices of : 1) practitioners in programs and on campuses who work with community college transfer students, particularly with historically underrepresented populations; 2) institutional decisionmakers who are concerned with improving their performance in terms of transfer graduation rates; and 3) policymakers, particularly at the state level, who are interested in promoting transfer as a means for improving the baccalaureate degree attainment rate among their consituents in order to ensure a more educated workforce. Ultimately, our goal is for low-income and first-generation students benefit from this research by getting the support they need to ensure success through bachelor's degree completion.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The current Presidential administration depends on community colleges to help fulfill President Obama's mandate for every American to complete at least two years of postsecondary education (Biden, 2010). Community college transfer students therefore play an important role in fulfilling the challenges for increased baccalaureate attainment set forth by the administration and educational foundations such as Lumina Foundation for Education. Further, state budget cuts have made access to the baccalaureate for students beginning at community colleges even less attainable (Shulock & Moore, 2005). For example, enrollments at community colleges in some states such as California have exploded to the point where these institutions do not have sufficient resources to handle the growth (Hebel, 2010).

Community colleges currently enroll over 10 million students annually, which represents more than 40 percent of the nation's undergraduate population (Bell, 2006, Cochrane and Shiremane, 2008). Due to the relatively low cost of community colleges in comparison with four-year institutions, these public two-year institutions have become a viable starting point for increasing numbers of students (Freeman, Conley & Brooks, 2006). The number of students entering higher education through community colleges has increased by 13 percent over the last 30 years (Melguizo & Dowd, 2009). Community college enrollments historically have fluctuated in response to economic ebbs and flows, with major surges occurring during economic downturns (Knoell & Medsker, 1965). The most recent statistics show that over half of first-year students enroll at community colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

TRANSFER STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The demographic and educational backgrounds of many of the students who begin postsecondary education at community colleges suggest that these students are likely to face particular challenges after transfer (Bailey et al., 2004; Cochrane & Shiremane, 2008; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Geckeler et al., 2008; Hoachlander, Sikora, & Horn 2003; Shields, 2004; The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2008). Community college students are more likely than those attending four-year institutions to be from low-income households, first-generation college-goers, and historically underrepresented underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005; Hagedorn, Cabrera, & Prather, 2010). These students are also more likely than others to engage in nontraditional pathways (e.g., delayed entry, part-time enrollment, and non-continuous attendance) that are often associated with increased attrition (Cabrera, Burkum, & LaNasa; 2005; Hoachlander, Sikora, & Horn 2003). These disadvantaged students also lack academic resources and degree aspirations relative to higher-income peers, which prevent them from achieving greater transfer and completion rates (Cabrera, Burkum & La Nasa, 2005).

Much of the research on transfer students (e.g., Wassmer, Moore, & Shulock, 2004; Crisp & Nora, 2010) can be informed by Bourdieu's (1973) theory of cultural capital and Stanton-Salazar's (1997) social capital/institutional support framework. Both of these theories support the notion that low-income, first-generation, underrepresented, and disadvantaged students lack the cultural or social "capital," the access to networks or level of knowledge that campuses across the U.S. have thus far expected as the norm for adapting to campus life. Such institutional familiarity and access to networks, including peers, help enable students to navigate campus processes required for a range of services, such as financial aid and coursework registration (Tym, McMillion, Barone, & Webster, 2004).

A lack of social and cultural capital can also be reflected in students' educational plans and aspirations. Low-SES students' families, peers, and even educators may not have provided the same level of encouragement surrounding degree completion as those of more privileged

students. Such support is critical beginning in the eighth grade (Cabrera, Burkum & La Nasa, 2005). Students whose social or cultural capital does not meet the current standards often feel they are in need of greater guidance. They do not know how to find help on campus, and may not feel as though they are a part of a community (Kerr, 2006). Stanton-Salazar identified "institutional agents" as critical to helping low-income students adjust to academic institutions, by imparting the institutional knowledge, and subsequently the confidence to help them succeed.

A transition from community-based two-year colleges to large, public four-year institutions further compounds the feelings of disorientation common among low-income, first-generation students at the onset of their enrollment in higher education (Bensimon & Dowd, 2008; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Rendon & Valdez, 1993; Wassmer, Moore, & Shulock, 2004). Thus, the social and cultural capital framework is applicable to low-income, first-generation community college transfer students throughout the entire postsecondary pipeline.

TRANSITION TO FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Community college transfer students face a unique host of personal and academic challenges once they move from the oftentimes close-knit cultures of two-year campuses to large, potentially intimidating, public four-year institutions (Bensimon & Dowd, 2008; Taylor Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009). Many studies have found that community college transfer students are less likely to attain a bachelor's degree than comparable "native" students who began at the four-year institution (Ishitani, 2008; Leigh & Gill, 2003; Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Sandy, Gonzalez, & Hilmer, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). The phenomenon of transfer adjustment to four-year institutions is not new; in 1965, Hills studied the concept of "transfer shock," whereby community college transfer students experienced a drop in their GPA the first semester at the four-year institution. Knoell & Medsker (1965), also one of the first to examine transfers in comparison with natives, confirmed this finding. This transfer shock is due to a mix of personal, academic, financial, and institutional barriers.

Bensimon et al. (2006) described the transition from two- to four-year institutions as a "border crossing" between two vastly different cultural settings. They found the hindrance of social and cultural barriers to be "especially true" of underrepresented minority students who transferred to four-year institutions, because "many low-income students are also members of racial and ethnic groups that only gained access to higher education in the last half of the 20th century." They stress the importance of student mentors who already had the experience of transitioning to the institution to act as "transfer agents" for low-income students who otherwise lack social capital to help navigate campus services.

The following review of research on four-year degree completion of transfer students, while focusing on the cultural shift for low-income students from community colleges to four-year institutions, will also provide a synthesis of identified institutional factors affecting degree completion of transfer students.

EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE ATTENDANCE ON FOUR-YEAR OUTCOMES

Recent research has begun to track community college transfer student outcomes at four-year institutions with comparable native peers — those who began at the four year institution. Comparing the degree attainment rates of transfers to native students at four-year institutions is complicated, however, because of individual- and institutional-level factors that could account for differences. An emerging body of research controls for such self-selection bias in seeking to explore whether the community college serves a "democratization" or "diversion" function — meaning, previous community college attendance either facilitates or inhibits eventual baccalaureate attainment (Alfonso, 2006; Gonzalez and Hilmer, 2006; Ishitani, 2008; Leigh and Gill, 2003; Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Melguizo & Dowd, 2009; Rouse, 1995). These recent empirical research models have refined the comparison between community college transfer students and natives by controlling for background characteristics, thus allowing for a determination of the effects of transfer on graduation. Some studies have found the community college students who successfully transferred were similar to those who began at four-year institutions "in terms of social and academic backgrounds," including study habits, parental support, and full-time attendance. Thus, studies must control for such background characteristics to make fair comparisons between transfer and native four-year completion rates and to accurately measure the effects of first institution type on success (Lee, Mackie-Lewis & Marks 1993; Lee & Frank, 1990).

These recent studies comparing transfer to native outcomes, controlling for background characteristics (and thus allowing for the measure of transfer effects), have yielded mixed findings. Some have found that those who started at the community college had lower probabilities of completing a degree to begin with, and therefore the community college itself did not divert degree attainment (Rouse, 2005). These studies often point to students' background characteristics as having a stronger relationship with degree completion than transfer status. Others supported the negative relationship between community college attendance and bachelor's degree attainment rates, even after accounting for self-selection bias (Alfonso, 2006; Gonzalez and Hilmer, 2006; Long & Kurlaender, 2009).

EFFECTS OF BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS ON FOUR-YEAR OUTCOMES

Recent empirical models, such as those described above, that study the effects of transfer on graduation outcomes have not always yielded differences by transfer status. Several of these recent studies have found student characteristics to be of significance in determining transfer student outcomes. Such studies typically group factors together as either (1) background characteristics present before four-year college attendance or (2) institutional factors that students encounter once at the four-year institution. Background characteristics include income level, race/ethnicity and gender, as well as prior academic achievement indicators.

Cabrera, Burkum, and La Nasa (2005) found that a combination of academic preparation, SES level, and first institution type determined chance of completion. This study utilized 1980 High School and Beyond (HS&B) data to examine both descriptive statistics for differences in transfer and completion rates by SES, and regression models for differences in success rates within low-SES students by various characteristics. They found that low-income students with low to medium academic resources in high school (such as curriculum intensity and/or quality) who enter community colleges have only a 4 percent chance of completing a bachelor's degree (Cabrera, Burkum, & La Nasa, 2005). Their findings also support the need to take into account academic goals and performance, the need for and completion of developmental coursework, demographic characteristics, and family structure.

Other studies supported the significance of academic preparation as a factor in transfer degree completion. Wang found high school coursework, community college GPA, and lack of math remediation as being significantly, positively linked to bachelor's degree attainment of transfers. Melguizo and Dowd identified participation in high school honors courses and SAT scores as significant factors in transfer students' completion of bachelor's degrees.

Personal characteristics including SES (Melguizo & Dowd; Wang), gender (Freeman, Conley & Brooks, 2006; Melguizo & Dowd; Wang), and age (Freeman, Conley & Brooks, Ishitani) have also been significantly tied to transfer degree completion. Students who begin college at the age of 18 are twice as likely as those of any other age to complete a bachelor's degree (Freeman, Conley & Brooks). This suggests that nontraditional-aged transfer students are less likely to complete a degree, perhaps based on competing family and work responsibilities. Some studies have also identified ethnicity as a potential barrier to transfer degree completion. Lee, Mackie-Lewis & Marks found that community college transfer students who are African American are less likely to complete a bachelor's degree than other community college transfer students.

The onset of degree goals and specificity of attainment aspirations can also have an effect on transfer student bachelor's degree completion. Wang found a significant, positive relationship between bachelor's degree aspirations in 12th grade and degree completion. Additionally, Wang examined a psychological variable — internal "locus of control" over one's environment — which also held a significantly positive relationship to persistence. This means that holding oneself accountable for educational outcomes — despite personal or other obstacles to success — will help ensure success. Adelman, however, found that educational "anticipations," which he defines as "the consistency and level of their vision of how far they will get in school" were not significantly related to degree completion. This is in contrast to his original findings from 1999. His more recent 2006 study stresses "use of academic time" and academic performance above all else (Adelman, 2006).

EFFECTS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS ON FOUR-YEAR OUTCOMES

Institutional characteristics such as selectivity had significant, positive correlations with the graduation outcomes of transfer students (Lee, Mackie-Lewis & Marks; Melguizo & Dowd), as did awarding advanced degrees (Lee, Mackie-Lewis & Marks). This finding that more selective four-year institutions offer better opportunities for transfers is revealing, because most low-income students cannot afford to attend private, selective institutions, and furthermore, many must live at home — particularly those with work and family responsibilities — and therefore are unable to move for their educations.

Surprisingly, institution size was not a significant factor, which one might expect given the typical small size of community college campuses to which transfers are accustomed.

Lee, Mackie-Lewis, and Marks also found that transfers were significantly less satisfied with both academics and social life at the four-year institution than their native peers. The researchers offered the following explanations for these differences in satisfaction levels: either transfers had built up expectations that the four-year institution did not meet, or the four-year institution did not provide support mechanisms to make the students feel welcome. Finally, as the authors note, it could be that the native students do not make an effort to interact with the transfer students. In other words, it could be that transfers are somehow stigmatized or seen as "second class" citizens on campus. Additionally, they found that transfers are more likely than natives to attend large, public, less selective institutions. Finally, the authors cite potential difficulties transferring credits or adjusting to a new institutional environment that could cause these lower levels of satisfaction.

Qualitative findings provide further insight into institutional factors cited above. Davies and Casey (1999) conducted focus groups with approximately 70 randomly selected students representing 15 feeder community colleges, who had transferred to a Western public state institution. Students were asked to compare their experiences between the community college and four-year institution. Many expressed a level of comfort with the community college that they had not yet found at the four-year university, both in the classroom and in the small campus environment. Even seemingly trivial matters such as parking and ease of walking between classes were easier at the community college, but seemed to make a big difference in the student's overall satisfaction. Conversely, others found the community college coursework perhaps too comfortable and not challenging enough, and were excited about all of the resources they had access to at the university.

Many students experienced what the authors identified as "campus culture shock," resulting from the transition between two vastly different campus environments. Students especially appreciated the individualized attention from both community college faculty and staff that they did not find at the university. In addition, students felt the community college classroom environment was more interactive and more learning-focused; they felt that the community college instructors genuinely enjoyed teaching and took an interest in the students' holistic development. This feeling was not universal, however: some felt the quality of instruction at community colleges was relatively poor. And some felt that the attentiveness bordered on intrusiveness; for example, they did not understand why attendance was necessary for adults.

Davies & Casey also noted that students who appreciated the interaction with instructors at community colleges were disappointed by large lecture-style classes at the university and felt that university faculty were more interested in research than in teaching. In addition, students felt that community college instructors were understanding of, and even expected and accommodated, work and family schedules. At the university, however, faculty expected coursework to take priority in students' lives, regardless of their work and enrollment intensity. In other words, students felt that university faculty did not invest in them at the same level as community college instructors may have been able to. This may have been due in part to smaller class size, but moreover perhaps because of institutional differences in community colleges' and universities' teaching and research missions.

Students who participated in the study found differences in social aspects of the two campus experiences as well. Some felt the social life at the university was overwhelming and distracted them from studies, while others found the social connections to be supportive. Some coped with the transition from community college by connecting with peers within the academic departments, or with other transfer students — essentially, finding a community within the larger campus to call home. In terms

of campus services, many students felt disappointed by transfer-specific support programs, including orientation and mentoring. Even with these services, students often did not feel they were able to find the information they needed about registration.

Factors beyond the control of individual institutions also seem to play a role in community-college transfer success. Melguizo & Dowd found that indicators of state-level policy — specifically, the strength of transfer and articulation systems — accounted for some of the difference in degree attainment rates, which suggests the effects of policies linking community college and four-year coursework. A lack of coordination at the institutional and state levels often results in problems with articulation and transfer of course credits, or unclear degree program requirements, resulting in discouraged students having to retake courses, only further delaying degree attainment (Kazis, 2006).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The research on transfer student outcomes summarized above points to suggested practices for implementation at four-year institutions, although researchers have yet to explore the efficacy of such practices targeting transfer students. Many recommendations stress the role of organizational culture, including the use of "transfer agents" to address transfer students' need for social capital as they attempt to integrate into the often larger institution (Bensimon & Dowd, 2008; Wassmer, Moore & Shulock, 2004). Wang recommends support programs that foster confidence and motivation in transfer students, which is in alignment with her findings that internal locus of control is positively associated with degree completion.

Much of the research recommends support services specifically targeting the characteristics found to be associated with attrition, such as nontraditional age, dependents, and lack of academic preparation (Freeman, Conley & Brooks; Wassmer, Moore & Shulock). Such services could include tutoring, childcare, and holistic transfer centers to help guide students through advising, financial aid, and transfer of degree credits.

Another institutional barrier is the lack of collaboration and communication between two- and four-year institutions. Researchers also points to coordinated transfer centers at both two- and four-year institutions, and coordinated advising between faculty and administrators to make curricular requirements clear to transfer students (Hagedorn et al., 2007; Hoachlander, Sikora & Horn 2003; Rendon & Nora 1988).

Institutions that do not clearly articulate transfer guidelines including credits, course requirements, programs, standards, curriculum, and expectations further the problem of low transfer rates for community college students (Kazis, 2006). Institutional articulation agreements, or "the process by which one institution matches its courses or requirements to coursework completed at another institution" (Anderson, Alfonso, & Sun, 2006), help assure students that the courses they complete will not have to be repeated at the institution to which they are transferring (Wellman, 2002). Articulation agreements at the institutional level typically guarantee transfer of credit, and in addition steer students towards a specific academic pathway and offer financial incentives such as scholarships for transfer and completion (Taylor Smith, Miller & Bermeo).

Additional recommendations to help facilitate successful degree completion among transfer students include transfer scholarships (Rendon & Nora 1988). A recent study suggests that transfers are less likely to receive any form of financial aid during their first two years at the four-year institution due to income received through employment. It may be that the transfers are accustomed to working while enrolled and do not adjust their financing strategy once in the four-year institution (Melguizo & Dowd). Both counseling and specific grants targeting transfer students could help alleviate some of the financial burden and direct students to aid packaging and employment patterns more suitable to the four-year environment.

Institutional programs and policies supporting initial transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions address the cultural barriers facing this population, and may also prove effective if implemented at the four-year institution to support transfers on their way to graduation. The research models themselves can act as useful tools to help institutions identify transfer patterns and risk factors for attrition (Ishitani, 2008). Institutions can then identify students in need of support, and tailor policies and services to their characteristics and challenges.

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METHODS

A mixed methods approach was used for this study. Data obtained from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the U.S. Department of Education guided the selection of five institutions for site visits consisting of interviews and focus groups. Quantitative analyses compared graduation rates of transfer students at each institution selected to those of "native" peers, and qualitative data gathered from site visits produced case studies examining the institutional factors that contribute to transfer gaps.

SITE SELECTION

THECB data yielded a list of 15 four-year institutions to which the majority of students from the five predominantly low-income community colleges visited during The Pell Institute's first study transferred as of 2009. Of those 15, three are upper-division only institutions and thus were excluded from the site visit selection process, as transfer/native comparison would not have been possible.

The table below displays the remaining 12 receiving four-year institutions, the number of feeder colleges from the first study represented, and the number of transfers from those feeder institutions. The highlighted rows represent institutions visited.

TABLE 1.

Number of Colleges and Students from Pell 2009 Study Represented at Four-year Receiving Institutions

FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTION	# FEEDER COMMUNITY COLLEGES	# FEEDER TRANSFER STUDENTS
A	2	313
B	2	104
C	2	95
D	5	81
E	3	39
F	4	35
G	3	34
H	2	30
I	2	26
J	4	25
K	3	21
L	2	14

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010

We based site visit selection on data from the THECB, as well as publicly available data from the Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to yield a diverse mix of institutions in terms of transfer performance, retention and graduation rates, degree offerings, size, locale, and student characteristics. This diversity was particularly important, since for this study we were not visiting top performers but rather top receivers of transfer students, to determine what might cause varying outcomes in students from similar feeder colleges. In addition, site visit selection took into account availability of institutions and willingness of institutions to participate and share data.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

For the quantitative analysis, we used THECB data to compare the second-year retention, four-year graduation rates, and GPA at graduation of 2004 junior-level transfer students who began at community colleges, with those of junior-level native students who began at the four-year institutions. In order to make a fair comparison of transfer outcomes, The Pell Institute and THECB together selected a comparison cohort of junior students based on the number of credits with which transfer students in Texas typically enter four-year institutions (above 45). Since institutions typically measure six-year graduation rates of freshmen, we tracked the four-year graduation rates of native juniors (who had already completed two academic years).

Using these data, The Pell Institute developed a "total transfer gap" rate, which takes into account the "transfer gap" (difference between transfer and native junior four-year graduation rates) and the "state transfer gap" (difference between transfer graduation rate and the state average transfer graduation rate). The institutions visited represent a mix of both high and low performers on all three transfer gap measures.




Data collected show that transfer graduation rates at the five institutions visited ranged from 58 to 75 percent, while native junior graduation rates ranged from 75 to 84 percent. The "transfer gap" rate, or the difference between transfer and native graduation rates, ranged from -9 to -20 percentage points. In other words, native students always graduate at a higher rate than transfer peers when using this comparison. It may be that the comparison needs to be further refined, or that perhaps native students of sophomore status would make a more fair comparison group based on the number of credits with which transfers enter the four-year institutions.

In terms of the "state transfer gap," institutions visited represent a range of 7 percentage points lower than the statewide transfer graduation rate, to 10 percentage points higher. One of the institutions is roughly on par with the state average. The "total transfer gap" rate taking into account transfer performance both relative to "natives" and to the statewide average ranges greatly as well, and is only positive (by 1 percentage point) for one institution. The poorest-performing institution in terms of its transfer performance has a total transfer gap of -27 percent. This means that relative to students who begin at four-year institutions and to transfer performance in the state, their transfer students are nearly one-third less likely than transfer students at other four-year institutions in the state to graduate.

Case study institutions also varied widely in both institutional and student characteristics. See Appendix A for tables outlining those characteristics.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Each of the five site visits consisted of approximately two days of interviews with staff and faculty, and focus groups with approximately 8-10 low-income transfer students as identified by the institution. Interviewees typically included the President, Provost, Vice President of Student Affairs, Financial Aid Director, Registrar, directors of campus support services such as advising, deans, and faculty who teach large numbers of transfer students. We developed institutional profiles for each institution visited, utilizing data from IPEDS, THECB, and institutional websites. A case-study approach guided the qualitative component of this study. While we analyzed interview data from site visits for common themes and factors that may either help or hinder transfer student success at four-year institutions, we took into consideration the unique combination of environmental factors at each institution that contribute to its overall transfer performance.

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TABLE 2. Transfer Gap Rates

INSTITUTION	"NATIVE" JUNIOR GRADUATION RATE	COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER GRADUATION RATE	TRANSFER/ NATIVE GAP	TRANSFER STATE GAP	TOTAL TRANSFER GAP
F	84%	75%	-9%	10%	1%
D	81%	70%	-11%	5%	-6%
A	75%	64%	-11%	-1%	-12%
G	79%	63%	-16%	-2%	-18%
I	78%	58%	-20%	-7%	-27%
Average	**79%**	**66%**	**-13**	**1%**	**-12%**

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010

The completion of the transfer pipeline at Texas four-year institutions is a complex story, and one that entails a host of factors at both the student and institutional levels. While the data described above show that native students always graduate at a higher rate than their transfer peers at these four-year institutions in Texas, the transfer gap rate varied considerably at the institutions we visited for this study. We originally hypothesized that institutions with transfer-specific services would be the most successful at retaining and graduating transfer students, but found that any pattern that may exist is not quite so simple. What we discovered is that one must take into account the institutional mission, leadership, and culture, as well as the state policy context in which the institution operates, to truly gain an understanding of the policies and practices that ultimately affect transfer student success.

STATE POLICY CONTEXT

The state policy context in which public postsecondary institutions operate plays a critical role in the outcomes for transfer success. As the work of Melguizo & Dowd cited above demonstrates, state policy issues related to transfer and articulation may well have an impact on what happens to students when they transfer from a community college to a public university. Moreover, institutions can either be encouraged or discouraged by state policy in their efforts to prioritize closing the transfer gap.

TRANSFER AND ARTICULATION POLICIES

Texas state law requires public universities to accept up to 66 credits earned at another Texas public college or university, provided the courses appear in the state's Lower Division Academic Course Guide Manual. In addition, if a student has completed the state's 42-hour core curriculum requirements prior to transfer, the receiving institution must consider that student core-complete, even if the courses used to fulfill core curriculum requirements at the receiving institution are different than those at the sending institution. However, because Texas has no statewide articulation agreement, there is no guarantee that the credits a student transfers will be applicable to a specific degree program at the receiving institution. As a result, some transfer students find that they must take additional lower-division courses after transfer in order to meet the requirements of their degree programs, thus increasing the time and expense needed to earn a bachelor's degree.

EXCESS CREDIT HOURS CAP

In an effort to expedite time to degree completion, Texas recently reduced the number of credits for which institutions can receive formula funding from 45 hours beyond the number required for a bachelor's degree to 30 excess hours. This policy is particularly problematic for transfer students who find that some of their transfer credits do not apply to their chosen degree programs and therefore must take excess credits for which public universities are allowed to charge out-of-state tuition rates. Since transfer students are likely to be working full-time to support themselves, the financial burden can be a serious problem if they have to pay out-of-state tuition.

ACCOUNTABILITY

A particularly important state policy issue for transfer-intensive institutions is the fact that the Texas Higher Education Accountability System focuses on completion of associate's degrees as a key accountability measure for community colleges. This policy encourages community colleges to counsel students to remain at the college until they earn an associate's degree, even if it may be more beneficial to the student to transfer earlier. In addition, the accountability system focuses on retention and graduation rates for first-time first-year students as key accountability measures for public universities and offers

little recognition of universities that do a good job assisting transfer students in earning a bachelor's degree. With these policies, the accountability system sends a signal to Texas public colleges and universities that transfer student success is not a strong priority for the state.

TRANSFER CHALLENGES

While community college transfer students face a host of challenges typically associated with low-income, first-generation and nontraditional-aged students, a few challenges emerged as specific to the transfer experience and particularly salient among students at the institutions visited. These transfer-specific challenges have personal, institutional, academic and financial implications.

SOCIAL

» ***Lack of engagement*** *– perhaps the greatest challenge faced by community college transfer students at these four-year institutions in Texas is a lack of engagement, or integration, into the institution. Students are not connected to one another or the campus in any meaningful way. Staff, faculty and students across all institutions repeatedly cited this as a major barrier to transfer students' success. The lack of engagement is two-fold: first, transfer students are often non-traditional aged, attending part-time, working off-campus, and facing multiple responsibilities such as caring for dependents, which leaves little time for participating in anything on campus outside the classroom. In addition, the student "bonding" that many traditional-aged, first-time students experience most often occurs during their freshman year. By the time transfers have arrived on campus, they may find that students with an equivalent number of credits (i.e., juniors) have already settled into a social niche and are not interested in expanding their circle of friends. At the same time, it may be that transfer students have little interest in socializing beyond the classroom and simply come to campus to complete their coursework requirements in order to complete the degree. Regardless, without an attachment or connection to the campus, these students may get lost in the system.*

FINANCIAL

» ***Lack of continuity*** *– another common challenge facing these transfer students is either a loss of financial aid at the four-year level or lack of continuous aid due to missed deadlines and the need to essentially "relearn" the financial aid system. The community colleges we studied from which many of these transfers hail, provided personal, close-knit cultures that proactively reminded students of upcoming financial aid deadlines. In some cases, the institutions admitted to being flexible with deadlines, not always enforcing them and giving students some leeway. When these students arrive on the larger, often more systematic or bureaucratic campuses, they are not always prepared for more stringent deadlines, an adjustment which can have negative consequences. In addition, transfers often apply to the institution too late to receive institutional funds that have already been distributed to first-year students. They are also not always prepared to take out loans that they did not need at the two-year institution, where grants were typically enough to cover costs.*

ACADEMIC

» ***"Wasted" transfer credits*** *– an issue with state policy implications is the common occurrence of students who transfer credits that do not apply to their degree plans and who then must take additional courses to meet major requirements. If, prior to transfer, students do not have a clear understanding of the requirements for their chosen degree program, they may face serious academic and financial ramifications. Students who have not decided on a major prior to transfer or who transfer to a different university or degree program than they had originally intended are particularly at risk in this situation.*

» ***Timing of transfer*** *– Students who transfer with too few credit hours may not be academically ready for university coursework, while those who transfer with too many hours run the risk of losing eligibility for financial aid and/or in-state tuition before completing a degree.*

» ***Differing levels of academic preparation*** *– Academic preparation, in general, is also a challenge for the universities since it is hard to effectively plan course sequences and degree programs when transfer students enter at different levels and with different academic backgrounds, including variations in the rigor of the courses offered at community colleges.*

In addition to transfer-specific challenges, transfer students at the institutions visited face challenges similar to those of native students who share their demographic

characteristics and associated attendance patterns and enrollment behaviors. In many cases, transfer students are working while enrolled and attending part-time, which has both academic and financial implications. Part-time attendance delays time to graduation, and, as a result, these students often reach the nine-year maximum time limit for receiving Pell Grants. While this is not a transfer-specific challenge, it is one common among transfers that further compounds the barriers to degree completion.

PROMISING PRACTICES

To mitigate the challenges described above, the institutions studied adopted a variety of policies and practices to support successful degree completion among transfer students. Some of these policies and practices were designed with transfer students' needs in mind while others were intended to assist low-income, first-generation and nontraditional-aged students more broadly but are relevant to many transfer students.

TRANSFER-SPECIFIC SERVICES

Several of the universities in this study offered a number of transfer-specific services. These services include:

» ***University transfer centers:*** *Such centers provide a range of academic, social, and financial resources specific to transfer students. Transfer centers also provide a central location for transfer students to connect and engage with each other and the campus, since many are working and are unfamiliar with the institution, and otherwise would not have an opportunity for integration.*

» ***Transfer advising:*** *Transfers display unique needs with respect to enrollment decisions that affect degree completion, as well as longer-term career goals that take into account their lifestyles and ongoing responsibilities. Transfer-specific academic advising and career counseling specifically target these typical transfer concerns to help students overcome barriers to not only degree completion but also job placement — or career advancement — following graduation.*

» ***Required, transfer-specific orientation:*** *While the concept of transfer-specific orientations received mixed reviews from staff and students alike, a general consensus emerged that if done in the right way (i.e., at convenient hours and with useful advising sessions), these orientations are a valuable service that help transfer students adjust. Additionally, several respondents noted that transfers may not initially think they need orientation upon enrollment since they have been to college before. Several weeks into the semester, however, they may realize that a four-year institution is unfamiliar terrain that may require some assistance to navigate. Therefore, offering orientation to transfers two to three weeks after the start of the fall semester may be the most optimal timing. Doing so would require a separate transfer advising session at the start of the semester.*

» ***Transfer "ambassador" mentors:*** *The transfer literature has documented the importance of "transfer agents" to act as advocates on behalf of transfer students as they transition into a new system (Bensimon & Dowd, 2008; Wassmer, Moore & Shulock, 2004). Peer mentors, sometimes referred to as "ambassadors," help transfer students acclimate to a new culture by drawing on their own experiences at the institution, often as transfer students themselves, who have already successfully learned to navigate campus services.*

» ***Transfer social and networking events:*** *Social opportunities are critical to transfer students who most often enter as juniors and have missed out on the 'bonding' that often occurs among students during their Freshman year. A lack of engagement was perhaps the greatest concern across institutions in their transfer students' success, and providing such targeted events is helpful to facilitating a connection to the campus.*

» ***Transfer financial literacy workshops:*** *It is critical that transfer students receive information regarding financial aid and financial literacy early on, even before enrolling at the four-year institution. Many community college transfer students need to take out loans for the first time at the four-year level, since grants were enough to cover costs in the two-year sector. In addition, we heard from many staff and students that transfers did not necessarily understand the importance of completing financial aid applications early, since deadlines may have been more flexible at the smaller, often close-knit and supportive community college campuses where staff proactively reminded students of upcoming deadlines.*

» ***Transfer scholarships:*** *Many institutions offer transfer-specific institutional grants, although they are on the whole merit-based and contingent upon maintaining a minimum GPA at the very least, and in some cases,*

upon membership in an honor society. While we would like to see purely need-based transfer scholarships that offer continuity of aid receipt between the two and four-year campuses, setting aside institutional funding for continuing students is at least a start.

TARGETED STUDENT SERVICES

Perhaps more important than offering transfer-specific services was the institution's overall approach to and understanding of students exhibiting characteristics common among community college transfers: namely, first-generation, nontraditional-aged, and part-time.

» ***Targeted student organizations*** *– Institutions that exhibited an understanding of and interest in nontraditional and first-generation students typically offered specific student organizations targeting these characteristics. These student organizations naturally drew in transfers who were a part of these very specific populations, and provided them with appropriate resources, connections to other students with similar life circumstances, and a sense of belonging.*

» ***Accessible services*** *– Institutions attentive to nontraditional student needs take into account their logistical scheduling considerations by offering registration and other services via their website or at "extended" hours when these students are most likely to be on campus.*

» ***Free transportation*** *– Another logistical concern for students who commute to campus is the expense and time that it takes to travel to and from these campuses that in some cases are up to two hours outside of the nearest major city. Several campuses offer free or discounted commuter shuttles or buses to students who live in neighboring towns along popular routes to the campus.*

» ***Childcare support*** *– Just as with transportation, having access to reliable and affordable childcare can be enough to make or break the success of a student with multiple responsibilities outside of the classroom. Campuses are in some cases able to funnel institutional funds into on-campus childcare support. Seemingly minor logistical considerations can make a huge impact on a student's ability to persist.*

COMMUNITY COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS

While the link between community college and four-year curricula has been demonstrated to improve transfer from the former to the latter (Kazis, 2006; Wellman, 2002), less emphasis has been placed on the importance of articulation agreements and other such partnerships on successful completion of transfers at four-year institutions. Seamless integration between degree plans at the two levels is critical after transfer to ensure that transfers are taking the courses they need to succeed.

» ***Institutional articulation agreements and guides*** *– Efforts by partnering two- and four-year colleges to clarify specific degree program requirements can help ensure that students take only the classes they need to graduate. Some universities have created formal articulation agreements with their feeder colleges to assure transfer students that the courses they take at the community college will apply to a specific major. These agreements are designed to make transfer as seamless as possible. Other receiving institutions have developed articulation guides for specific programs that can be used by transfer students and community college advisors in selecting the best courses for a potential transfer student.*

» ***Curricular alignment*** *–When universities and community colleges work together to align their curricula, students are better prepared for university-level work after transfer. This practice must be done on a departmental level, however, and requires the active engagement of faculty members as well as good communication between the institutions. The top performing four-year institution in this study also kept its partnering community colleges informed of student outcomes in specific programs, and collaborated to make any necessary curricular changes based on these data.*

» ***Reverse transfer and inverted 2+2 degree*** *– Reverse transfer agreements were also common among high performing institutions. These programs allow transfer students who have not yet obtained an associate's degree to be retroactively awarded that degree once they have accumulated enough credits at the four-year level. Similarly, the inverted 2+2 program allows for core curriculum completion post-transfer for students who were enrolled in an applied associate's degree program at the community college. While these agreements may not directly improve bachelor's degree completion rates, they do strengthen institutional partnerships and provide motivation to students along the pathway to keep striving for their ultimate goal.*

TRANSFER TRACKING

Administrators at several of the case study institutions

believed that transfer students were performing better than native students, because they were comparing transfer graduation rates to those of freshmen. This is not a fair comparison, given that transfer students in Texas most commonly enter the four-year institutions with 45 credits or more, at sophomore or junior status.[3] As a result, transfer students have already survived the attrition commonly seen during and after the first year of college and so can be expected to complete their degrees at higher rates than incoming freshmen.

Four-year institutions that are more successful in promoting degree completion for their incoming transfer students collect data on transfer students, compare those data to the outcomes of equivalent groups of students, and use those data to make decisions about policies and programs.

» ***Data on transfer students:*** *Institutions that pay attention to outcomes of specific student groups can better target their challenges with appropriate support. Data-driven decision making entails not only disaggregating and tracking data but acting on data, and being flexible enough to adjust support programs based on the outcomes of students. Truly successful institutions therefore track not only student performance but also student usage of support services, to gauge the effects of institutional policy and practice.*

» ***Transfer success committees:*** *Institutional leaders that emphasize transfer enrollment and success in their missions often take the initiative to form cross-campus committees that examine data on the institution's transfer students and propose strategies for improving transfer student success.*

TRANSFER PHILOSOPHIES

One major but unexpected finding is a stark contrast between two distinct transfer philosophies, both across and within the institutions. These transfer philosophies act as the guiding principles behind policies and practices that support transfer students. Leadership, staff, faculty, and students alike either express the need for transfer-specific support services to address transfers' unique characteristics and challenges, or, due to transfers in some cases comprising a majority of the student body, do not see a need for separate services beyond transfer orientation sessions and some initial academic advising. Rather, individuals holding the latter philosophy design institution-wide programs and services with transfer student characteristics in mind (namely, low-income, first-generation, nontraditional-aged, working or commuter students). Institutions with the latter philosophy repeatedly expressed a concern that creating separate transfer services would only serve to stigmatize or label these students rather than facilitate their integration into the institution.

Institutions also stressed that not all transfers are created equal. Transfer students enter institutions with a wide range of credits from a variety of academic fields at different colleges and universities. For this study, we are interested in studying transfer students from community colleges in particular, but one also tends to see a large number of 'swirlers' who make multiple moves between institutions of different types, and tend to display strikingly different characteristics and motivations for transfer than students typical of community colleges, such as those visited for our first study (Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009). Students who transfer from one four-year institution to another, rather than from a community college, for example, tend to come from higher income backgrounds and transfer due to institutional preference, rather than economic or academic reasons.

Even within community college transfers, students display a range of characteristics, experiences, and motivations. While community college transfer students are more likely than four-year transfers to be independent, nontraditional-aged, low-income, and first-generation (Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer), institutions we visited noted that they are seeing increasing numbers of traditional-aged transfer students who choose to begin at the community college level to save money rather than out of economic necessity. This new wave of community college transfer students may be more likely than the traditional community college transfer student to "blend in" to the campus rather than seek out transfer-specific services that cater to the needs of nontraditional students.

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[3] It is common for students in Texas to accumulate college credit through dual enrollment coursework in high school, so the comparison may warrant further refinement based on that assumption.

IMPLICATIONS

The diversity of transfer students described above, as well as the divergent philosophies about how best to support transfer students found at case study institutions, suggest the need for further research in this area. Nonetheless, patterns of policy and practice seen at the higher performing institutions in this study do suggest some important areas on which institutions and states can focus to improve transfer student success.

STATEWIDE TRANSFER ACCOUNTABILITY

» ***Identify transfer as a state priority*** *– The structure of Texas's higher education accountability system does not place sufficient value on community college transfer success. Successful transfer by community college students should be tracked, and systems put in place to reward community colleges that promote transfer to four-year institutions, even if the student has not completed an associate's degree. In addition, recognizing four-year institutions for their role assisting community college transfer students in completing a bachelor's degree will provide them with additional incentive to develop policies and practices that promote transfer student success. While universities are currently required to report to the state the four-year graduation rates of transfer students, little emphasis has been placed on these data by policymakers. Public universities should be required to report these graduation rates in comparison with native juniors, and successful institutions should be recognized for their work in this area.*

COHERENT TRANSFER PATHWAYS

» ***Four-year advising on community college campuses*** *– Advising from the four-year institutions must occur early, well before a student transfers. Successful partnerships with community colleges provide four-year academic advisors on site at the community college in a designated office on a regular basis, so students know where to go for reliable information about the transfer and articulation process. Ensuring that students receive accurate, updated information about transfer of course credits is critical to timely degree completion at the four-year institution.*

» ***Cross-institutional training*** *– Just as university advisors must take an active role on the partnering community college campus, so too must they provide opportunities for community college advisors to receive up-to-date information about university admission and degree requirements. Only through experiencing the four-year system can community college advisors gain a deep enough understanding to guide their students along the transfer pathway.*

» ***Online degree audit systems*** *– While nothing can replace in-person advising, giving students access to information about degree requirements and how their course choices fit into degree programs available at any time of day is critical to supplement advising sessions.*

» ***Joint admissions*** *– In addition to articulation agreements, some institutions offer joint admissions programs whereby community college students have access to the partnering four-year institution's advising and other resources on their campus while still taking classes at the community college. These programs help to engage the student with the university early on, as well as provide information about preparing for transfer.*

INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFER SUPPORT PRACTICES

» *Institutions should develop as regular practice the tracking of transfer success rates in comparison with an equivalent group of native peers, based on the average number of transfer credits. Institutions should disaggregate support service usage data by transfer status, if they do not already.*

» *Various departments and offices on campuses must become more aware of services available to transfers at their institution. For example, advisors interacting with transfers should have knowledge of transfer-specific financial aid.*

While the practice of configuring the support services for all students can serve to also effectively support transfer students, making sure that the unique and comprehensive needs of transfer students are identified and addressed is still crucial to their success. A committee or other dedicated entity that collects targeted data and evaluates the experiences of transfer students can be a beneficial practice.

CASE STUDIES

The Pell Institute visited a total of five four-year institutions to which the majority of low-income students from the institutions identified in our first study transfer (Taylor Smith, Miller, & Bermeo). The case studies below summarize factors related to transfer student success rates in comparison with those of native juniors at each of the five receiving institutions visited. Institutions in this report, while receiving a large number of community college transfer students that in some cases make up the majority of student bodies, display a range of transfer policies, support strategies and success rates. Tables showing the range of transfer policies and support strategies at these institutions can be found in Appendix A.

Each case study also presents a detailed analysis of information gleaned from our site visits, including the campus environment, leadership, student characteristics, transfer admission policies, advising, support services, major challenges and success factors. Together, these factors present a holistic view of the institutional approaches that might explain the level of their transfer performance. Due to the fact that we are examining not only promising practices but also institutional challenges, institutions remain anonymous in the report.

TRANSFER SUCCESS UNIVERSITY (TSU)

Total transfer gap: +1%	
Undergraduate enrollment: 14,302	Fall transfer admits: 2,000
THECB classification: Doctoral	Locale: distant town
Pell recipients: 33%	Underrepresented minority students: 28%

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

TSU is located in a small town 80 miles from a major city. TSU has experienced substantial growth in recent years, with enrollments increasing by almost 40 percent since 2000. Transfer students account for a large part of that growth, making up just under half of newly admitted undergraduates in 2010.

Although TSU has expanded in the areas of research and graduate education, undergraduate education remains a central focus for the university. Both the provost and the deans emphasized the importance of high quality teaching to faculty hiring, tenure, and promotion. Average undergraduate class size is 35 students, and 47 percent of lower division classes are taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty. Undergraduate programs with high national rankings include criminal justice, dance, theater, and mathematics. Degree programs with the most transfer graduates are criminal justice, academic studies, and general business, representing almost 40 percent of transfer students who completed a degree at TSU.

TRANSFER STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

TSU admits around 2,000 transfer students each fall semester, making up approximately half of the new undergraduate students admitted. Typically, an additional 650 transfer students enroll in the spring semester. In 2009, transfer students made up over half (56%) of TSU's graduating class, of which 80 percent transferred from community colleges.

Most transfer students arrive at TSU with a relatively large number of credit hours. In Fall 2009, incoming transfer students averaged 57 credit hours and the majority (86%) had over 30 transfer credit hours. However, most transfer students do not earn an associate's degree prior to transfer. In Fall 2008, for example, just under 21 percent of community college students who transferred to TSU had already received an associate's degree.

Transfer students at TSU are more likely than native juniors to be over the age of 24, and to attend part-time. Transfers are slightly less likely than native juniors to receive Pell Grants (see figure 1).

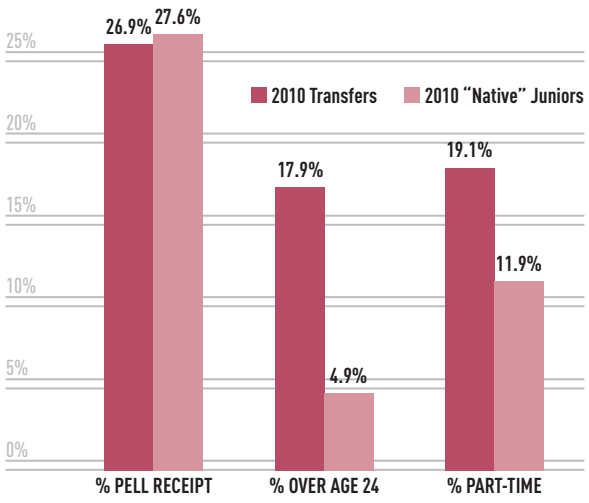


FIGURE 1. TSU TRANSFER VS. NATIVE AT-RISK CHARACTERISTICS

Source: TSU Institutional Research, 2011

TRANSFER PERFORMANCE

Transfer Success University (TSU) has the smallest total transfer gap of any of the institutions visited. While transfer students graduate at a rate 9 percentage points lower than native juniors, the rates are still high relative to other institutions in the state (see figures 2-3.). Interestingly, while transfers graduate at lower rates than juniors, they persist to the second year at a slightly higher rate, and graduate with slightly higher GPAs (see figure 4.). TSU's success relative to other institutions in the state can be explained by a focus on transfer student success, awareness of their challenges, and strong partnerships with community colleges. TSU does not offer many transfer-specific services but rather provides a range of services for students with characteristics (i.e. first-generation, nontraditional) typical of transfers.

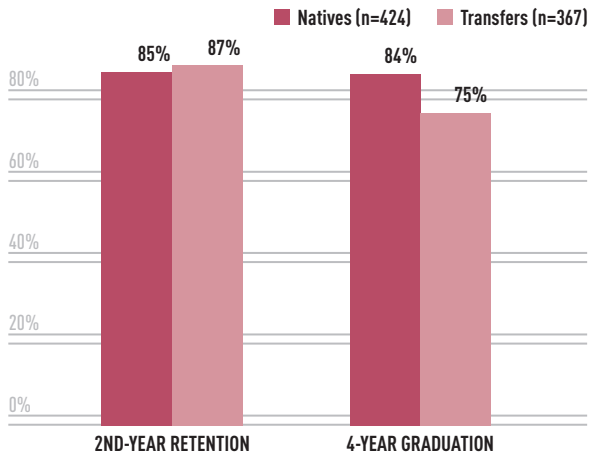
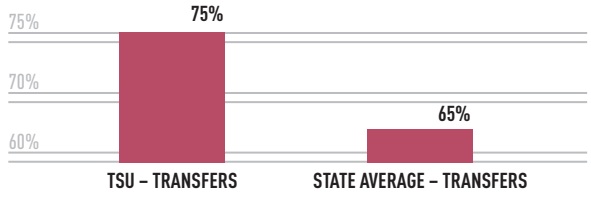


FIGURE 2.

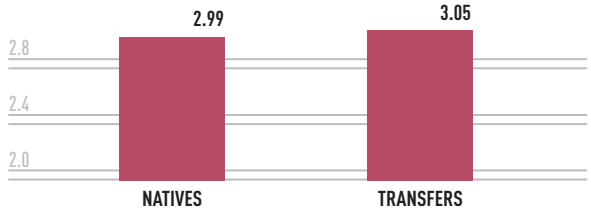
Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010



4-year Graduation

FIGURE 3.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010



GPA at Graduation

FIGURE 4.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010

Due to an awareness of and consideration for their transfer achievement gap, TSU has steadily increased its four-year transfer graduation rates since 2005. TSU has also found that transfer student success varies based on the number of credit hours students earn prior to transfer. In particular, they have seen lower retention rates for community college transfer students with less than 30 credit hours. Only 67 percent of these students were retained to a second year in 2009 versus 85 percent of those who transferred with 60 or more credit hours (TSU, 2010).

TRANSFER PHILOSOPHY

Transfer students are a priority for TSU. University leaders recognize that transfer students make up a substantial portion of the student body, and represent a key area for growth. TSU responds to this recognition by tracking transfer student experiences as a part of the university's institutional research efforts. The university has conducted several major studies comparing transfer student success with similar native cohorts. Transfer students are also the subject of regular discussions among academic affairs and enrollment management administrators.

In addition, the university's student success task force has taken on the issue of transfer students as part of its agenda. The committee includes faculty members from each college as well as representatives from student services, enrollment management, institutional research, the advising and mentoring center, and other critical areas. The committee chair is the Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs, who heads a student success initiative, created in 2004 with a focus on the first-year experience, that has now expanded to look at student success more broadly and is expected to take the lead in any new projects related to transfer student success. To facilitate the task force's work, TSU is administering a transfer student survey that looks at self-reported demographics, perceived problems, and services needed.

At this time, relatively few programs and services at TSU are tailored specifically to the transfer student population. Several TSU staff members mentioned that the goal is to have transfer students feel like they are part of the university as quickly as possible and that transfer student needs are already addressed by existing services. The overall approach to student success at the university is to provide the services needed by any student defined as "at-risk" (i.e., first-generation, nontraditional-aged), and to then offer those services as widely as possible.

On the other hand, TSU administrators and staff also recognize that pockets of activity related to transfer students occur on campus, but that these need to be brought together into a more comprehensive program based on the university's current model of transfer student success. In other words, existing services are not officially labeled as transfer-specific but do address transfer student needs and could perhaps be more effective if they were better coordinated across campus. This is perhaps representative of a key institutional transfer philosophy observed on the campuses visited: institutions such as TSU do not want to in any way label or stigmatize transfer students but rather want to meet their needs while integrating them into the institution.

Another key component of TSU's transfer philosophy is its efforts to maintain good relationships with the community colleges that send transfer students to the university. In addition to offering joint admissions and reverse transfer programs, discussed below, TSU produces a regular data report that allows community colleges to track their transfer students' performance at the university and make adjustments to their curriculum if certain groups of students are having difficulties. TSU department chairs work closely with counterparts at nearby community colleges to make sure that articulation agreements work. Over the last two years, 12 TSU departments have engaged in this work with community college counterparts. TSU also sponsors faculty exchanges with local community colleges in which TSU and community college faculty members make presentations on each other's campuses.

TRANSFER POLICIES

TSU accepts up to 66 transfer credit hours[4]. Students transferring to TSU with at least 18 credit hours must have at least a 2.0 GPA; students with 12-17 credit hours must have at least a 2.5 GPA. Students transferring with less than 12 credit hours must have at least a 2.5 GPA, and must also meet freshman admissions standards, which are based on a combination of high school class rank and SAT or ACT score. Students who have earned more than 12 college credits through dual credit programs while still enrolled in high school are also required to meet freshman admissions standards and are not treated as transfer students.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS

TSU has put considerable effort into developing policies that will smooth the transfer process, with much of this work spearheaded by the university articulation coordinator. The articulation coordinator has negotiated articulation agreements covering 50 different majors with more than 40 Texas community college districts, many of which are multi-campus systems enrolling large numbers of students. Transfer applicants and counselors from these colleges can view major-specific articulation agreements on the TSU website in order to get a sense of which transfer credits will apply to the intended major. TSU administrators believe that these articulation agreements greatly reduce the number of students who transfer credits that cannot be applied to their major.

TSU has found reverse transfer to be an effective way of promoting community college support for transfer, since the community colleges can get credit under the Texas Higher Education Accountability System for students who earn associate's degrees through reverse transfer. TSU has reverse transfer agreements with 16 community college districts, including the four nearby districts that account for more than half of the transfers into TSU. Students with at least 15 credit hours from a single community college are eligible for reverse transfer once they have earned 60 credit hours and have completed the state-mandated 42-hour core curriculum. Rather than having students apply for reverse transfer, a process many students see as unimportant, the community college's registrar requests eligible student records from TSU and conducts a degree audit, awarding associate's degrees to students who have met all requirements. While similar reverse transfer efforts have raised FERPA concerns in the past, the Apply Texas common application now includes a statement that allows universities to send student information back to community colleges. One community college district has had 93 percent success in awarding reverse transfer associate's degrees to its students who

[4] An additional four credit hours may transfer in Kinesiology if that course is required as part of the sending institution's core curriculum

transfer to TSU, and another has seen a 20 percent increase in the number of associate's degrees it awards.

TSU also offers joint admissions programs with five community college districts. Under this program, students with at least 12 credit hours can be admitted to TSU while still enrolled at the community college and have access to TSU resources such as the library, athletic events, and an email account. Jointly admitted students can also have their transcripts evaluated by TSU each semester and are able to use TSU's degree plan software so that they can make educated decisions about the courses they take.

Advising of prospective transfer students at community colleges is an area of concern for TSU. Many community colleges are moving to part-time advisors for financial reasons, there is high turnover among counselors, and training is often focused on advising for core curriculum. Advisors need to know specific information about the receiving university and potential major in order to give students the best advice. TSU's online transcript system and articulation agreements can help in this process and are available for use by community college advisors. TSU also works to train community college advisors through an annual workshop held on the TSU campus and advising visits to community college campuses, particularly Lone Star College.

ADVISING

The advising center plays a central role in retention efforts at TSU. Prior to enrolling for their first semester at TSU, transfer students are required to undergo academic advising through the advising center. The advising center encourages transfer students to come to campus to be advised but also conducts advising by phone and email. Transfer students, like entering freshmen, must also be advised before enrolling for their second semester.

Nearly all (95 percent) TSU students receive advising each semester. The advising center serves as the central student support resource at TSU, providing academic advising, mentoring, and workshops on topics such as study skills and time management. Advising center staff members consider it important to make sure that students don't feel stigmatized by coming to the advising center. Mandatory advisement helps with this effort, since many students are required to visit the advising center to be advised. Similarly, workshops such as GRE preparation underscore the point that the advising center's services are intended for all students, not just those with academic difficulties.

Some academic departments advise their own juniors and seniors, but the advising center is open to anyone who wants advisement. Advising by professional and faculty advisors through the advising center is mandatory for students with GPAs below 2.5, students enrolled in developmental education, and students with 90 credit hours or more. However, several TSU students complained that they received inaccurate information during advising at the advising center, suggesting some limitations to this advising model.

The advising center's referral programs are particularly important in promoting student success. These programs rely on referrals from deans, faculty, advisors, and students themselves and usually serve students who are having academic difficulty. The advising center receives over 1,600 referrals each semester and offers a number of mentoring programs for referred students, including programs for students on academic probation and those returning to TSU after academic suspension. These programs require students to attend a six-week study skills course and to meet regularly with an advising center counselor who can refer them to additional support services as needed. The center also offers a voluntary self-referral mentoring program for any student in need of academic support.

ORIENTATION

TSU offers an optional transfer orientation session separate from its mandatory freshman orientation. Because many transfer students apply in the fall for the following fall semester and are able to register in the spring for fall classes, the orientation session is less focused on advising than the freshman orientation, which may reduce students' motivation to attend. TSU staff members report that only about 9 percent of transfer students participate in orientation. Staff members note that transfer students sometimes think they know everything they need to know since they have already attended college. In addition, the transfer students most likely to attend orientation are those who were involved in student activities at their community college, which means that the least engaged students who most need to make connections at TSU are less likely to take advantage of this resource. Future plans for transfer orientation at TSU include adding a student organization fair and more time for students to network

with one another, both activities aimed at promoting student engagement.

Since many transfer students will be entering upper-division coursework in their declared major, the individual TSU colleges also play a role in orientation and advisement for transfer students. The College of Education, for example, has its own advisement center and assigns current students as mentors to transfer students. The College of Business Administration hosts a professional organization fair, with food provided, to get new transfer students involved in student activities.

FINANCIAL AID

Institutional transfer scholarships are available to entering transfer students with at least 45 credit hours and a 2.75 GPA. Award amounts range from $1,000-$3,000 per year, based on the student's GPA. These awards are automatically applied to a transfer student's financial aid package and are renewable for a second year, provided the student maintains at least a 3.25 GPA. This scholarship provides a total of $1.3 million to approximately 800 transfer students each year.

Because TSU recognizes that financial concerns are a source of student attrition, the university has created the Student Money Management Center. This center offers individual professional and peer financial counseling, an online financial literacy tool, workshops on topics such as budgeting, managing loans and credit, preventing identity theft, and saving money. Speakers from the center also present on financial literacy topics at classes and student organization meetings. While this center is available to all TSU students, it may be of particular value to transfer students, many of whom come from low-income backgrounds.

SUPPORT SERVICES

None of the many support services offered at TSU specifically target transfer students, although most services are available to them. All support programs are expected to track usage by different student groups, including transfer students, to make sure that their services are reaching all students who may need them. TSU students mentioned using these support services and indicated generally positive experiences with them.

A key support program (in addition to advising) is the early alert system, through which faculty members can provide referrals for struggling students. The advising center then invites the students to come in so that they can be connected with appropriate services. To reach referred students, advising center counselors first send an email. If no response is received, they call the student and leave a message. If the student still does not respond, they send a letter to the student's permanent address (which can lead to parents becoming involved). Faculty members have embraced the early alert system because it allows those who teach large classes to help students more effectively. Referring faculty members receive information on what happens to the student and are able to see if further intervention is necessary. The early alert system drew 588 referrals in fall 2010.

Tutoring is offered to all TSU students through three academic support centers in reading, writing, and math. The Reading Center serves mostly traditional students with a focus on textbook reading strategies. The director does attend transfer orientation to promote the Reading Center. The Writing Center reaches a substantial portion of the first-year student population through freshman composition. Transfer students don't have the same early contact with the center as freshmen do, but the center is seeing more referrals from upper-division courses. The Math Center serves primarily developmental math students and students enrolled in lower-division, non-major math courses. They see many non-traditional students, including "math-phobic" transfer students who have not yet completed their core curriculum math requirements.

Student Affairs sponsors a faculty-staff mentoring program for new students. Program mentors participate in social activities with new students, provide referrals to student services, and serve as a resource during the student's transition to campus life. This program is available to transfer students, but most of the students who participate in it are freshmen.

TARGETED LOW-INCOME/ FIRST-GENERATION SUPPORT

While the advising center and academic support centers are available to all TSU students, the university also offers some programs targeted to specific student groups. These include:

» *TRIO Student Support Services, which serves at least 165 first-generation, low-income, or disabled students, about 40 percent of whom are transfer students. Students are recruited into the program through collabo-*

ration with other programs on campus, and through partnering community colleges. Student Support Services makes a deliberate effort to form peer groups for non-traditional and transfer students who come together to network and share resources. Several TSU transfer students who are part of Student Support Services emphasized its value in helping them succeed at the university.

» *Mentoring and academic support services for minority male students. This small group of students also participate in social and service activities. While this program is currently available only to first-time freshmen, the university is working with the nearby community college's minority male initiative to develop a similar program for transfer students.*

» *The Veterans Resource Center, which offers services for the more than 800 veteran students at TSU, 90 percent of whom are transfer students. Staff members recruit veteran students, certify veterans' benefits, and provide referrals to medical, psychological, and community resources. The center offers a mandatory orientation for veteran students at the start of the fall semester and is working to address ongoing problems with the retention of veteran students.*

» *Although there is no student organization targeted specifically at transfer students, many members of the nontraditional student organization (NTSO) are transfer students. This group was created by students in 2005 and currently has 200 students on its email list. The NTSO sponsors meetings with speakers on topics such as career counseling, parenting, and time management.*

MAJOR TRANSFER CHALLENGES

SOCIAL

The most important transfer student challenge, from TSU's perspective, seems to be social integration. Staff members mentioned that transfer students may have difficulties adapting to university life. They see the key challenge as one of how best to help transfer students create a sense of belonging through better integration into campus activities. Staff members also emphasized differences between traditional transfer students and nontraditional ones, noting that it can be easier for traditional transfer students to transition to TSU, even though they may have to adapt to not having as much parental support if they are living away from home for the first time. Nontraditional transfer students, on the other hand, need more help connecting with the university and may feel out of place surrounded by younger students.

ACADEMIC

Another key concern is academic advising and intervention. Transfer students may have trouble adapting to harder classes and a more demanding workload than they experienced at a community college. Taking on a heavier academic workload can be a particular problem for commuter students who work off-campus, and can result in transfer students going on academic probation during their first semester at TSU.

FINANCIAL

Financial needs are also a challenge for transfer students, who are paying higher tuition and fees and may be living on their own for the first time. Some transfer students are not able to find jobs in the town where TSU is located, and end up commuting to campus. One TSU student mentioned that it is more difficult to obtain financial aid as an upper-division student, because the institution sets aside more aid for incoming freshmen.

INSTITUTIONAL

The challenge that transfer students cited most often was the difficulty of navigating university bureaucracy. They felt that TSU students must accept responsibility for their own success by taking advantage of all the opportunities that the university has to offer. However, several students also indicated that they saw taking on that responsibility as part of what they needed to learn in college.

STATE POLICY

Many of the challenges identified by TSU administrators relate to state policy. The state-mandated core curriculum adds complexity to articulation efforts since the requirements vary from institution to institution. While the number of hours required for each subject is standard across the state, the institution decides which specific courses meet those requirements. Federal FERPA regulations have made reverse transfer efforts challenging. State policies designed to limit the number of state-funded credit hours per student are more likely to affect transfer students than native students. If students attempt more than 30 credit hours over the minimum required in their degree program, TSU receives no state formula funding. Some of that cost is then passed along to the student through higher tuition charges. In addition, state limits on the number of courses a student may drop without penalty make it difficult to counsel a student

to drop a course, even if he or she is failing or needs to reduce the course load in a given semester. These policies may also penalize students who want to explore different potential career paths or change majors, options that several TSU students emphasized as important to their college experience.

TRANSFER SUCCESS FACTORS

TSU administrators attribute transfer student success primarily to institutional culture and services. They take pride in the university's welcoming and collaborative environment and the value placed on student success. They believe that TSU tries to create an environment where students receive personal attention and the support they need to succeed. They see TSU's purpose as building a university with strong academic credentials and national prestige but still continuing to serve students in the community.

In terms of transfer student success, TSU administrators emphasize policies that improve advisement and articulation as well as building solid relationships with feeder community colleges. The growing recognition that transfer students may need additional services once they arrive at TSU is now being addressed through the same sort of institutional work that was previously focused on improving success for first time in college students.

TRANSFER ATTENTIVE UNIVERSITY (TAU)

Total transfer gap: -6%	
Undergraduate enrollment: 24,810	Fall transfer admits: 3,192
THECB classification: Doctoral	Locale: town, fringe
Pell recipients: 21%	Underrepresented minority students: 28%

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

TAU is located in a small city between two major metropolitan areas. Because of its fairly central location in Texas, TAU is "one of few [institutions] drawing on all areas of the state" for community college transfer students. Location seemed to be the main motivator for transferring to TAU among students in our focus group: all wanted to be "away from home but close to home," and appreciated the combination of a small town feel with close proximity to a large city.

Originally founded as a teacher's college, TAU now offers 97 bachelor's degree programs, 89 master's degree programs, and nine doctoral programs. Over one-third of undergraduates major in liberal arts programs. A new nursing program housed at a branch campus is attracting many students as well. The average undergraduate class size is 29, and 30 percent of lower-division courses are taught by tenure-track faculty.

As TAU grows, it retains its emphasis on serving nontraditional and underrepresented student populations. Most recently the institution has particularly focused on its Latino population, first as an emerging HSI for several years, and this past year surpassing the 25% Hispanic enrollment requirement to be officially recognized as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). TAU is now focusing on providing the appropriate resources to accommodate the recent surge not only in a diverse student body, but also in overall growth. Enrollment has nearly doubled since 1990 from approximately 18,000 students, and the provost expects the growth to continue at the pace of roughly 1,000 students per year.

TAU provides a traditional, collegiate, residential atmosphere with active organizations on campus. Many noted that the institution retains a small campus feel despite its large enrollment size. This is important particularly for those transfer students adapting from small community colleges, where interactions were "more personalized." It is critical that these students feel a sense of belonging to the community.

One administrator noted that the institution is currently hiring 30-40 faculty per year to keep up with growth, and is focusing on diversifying its faculty to reflect a diverse student body. Staff and administrators stressed a "spirit of collaboration," noting that one "cannot exist here in silo." In other words, staff work together across departments, leveraging their respective areas of expertise to help meet students' needs. The Vice President of Student Affairs enacted a "one referral rule" that students should not have to ask more than one staff member the same question.

The Dean of Liberal Arts emphasizes teaching above all else. She makes it clear to faculty that they will be evaluated by students each semester, and takes evaluations seriously. All first-year faculty attend a teacher excellence workshop. Others concurred that TAU retains its history as a teachers institution, and only hires faculty who are interested in teaching and committed to student success.

TRANSFER CHARACTERISTICS

Over half of students (52%) at TAU are transfers, mostly from community colleges (80%). Transfer students at TAU are more likely than native juniors to be Pell recipients, over the age of 24, and to attend part-time. Roughly the same percentage of transfer and native junior students are the first in their families to attend college (see figure 5).

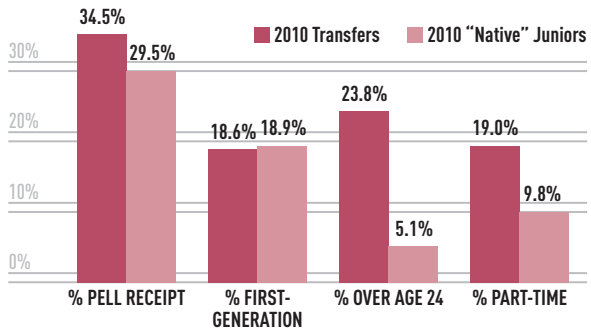


FIGURE 5. TAU TRANSFER VS. NATIVE AT-RISK CHARACTERISTICS

Source: TAU Institutional Research, 2011

TRANSFER PERFORMANCE

Transfer students at Transfer Attentive University (TAU) are graduating 11 percentage points behind native juniors, but still 5 percent higher than the state average (See figure 6-7). Transfers are also persisting to the second year at a slightly lower rate than natives, and graduating with roughly the same GPA (see figure 8). TAU is highly aware of the challenges facing transfer students, who represent half of undergraduate students at the institution. Due to transfers being in the majority, TAU does not offer transfer-specific support services but rather considers the needs of transfers in all of its services.

TRANSFER PHILOSOPHY/APPROACH

At Transfer Attentive University (TAU), approximately half the student body is made up of transfer students — thus they are engrained in the mindset of the institutional staff and policies. In fact, TAU enrolls nearly as many transfers as freshmen each year (3,611 compared with 3,930 in 2010). However, because they make up such a large portion of the population, they are not necessarily considered to be any different than students who began at the institution.

Nearly every administrator we met with had a variation on the philosophy that transfers do not need special programs. Rather, the institution is focused on retention of all students. This is not meant to imply that the institution does not give special consideration to transfers.

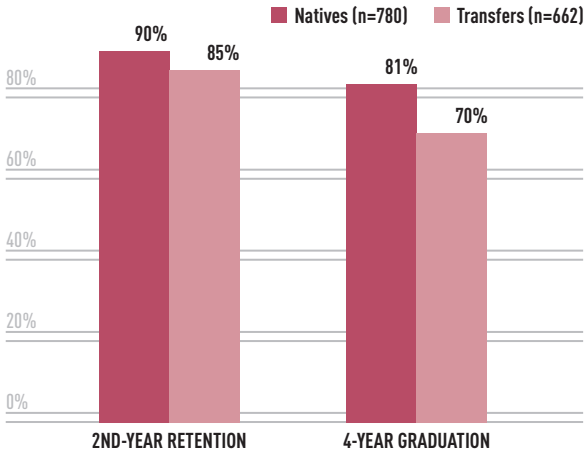
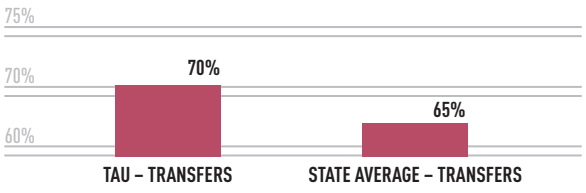


FIGURE 6.

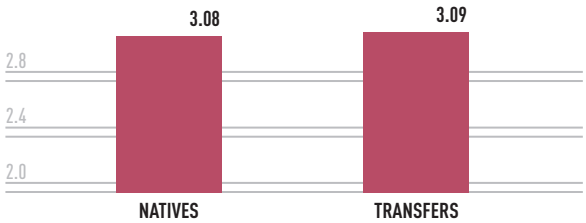
Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010



4-year Graduation

FIGURE 7.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010



GPA at Graduation

FIGURE 8.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010

As one administrator stated, "transfer students are not a second thought." In fact transfers are a "vital part of campus." Transfers were also described as "part of integrative culture" and "not second class." The institution "spends a lot of time making sure [transfers] feel connected," but "not segregated."

To some degree, transfers are given special attention. A student affairs transfer study committee determined the importance of making a connection with transfers within their first two weeks on campus. And staff did note some transfer-specific materials such as an informational website, and specialized recruiters. Many staff recognize that transfers have different timelines than other students, as well as different levels of involvement and responsibilities such as families and jobs.

Another administrator had a different take; he felt the institution needs to help transfer students "overcome the stigma of already knowing." In other words, some staff might believe that transfers already have institutional knowledge and don't need "freshman stuff" when in fact the four-year institution is a new experience and transfers experience an adjustment period just as new students do.

Staff largely felt that it is "more acceptable" to be a transfer at TAU, whereas at other institutions, transfer students may feel like "more of an outsider" if they had not been there since freshman year. On the other hand, some felt that TAU is a "bifurcated system" due to the two discrete missions to serve transfers and more traditional students.

Institutional representatives also concurred that defining one typical transfer student is virtually impossible, because they vary so much on the number of credits and types of courses with which they transfer. Nearly all administrators we met with believe that transfers perform equal or better in comparison with native freshmen based on data, because they are comparing graduation rates from the same starting point despite the fact that transfers do not enter the institution as first-year students.

TRANSFER POLICIES

TAU accepts up to 66 transfer credit hours. Students transferring to TAU with at least 30 credit hours must have at least a 2.25 GPA; students with less than 30 credit hours must also meet freshman admissions standards, which are based on a combination of high school class rank and SAT or ACT score.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS

Advisors at TAU are involved in partnerships with community colleges, through the academic transfer advising group. About 20 TAU advisors travel to two local community colleges as part of the university's outreach efforts to provide community college students with information about academic programs and admission requirements at the university. TAU also provides data for community colleges that send more than five students in the fall, including aggregate retention rates, first-year GPA, and a comparison between each college's transfers and all transfers. A transfer advisory council meets annually. Community college representatives visit the campus and receive reports on their transfer student performance. They discuss any concerns regarding transfer agreements.

TAU has a long history with one of its main partnering community colleges, which used to share a branch campus. They remain close partners today, and have a reverse transfer agreement whereby once transfer students accumulate 70 credit hours while at the four-year institution, the community college will automatically award them an associate's degree. TAU also partners with its main feeder by staffing designated office space at a community college, and by holding a transfer day for community college students who can visit to learn more about the institution. Many students — both transfers and "natives" — take community college courses at home in the summers to save money.

The institution currently claims to have over 1,000 articulation agreements with 19 partnering community colleges. The Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs at TAU is responsible for articulation agreements, although they have become less common as some at the institution feel they are more "ceremonial" documents. The institution prioritizes resources in transfer planning guides, which involve the collaboration between faculty, the registrar's office and admissions. Administrators feel that providing detailed guides is "pivotal," yet uncommon in other states.

Approximately six years ago, TAU representatives visited community colleges of HSI status, and met with their chairs to understand their courses. TAU then developed a matrix with steps to articulate 44 programs. They completed that document within one year, and held a celebration at the college to "kick off" the partnership. Staff stress the involvement and dedication required by staff to complete such in-depth documentation.

ADVISING

Currently, advising is handled through a central office with satellites in each department. Until five years ago, students were group advised in general sessions before the start of the fall semester. Then, advising was moved online, along with individual advising before enrollment. The university found that group advising was not effective, and has seen an increase in GPA and persistence rates since changing that practice. Students are currently advised twice a semester, but mostly by email. The university would like to shift to more in-person advising.

Staff tell us advisors take into account nontraditional considerations, such as students' commuting time when scheduling classes. They make an attempt to minimize the number of days that these students must be on campus since many have to accommodate work schedules.

A one-stop advising center is being planned for 2012. The center will initially focus on freshmen, but will eventually serve transfers as well. The center will house roughly 20 advisors and in addition to academic advising, will provide mentoring, career counseling, and veterans support services. The learning and writing centers may also be housed there. Currently, eight advising centers are located throughout the campus, one for each college. A liaison from each college will work with the advising center, which will also house major and career fairs. The idea is to move to a one-stop model from the current structure, which is scattered throughout the campus. Currently, advising has a high turnover rate, and it takes time to train new advisors and orient them to campus.

The central advising center is expected to reduce advisors' workloads and their student ratio to 300:1. The advising center will also move scheduling and advising records online, to help automate the transfer of credits. TAU will also be adding a new degree auditing system which will allow students to "explore scenarios," for example, how many courses they will need to complete if they decide to change majors.

As one administrator stated, you "can't overestimate value of good advising." One problem the institution has run into with advising, however, is that it is an entry-level job which requires time-consuming training, and staff often leave after just a year or two because of low salaries and lack of opportunities for internal promotions.

ORIENTATION

The institution offers an optional transfer-specific orientation. Transfer orientation addresses issues typically faced by transfer students, such as transfer shock. Staff and faculty at orientation encourage transfer students to use resources available on campus, such as the writing center. Students also meet with their academic advisors during orientation. An online orientation is available as well, but students who attend online must pass a test of campus policies including transfer of credits and degree requirements, and must subsequently set up a time to meet with their advisors in person.

Students did not feel that transfer orientation was helpful; the advising portion in particular was too brief. They learned about transferring credits as a group, but the one-on-one time with advisors was more limited. Some initially felt that orientation wasn't necessary for students who had already attended college, but then eventually realized that every campus is different.

A resource fair originally intended for veterans also targets transfer students, with information about campus services and activities. This event is particularly appealing for those who were unable to attend orientation in person.

FINANCIAL AID

The multicultural office also offers a scholarship program to 50-60 students each year for any low-income, first-generation student, including transfers. This scholarship provides $1,000-$2,000 per semester. Of approximately 200 scholars, approximately one-fourth are transfer students. Scholars meet weekly with graduate students, attend a leadership conference, and are required to maintain a minimum GPA. Scholars must also attend financial aid workshops to understand the requirements for keeping their scholarships.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

The learning center provides academic assistance to students across all levels and subjects. In addition to tutoring, the center offers Supplemental Instruction (SI), and assistance with the transfer equivalency guide. Students, including transfers, also visit the learning center to prepare for graduate entrance exams such as the GMAT and LSAT.

The learning center is funded by various academic departments and student fees, and employs a total of 40 student tutors and 40-50 SI leaders. The learning center is open until 8:30 p.m. on Monday and Wednesday, and also has Sunday hours. The lab has drop-in hours and the writing center is appointment-based. The learning center is now located in the library, which staff feel is a central location for attracting students who are not otherwise engaged on campus.

In the fall of 2010, over 2,800 students made more than 11,000 visits to the learning center. Only one-third (34 percent) of students who visited the learning center were freshmen; the rest were sophomores or above (of which many were likely to be transfers although the staff do not track specifically for transfers). Over one-fifth (23 percent) were over the age of 23.

The SI coordinators receive intensive training and attend monthly content meetings and present at conferences. They can reach three different levels of certification. Additional testing is required for some subjects such as chemistry. SI leaders focus on learning process strategies and "weave" them into course content, rather than simply "reciting concepts." SI targets difficult courses such as organic chemistry, a "major barrier" for transfer students. Another difficult course for transfers is business calculus, which they are required to complete before entering the business school.

TAU has implemented an early alert system to monitor students who may be at risk of leaving the institution. In addition to contacting students directly, the system reaches out to faculty to solicit any concerns about specific students. Identified students are then referred to the learning center for any academic difficulties, or to counseling for any personal problems.

TRANSFER SUPPORT

While TAU does not offer a great deal of transfer-specific services, it targets transfer student characteristics through programs available to all students, including SSS, the multicultural office, non-traditional and first-generation organizations, and veterans organizations.

Support offices including advising, SSS and multicultural programming proactively connect students to academic resources such as tutoring, even if students do not request that support. Students often realize too late into the semester that they need the extra help. Support staff feel that transfer students show greater appreciation than freshmen for campus resources, because they relied on similar resources at the community college and "understand their value."

The institution has a first-generation organization, and a nontraditional student organization, both of which cater to transfer students. The first-generation organization is about eight years old, and a collaboration between the retention committee, career services and multicultural services, among other offices. The career center took the lead in forming the organization. The first-generation organization membership numbers have dwindled due to a change in program leadership. Activities consist of weekly meetings, community service, field trips, and an annual conference.

The institution also has two veterans organizations, which many transfer students join. In addition, TRIO Student Support Services (described below) serves low-income, first-generation students, many of whom are community college transfer students.

TARGETED LOW-INCOME, FIRST-GENERATION SUPPORT

» *SSS at TAU provides peer mentors, cultural outings, financial literacy workshops, and weekly one-on-one tutoring to low-income, first-generation students — including both transfers and new students. The tutoring, however, is mainly available for core coursework. The three SSS staff also act as success coaches and provide three required sessions each semester for every student in the program. SSS also requires that students personally deliver mid-semester reports to faculty, which presents them with the opportunity to build relationships with faculty.*

» *The director of SSS at TAU noted that transfer students often participated in SSS at their community colleges, and are therefore aware of and know to look for the service once on TAU's campus. Of the 16 transfer students in SSS this past academic year, 88 percent were in good standing, and 94 percent persisted to their second year at TAU.*

» *In addition to SSS, the multicultural office at TAU is quite active in providing programming and services to first-generation students, including transfers. The multicultural office sends targeted reminders to students about financial aid and registration deadlines. Students often find out about multicultural program-*

ming through word of mouth and staff presentations at orientations (both general and transfer-specific). Multicultural staff are also in frequent contact with parents of students in the program, and welcome them on campus for receptions and meetings. Students from the multicultural office conduct an interactive diversity presentation to all incoming students in the fall.

TRANSFER CHALLENGES

Some have difficulty adjusting to the size of campus, and to university-specific processes such as registration. Other challenges are more closely tied to their common characteristics, given that transfer students at TAU are more likely than other students to be older, working, and attending part-time.

ACADEMIC

Transfers at TAU often experience a drop in grades directly following the transition from community college. Classes at the community college were smaller, and transfers must adjust to no longer having close relationships with faculty — particularly for those who still require introductory courses, which tend to be much larger than upper-division courses specific to the major.

Students described community college classes as a "family" atmosphere, and many are still in touch with their community college faculty. At TAU, they feel more like a "number not a name," they have to wait in a long line to talk to professors after class or make an appointment to see them, which was not necessary at the two-year level.

One student became a research assistant for a professor, and found it easier to develop relationships with faculty once he began taking smaller classes in his major. He found it more intimidating to approach faculty in the larger introductory lectures. He feels that "faculty respect you if you show interest."

Another adjustment for transfer students is attempting to register for classes that fill up quickly. As staff at TAU noted, transfers and first-generation students in general do not understand the "complexities and processes of the system." It can be "easy to slip through cracks and get lost."

Most transfers enter TAU with specific degree goals; few are undeclared. According to staff, transfers who enter as juniors are more successful than those with fewer credits. Staff also tell us that students complaining about credits not transferring have likely changed degree programs.

Transfer students who do not complete the core at the community college can face additional challenges. In some cases, transfers in certain majors such as STEM programs have not yet taken all of the institution's prerequisites needed to enroll in upper-level coursework. Core courses at TAU are not only large but also are considered to have "heavy" critical thinking and writing components, which may be an adjustment for some transfer students. Faculty and advisors rely heavily on the writing center to help students with deficiencies.

FINANCIAL

Transfers must in a sense "relearn" the financial aid and registration processes after leaving the community college, which in many cases had more flexible policies and deadlines. It is critical that the institution communicate financial aid deadlines and timeframes to transfer students just as they would to any new student.

Unlike in community college where tuition was lower and covered between Pell Grants and students' salaries, four-year institutions require that these students take out loans, which they did not previously need. Staff also found that many students who were eligible for aid were simply unaware of certain programs such as the SMART grant and work/study. Transfer students need to be aware not only of financial aid deadlines and requirements, but also of the specifics of loan repayment, since they may not have participated in these aid programs at the community college.

SOCIAL

One student faced a social adjustment after transferring; she found it difficult to make new friends at first. Another was not prepared for the level of writing in her classes. Others face personal challenges such as family illnesses, feeling "torn between helping family and prioritizing school."

Another challenge is that transfers do not have time for student organizations on campus that might otherwise ease the transition. Transfers, like many nontraditional or first-generation students, must continue working while enrolled to support themselves and in many cases their families, and face issues such as time management. Student Affairs staff find it hard to connect with transfer students to get them more involved on campus.

INSTITUTIONAL

Some staff feel they cannot help students with financial and personal issues. It seems there could be greater col-

laboration between advisors and financial aid, however, as the former seemed unaware of scholarships available to transfer students.

One senior administrator noted that the logistics of campus, in particular a shortage of parking, is the single biggest issue as opposed to any academic challenge. The institution does offer bus service to nearby cities, however, for transfers and other students who live off-campus and need financial assistance with transportation.

TRANSFER SUCCESS FACTORS

Staff feel the President and leadership at the institution are "committed to student success" and closing achievement gaps. The institution currently has a retention management and planning committee, and had a student affairs transfer team for six years. The transfer team advocated for transfer students on campus and conducted a survey which resulted in some transfer-specific services. The transfer team was made up of representatives from academic affairs, the business office, advisors, and University College/undecided majors. Members of the transfer team noted a need to provide transfers with a connection on campus. Efforts eventually moved to the retention management office.

The institution is also focused on proper course sequencing for both first-year students and transfers. For example, history is particularly writing intensive, and often poses a challenge not only for transfers but also for first-year students who are underprepared academically and not as exposed to writing in high school. For that reason, advisors now strongly advise delaying that course until the second semester at the institution or successful passing of English composition.

TAU conducts an academic program review every five to six years, not only for external accreditation purposes but for internal planning. Reviews include curriculum sequencing as well as student organizations. Campus leaders at TAU describe focusing on understanding data so they can forecast courses up to a year in advance. They solicit feedback from faculty and advisors and look for "bottlenecks," particularly with transfers in mind.

Despite institutional transfer planning, some recent initiatives focus on first-year students. The new academic support center, for example, only serves freshmen, although the institution has considered implementing a transfer center. Other support services such as SSS and multicultural programming seek to foster a welcoming environment for transfer students. Campus leaders recognize that transitioning to campus requires a "concerted effort" early on to help transfer students feel connected.

TRANSFER EMERGING UNIVERSITY (TEU)

Total transfer gap: -18%	
Undergraduate enrollment: 27,812	Fall transfer admits: 4,012
THECB classification: Emerging Research	Locale: city, midsize
Pell recipients: 17%	Underrepresented minority students: 26%

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

Transfer Emerging Institution (TEU) is located in a small suburban city in North Texas. TEU has historically been a stand-alone institution but is now the flagship campus of an emerging university system. TEU offers 97 bachelor's degree programs, 101 master's degree programs, and 49 doctoral programs. The university's annual budget was around $788 million as of 2009-10.

Like most Texas universities, TEU is growing at a fast pace, with enrollment increasing by 36 percent between 1999 and 2009. TEU enrolled nearly 30,000 undergraduates in Fall 2009 and awarded 5,860 bachelor's degrees in 2008-09. Only 16 percent of undergraduates live on campus. TEU remains primarily a regional university, with the majority (88 percent) of its students identified as Texas residents. More than two-thirds (69 percent) of TEU students in Fall 2009 came from the Dallas-Fort-Worth Metroplex.

TEU was founded in 1890 as a teachers college. Over the next century, the university's name changed six times as the university's size and mission expanded, with the current name adopted in 1988. Today, the university describes itself as "a student-centered emerging research university, offering a breadth of disciplines from engineering to visual arts." Categorized by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as a research university with high research activity, TEU is trying to move towards what has been called "tier one" or "national" research university status by making substantial investments in new faculty and facilities in order to attract additional external research funding.

The Carnegie Foundation (2010) classifies TEU's undergraduate program as balanced between degrees awarded in arts and sciences and in professional fields. Fields in which the university has traditionally had strong undergraduate programs include music, visual arts, and education. More than one-third (35 percent) of undergraduate students at TEU major in fields in the College of Arts and Sciences with another 13 percent majoring in Education, 11 percent in Public Affairs, and 7 percent in Visual Arts. Popular majors include general business, teacher education, biology, psychology, radio-television-film, kinesiology, and journalism. Average undergraduate class size is 45 students, and 31 percent of lower division classes are taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty, reflecting the research focus of the institution's faculty. Transfer students make up half the majors in arts and sciences, more than half in business, and nearly three-quarters in education.

TRANSFER CHARACTERISTICS

Transfer students at TEU are more likely than native junior peers to be Pell recipients, over the age of 24, part-time, and independent (see figure 9). Underrepresented minority students made up roughly one-third of incoming transfer students in 2008-09. A student experience survey conducted at TEU in 2009 found that transfer students were significantly more likely than native students to report lower family incomes.

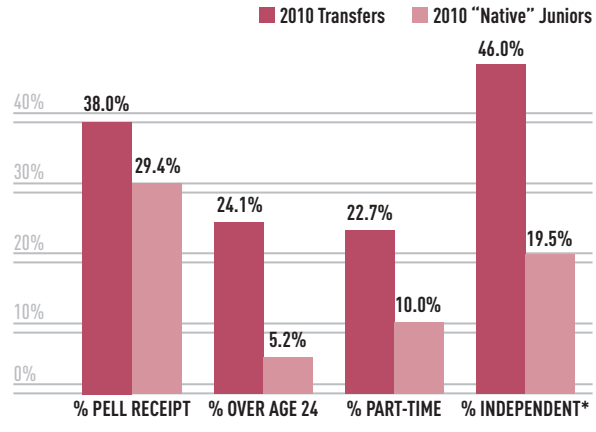


FIGURE 9. TEU TRANSFER VS. NATIVE AT-RISK CHARACTERISTICS

Source: TEU Institutional Research, 2011
*Dependency status reported for financial aid applicants only

Among transfer applicants to TEU in Fall 2009, 59 percent were admitted and 41 percent enrolled. In that semester, TEU enrolled 4,012 new transfer students, representing 53 percent of 7,584 new undergraduate students. Of these new transfer students, 9 percent were admitted as seniors, 39 percent as juniors, 43 percent as sophomores, and 9 percent as freshmen. In addition, TEU typically admits an additional 1,700 or so transfer students in the spring semester but admits few new freshmen, and as a result, transfer students make up approximately 60 percent of new students at the university in any given year.

Most students who transfer to TEU from community colleges in Texas do not earn an associate's degree prior to transfer. In Fall 2008, for example, only 28 percent of community college students who transferred to TEU had already received an associate's degree.

TRANSFER PERFORMANCE

Transfers at Transfer Emerging University (TEU) are graduating 16 percentage points below natives, and 2 percent below other transfers in the state (see figures 10-11). They are also persisting to the second year at lower rates than natives, but graduate with GPAs equal to those of native students (see figure 12). TEU has just recently shifted its focus to transfers and has implemented a host of innovative transfer-specific support services, including a transfer center.

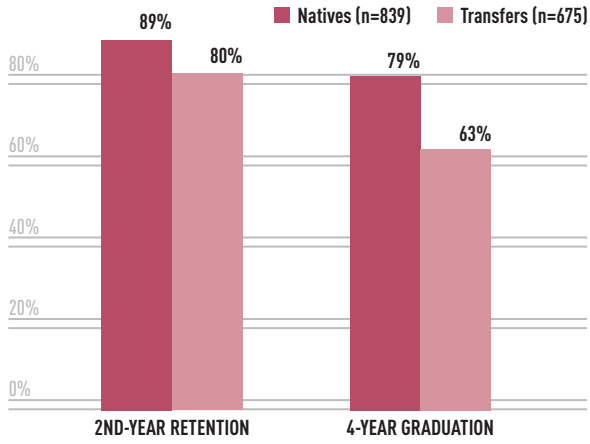


FIGURE 10.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010

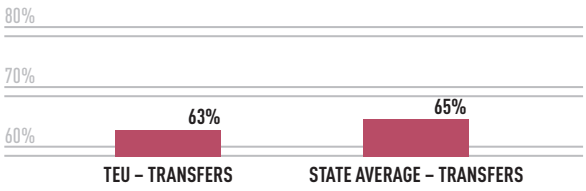


FIGURE 11. *4-year Graduation*

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010

FIGURE 12. *GPA at Graduation*

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010

TRANSFER PHILOSOPHY

TEU administrators emphasize that transfer students are a significant part of the undergraduate population, and the success of these students has become an important topic at the university. TEU has a history of accepting transfer students and is currently ranked first among public universities in the state and fourth in the nation in the number of transfer students enrolled, according to a widely-read national publication. In the past, however, the university tended not to pay much attention to its transfer students beyond developing articulation agreements with community colleges and offering a transfer orientation, in part because of the perception that transfer students are generally successful at the university.

Over the last five to seven years, increasing numbers of transfer students, combined with the recognition that these students do not always graduate as consistently and as quickly as the university expects, has captured the attention of TEU administrators. TEU staff members find that students don't want to be labeled as "transfer students" so the university's philosophy is to help them become integrated into campus life as quickly as possible. This philosophy has led TEU to focus its services for transfer students on transitional issues, especially during the student's first semester, and on making sure students know about available services. The TEU Transfer Center, a focal point for much of the transfer-oriented services, falls under Student Transition Services within Student Affairs, the office which also coordinates orientation for all students.

TEU's president and provost have generally pushed for a climate of data-driven decision-making, which sets the tone for how the university will look at transfer students. The president recently created an enrollment council, chaired by the provost and the vice president for student affairs. This council, which is designed to promote strategic planning, will examine recruitment and retention for three student groups: first time in college students, transfer students, and graduate students. Transfer students are also a topic of discussion by other university committees. The retention and graduation committee is focusing on transfer student success during the 2010-11 academic year. The enrollment management committee looks at how institutional policies affect transfer students. Finally, Student Affairs has a division-wide assessment team that regularly discusses transfer student success.

An important point raised by all these committees is the need to disaggregate institutional data to examine the experience of transfer students. Institutional Research tracks transfer student origins as well as retention and graduation rates and shares this information with the relevant committees. A student experience survey conducted in 2009 included transfer status. Transfer Center staff members conduct monthly online and in-person focus groups with groups of eight or nine transfer students. One area in which data is currently weak is the extent to which services are used by different student groups. Student Affairs is moving to a method in which students will swipe their I.D. cards when participating in co-curricular activities and services, allowing these data to be collected and matched with other student characteristics.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS

Maintaining good relationships with feeder community colleges is also an important part of the transfer equation at TEU. These relationships can be challenging because communication between institutions is not always optimal and key feeder community college districts have many campuses and are very decentralized. One solution to this challenge has been TEU's support for a regional consortium of 24 community colleges which offers professional development to community college administrators, faculty, and staff members through workshops and conferences on topics such as developmental education,

learning outcomes assessment, and advising. The consortium is housed at TEU, and administrators believe that the relationship has promoted solid connections with these community colleges.

TEU partnership programs with local community college districts include specific articulation agreements in areas such as engineering as well as campus visit days at TEU and special advising on the community college campuses. Subject-specific articulation agreements guarantee admission to community college transfer students who have completed the core curriculum and have at least a 2.0 GPA. TEU also has a reverse transfer agreement with the seven community colleges in the district.

Transfer students who have completed an applied associate's degree or received college credit for vocational training can enroll in TEU's Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences program. This degree program functions as an "inverted" degree completion program that builds on the technical courses students have already taken and finishes the degree with any missing core curriculum courses. Students are provided with intensive advising to help them select the most appropriate courses, and many courses are offered online. The program currently serves 500 to 600 students, many of whom attend college part-time. BAAS students are more likely than most TEU undergraduates to be non-traditional students, with an average age of 31, and are also more likely to be first-generation and/or minority students. The BAAS program provides a flexible route to a bachelor's degree for nontraditional students who need the degree for career advancement.

TEU has one reverse transfer agreement, whereby students who transfer to TEU from one of the district's seven colleges can request that their transcripts be sent back to the community college after they have completed the requirements for an associate's degree. TEU administrators note that the process is dependent on students filling out a form and that students do not always see any point in getting the associate's degree once they are enrolled at TEU.

TRANSFER RECRUITMENT

The TEU admissions office fields two recruitment teams: one for freshmen and another for transfer students. Two local community college districts have a full-time TEU admissions counselor who rotates across the campuses on regular schedule. In addition, three more transfer admissions counselors based at TEU visit each local community college at least once a month, covering the 20 community colleges within driving distance of TEU. Admissions counselors attend transfer fairs at community colleges across Texas, and the admissions office advertises in community college newspapers.

TRANSFER ADVISING

All new transfer students must be advised before registering for the first semester at TEU. Academic advising is done through the colleges, and the initial advising session usually takes place at orientation. Advising is also mandatory for all undecided students every semester, but advising requirements otherwise vary by college. The College of Undergraduate Studies was recently created and serves as a home for incoming students who are undecided or have not yet been accepted to certain colleges such as Engineering or Business. Currently, about 10 percent of transfer students fall into this category, but TEU administrators expect this number to go up because Business and Engineering have tightened their entry requirements.

To facilitate the transfer process, TEU offers community college counselors and prospective students access to an online resource which provides transfer equivalency information for specific TEU courses. Individual colleges offer transfer guides showing the best lower-division courses for students interested in different degree programs. TEU is also working on an automated online degree audit program that allows students to look at different degree plans and see how their current courses would apply. This program could help prospective transfer students make informed decisions.

However, university administrators note that students need personal help with degree planning both before and after transfer and that transfer guides cannot substitute for high-quality advising. Community college advisors can only provide general information and cannot answer questions about how credits will apply to a degree plan at TEU. There has been an effort to encourage prospective transfer students to meet with a TEU advisor prior to applying, but not many students actually do this. The ideal solution would be to hire an outreach advisor to work with students at feeder community colleges on a rotating basis, but this idea has not moved beyond the discussion phase. Some TEU colleges do outreach to community colleges on their own. Advisors from the College of Education go to feeder community college to promote the college's transfer guide and meet with prospective students. The College of Business would like to create a

similar outreach program but has not found the necessary resources. The College of Arts and Sciences recently wrote a grant proposal that would allow them to send TEU STEM students into community colleges to work with prospective transfer students.

TRANSFER ORIENTATION

TEU requires that all transfer students attend an orientation. Most transfer orientation sessions are one-day events for approximately 500 students, held on campus on Fridays during the summer. Students meet with advisors from their intended majors, attend sessions on student success, career planning, health and wellness, campus safety, housing, and financial aid, visit the Transfer Center, and register for classes. Parents can attend orientation with transfer students and around 10 to 20 percent do so. TEU also allows students who are 21 or younger and have less than 30 credit hours to attend a two-day freshmen orientation, but this option has not been gaining traction. An alternative may be to create two transfer orientation tracks: a one-day session focused on advising and a longer session offering more information on student success. One question is whether certain students should be required to take the longer orientation track, but it is not clear how to break out groups in the most meaningful way. It might be helpful to offer orientation by the number of transfer hours a student has earned (less than 30, 30 to 60, 60 or more), but the logistics of this sort of approach would be challenging.

TEU's mandatory orientation is perceived by staff members to be unpopular with transfer students, who say they do not need an orientation because they have already been attending college. Students participating in transfer student focus groups had very mixed opinions of the orientation process, with some complaining that orientation was too short and did not allow enough time for questions while others thought it was too long and a waste of time. University departments would prefer that orientation focus only on advising and registration, but Student Affairs staff members believe that it helps to have students come to campus as a group and receive information about university services and students organizations. If students do not get connected with campus programs and services immediately, an opportunity is lost. It has become harder to get students to stay on campus longer to learn about the programs and services available. Even freshman orientation has been shortened in recent years—it now does not include a campus tour and students have trouble navigating the campus.

Some transfer students said in focus groups that programs such as a weekend retreat for new students and a series of events for incoming students held during the first week of school, need to be marketed as more than just for freshmen. These programs are open to all incoming students, but transfer students often perceive that the programs are not intended for them. In fact, the new student retreat used to be just for freshmen, but two transfer students who attended one year came back as camp leaders, which made staff members aware of the potential value the program can have for transfer students.

FINANCIAL AID

TEU offers three transfer scholarships; all are merit-based. TEU Texas Transfer Scholarships are available to students transferring from a Texas community college or university with 45 or more credit hours and at least a 3.25 cumulative GPA. Award amounts start at $3,000 per year and go up based on GPA. The scholarships are renewable for a second year if the student maintains the GPA requirement. TEU has been able to offer this scholarship to all eligible students in recent years, providing around 400 scholarships each year. Phi Theta Kappa and Honors Scholarships are limited to students who belong to those organizations.

TEU facilitates the process of applying for these scholarships and others by offering an online application portal with separate applications for different types of students, including transfer students and veteran students. The portal also provides information to transfer students about what they need to do if they have been offered financial aid by their previous institution for the semester in which they plan to transfer.

The TEU financial aid office works closely with admissions to offer financial aid presentations at feeder community colleges. The office does not have designated outreach staff members, but its employees participate in over 100 financial aid presentations each year as well as attend community college fairs and train admissions counselors in talking about financial aid. While the financial aid office does maintain relationships with community college counterparts through the Texas Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, these relationships could be strengthened.

TRANSFER CENTER

The TEU Transfer Center was created in 2008 and is located centrally in the student union. It serves as a space where transfer students can connect with one another and provides lockers for commuter students. The center recruits four students to serve as Transfer Ambassadors who function as mentors and help plan programs for transfer students. Transfer Center programs often showcase campus resources such as the Student Money Management Center, the Career Center, or recreational sports. The center also offers social programs to help transfer students meet other students, including a football-watching party and a campfire party with s'mores. These programs are open to all TEU students, and some non-transfer students participate. The Transfer Center is developing an online community for transfer students aimed at providing these students and their parents with information prior to orientation. This online community was originally geared toward Latino students, but staff members hope to make it available to all transfer students. The Transfer Center, the Veterans Center, and programs for non-traditional and commuter students are deliberately housed together at TEU because these student categories intersect. The open house offered at orientation allows students to see the whole range of opportunities these programs offer.

TRANSFER HOUSING

Some TEU transfer students take advantage of on-campus housing, representing almost 10 percent of the 5,600 who live in residence halls. Two TEU residence halls have transfer wings. Transfer students who live on campus may be those who transfer with fewer credit hours, and resident transfer students have been found to be more likely to use services and attend programs. However, a survey of resident student needs had transfer students overrepresented among respondents, and these students scored lower on measures of satisfaction across the board. TEU has been experimenting with learning communities in the residence halls and last year started one for transfer students, but only 13 students participated. The university recently received a Title III grant to create additional learning communities for transfer students.

TRANSFER SUPPORT SERVICES

Several TEU programs that are available to all students offer services tailored to transfer students. The Career Center, for example, has a counselor who specializes in transfer students. Students can also get career counseling at the Student Counseling Center, where staff members find that transfer students use career counseling services often, especially those who think they know what they want to do until they get into upper-division classes in the major and need to reevaluate. Similarly, the Student Money Management Center money offers financial literacy workshops designed for transfer students along with offering individual financial counseling and emergency loans. The Student Money Management Center, the Career Center, the Student Counseling Center, and the Student Health and Wellness Center are all located in the same building, so it is easy for counselors to refer students back and forth as needed.

TEU also provides a number of services aimed at nontraditional and commuter students that may benefit transfer students who fall into these categories. Several campus offices provide services through the Extended Hours Desk located in the registrar's office. The TEU Shuttle offers free transportation throughout the campus and surrounding areas, while TEU students can ride free on a commuter bus that serves nearby cities. The university also offers financial assistance to students who need childcare while attending class. And transfer students who meet low-income/first-generation status requirements can participate in Student Support Services and McNair TRIO programs.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Like all TEU students, transfer students have access to the Learning Center, which provides academic support through free workshops on topics such as study skills, time management, and test-taking. Students on academic probation are required to participate in academic support programs at the Learning Center. The Learning Center also offers free tutoring at all levels. Tutoring can take place online through SmartThinking.com or face-to-face with one of the center's 283 volunteer student tutors. The Learning Center had 60,000 contacts with students last year; 6,500 students used a course content tutor at least once. While they don't collect information on which students use the center's services, staff members believe that participants mirror the overall student population and that they actually see more transfer students than native students in study skills workshops. TEU also has a Writing Lab that is open to students at all levels and a Math Lab that serves lower-division math students and oversees graders. These labs see lots of community college students

and veterans who are trying to acclimate themselves to the university. Many students are referred to academic support services by the Transfer and Veterans Centers.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

TEU does not have a student organization designated specifically for transfer students, although it does offer one for non-traditional aged students. Staff members encourage transfer students to join some of the over 400 student organizations on campus in order to become integrated into the campus community. TEU sponsors a chapter of Tau Sigma, an honor society for first-semester transfer students. Staff members believe that it is important to have a Tau Sigma chapter on campus because it sends a message about starting over and making your mark even if you have not had academic success in the past. A similar message is sent to students at transfer orientation and at a transfer "kick-off" event that attracted 100 students in 2010. The university is moving towards having a transfer convocation ceremony like the one offered for freshmen.

MAJOR TRANSFER CHALLENGES

INSTITUTIONAL

One important challenge that transfer students seem to face at TEU lies simply in making the transition to a new institution. TEU is much larger than most community colleges, especially if students have been attending college at a satellite community college campus. Parking can be difficult to find on the TEU campus. Registration and financial aid processes are more complex. Transfer students in a focus group mentioned the complex bureaucracy and the need to go all over campus to get information and assistance. Some students may have difficulty with the academic transition and find that they do not perform as well as they did in community college.

SOCIAL

Student engagement is another challenge. Transfer students, in the 2009 student experience survey at TEU, were much less likely than native students to agree with a range of statements reflecting engagement with campus life. Many transfer students work full time or have family obligations that make it hard for them to take advantage of programs and services. TEU staff members have found it difficult to schedule events at times that would work for the majority of students. Students may also miss out on learning about activities if they do not check their TEU email accounts. From the student perspective, engagement seems to be a particular problem for commuter students, who find it more difficult to participate in campus activities. Effectively communicating with transfer students is a major challenge for staff. Transfer students are a diverse group and are more spread out on campus (not grouped in residence halls or introductory classes like freshmen).

FINANCIAL

Financial need is a significant challenge for many transfer students. The 2009 student experience survey at TEU found that transfer students were significantly more likely than native students to report having difficulties paying for college. Transfer Center staff note that students often come in asking for information about financial aid. In addition, transfer students may not get the best financial aid packages because they apply after limited funding has already been allocated, a problem particularly salient for mid-year transfers. Some TEU students indicated that financial need is a concern for them and that they did not always find the financial aid office sufficiently helpful in resolving their financial aid problems.

MAJOR INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

A particular challenge for TEU in trying to better serve transfer students is the fact that these students prefer not to be labeled as transfers and are really only open to using services during the first semester. The diverse population of transfer students complicates the situation further. The university has to recognize that there is a difference between a freshman transfer who wants the same experience as native students and junior or senior transfers who just want to commute to the university to finish their degrees. There are also differences between traditional-age transfer students and non-traditional students as well as transfer sub-groups such as veterans that may have specific needs.

Advising is a major area of concern for TEU. There is currently a 400:1 ratio of students to advisors at the university. Professional advising positions are considered entry-level and pay $35,000 per year or less, so advisors rarely stay in their positions for long and are difficult to replace because the job requires considerable training. TEU students indicated that inaccurate advising can be a problem, although this situation seems to vary from college to college. Several students felt that the advisors they saw were not helpful and that they really had to learn to navigate the academic system on their own.

TRANSFER SUCCESS FACTORS

TEU administrators and staff members attribute transfer success, at least in part, to the university's culture. They point to the fact that transfer students make up a large proportion of the student body, which helps them feel that their experience is the norm. Transfer and commuter students are part of the culture at the institution. Students see opportunities for transfer students advertised regularly. The personal attention they receive, starting with orientation and advisement, helps them know that they are important to the university. A recent study found that transfer students donate to the university at higher rates than native students, which suggests a strong sense of connection to TEU, supporting the idea that campus culture is important to transfer student success.

In addition, transfer students are seen as having characteristics that contribute to their success at TEU. Transfer students may be more mature and career-driven and are more likely to find their way into programs such as undergraduate research that provide them with academic and social support. Many staff believe that transfer students are also more likely to seek out services, read pamphlets, and ask questions. They know what it took to get to TEU and want to do what is needed to succeed. Since TEU offers many resources and services to transfer students, administrators and staff members feel confident that these students will take advantage of what the university has to offer.

TEU students point to the approachability of TEU staff and faculty as a factor in student success. They believe that faculty and staff members care about them as individuals, are concerned about students' needs, and check on students if they feel that something is wrong. One student noted that the information he received from the Transfer Center was helpful in making the transition to TEU because it meant that he did not have to seek out that information himself. Students also emphasized that TEU provides a strong feeling of community, supported by many on-campus activities that allow students to make connections with the university and one another.

FIRST-YEAR FOCUSED UNIVERSITY (FYU)

Total transfer gap: -12%	
Undergraduate enrollment: 5,315	Fall transfer admits: 358
THECB classification: Comprehensive	Locale: rural, fringe
Pell recipients: 70%	Underrepresented minority students: 94%

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

First-year Focused University (FYU) is an HSI located in a relatively isolated part of South Texas near the Mexican border. Most FYU staff members and students are bilingual in English and Spanish, and 80 percent of staff members are either FYU alumni or are currently taking classes at the university, creating a strong sense of community at the institution.

FYU is part of a major Texas university system and offers over 70 bachelor's and master's degree programs and a doctoral program in international business. FYU's 2011-15 strategic plan aims for a 5 percent increase in both freshmen and transfer students admitted each year for the next five years. FYU is also starting to enroll more students from out of the immediate area, although still primarily from South Texas.

FYU began its existence in 1970 as an upper-division institution with a focus on teacher education and business intended to provide a way for South Texas residents to earn bachelor's degrees close to home. Classes were offered on the nearby partnering community college campus. FYU expanded to become a four-year institution and moved to its own campus in 1995.

The Carnegie Foundation (2010) classifies FYU's undergraduate program as professions plus arts and sciences, with 60 to 79 percent of bachelor's degrees awarded in professional fields. The most popular undergraduate majors include biology, business administration, criminal justice, early childhood education, and nursing. The top majors for transfer students are nursing, bilingual education, criminal justice, business administration, communication disorders, fitness and sports, psychology, and accounting. Average undergraduate class size is 34 students, and 47 percent of lower-division classes are taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty.

TRANSFER CHARACTERISTICS

Transfer students at FYU only vary slightly from native juniors in terms of Pell receipt and first-generation status. They are, however, much more likely than native juniors to be nontraditional-aged and attending part-time (see figure 13). Nearly all (90%) of incoming transfer students were Hispanic.

In Fall 2010, 458 new transfer students enrolled at FYU, representing 35 percent of all incoming students. FYU's neighboring partner community college provides the majority (75%) of transfer students to FYU. Of new transfer students, 16 percent were admitted as seniors, 48 percent as juniors, 28 percent as sophomores, and 8 percent as freshmen. Almost two-fifths (39 percent) have already received an associate's degree, and more than a quarter of those associate's degrees were technical rather than academic.

Transfer students also tend to bring a lot of credit hours when they transfer to FYU. In Fall 2010, 46 percent of new transfer students had between 61 and 90 transfer credit hours, and another 15 percent had more than 90 transfer credit hours. Many of the students with large numbers of credits are those who have earned several vocational certificates and are now trying to pursue a bachelor's degree.

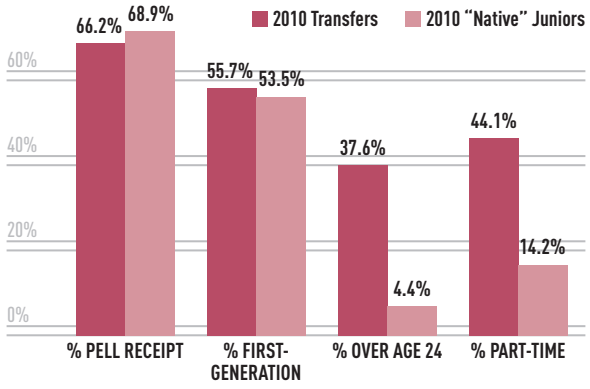


FIGURE 13. FFU TRANSFER VS. NATIVE AT-RISK CHARACTERISTICS

Source: FFU Institutional Research, 2011

TRANSFER PERFORMANCE

Transfer students at First-year Focused University (FYU) graduate 11 percentage points lower than natives at the institution, and 1 percent lower than other transfers in the state (see figures 14-15). Transfers are also persisting to the second year at a lower rate than natives, and their GPAs at graduation are roughly on par with natives (2.98 vs. 2.94, respectively) (see figure 16). Unlike TEU, which has recently shifted its focus towards transfers, FYU has been focusing its efforts on first-year students in recent years, as it strives to diversify its student body and improve its academic reputation in the state.

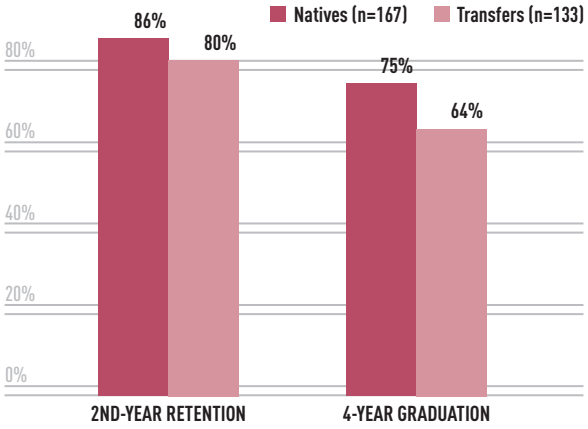
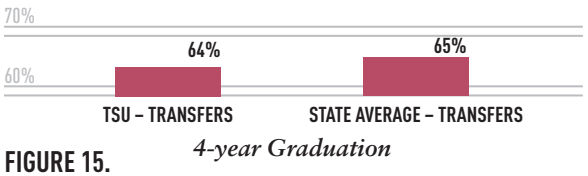


FIGURE 14.

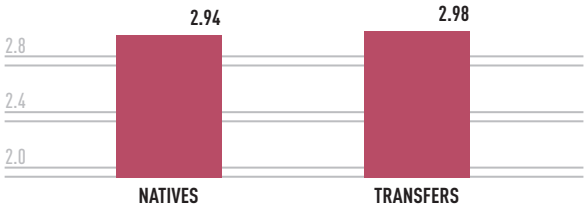
Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010



4-year Graduation

FIGURE 15.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010



GPA at Graduation

FIGURE 16.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010

TRANSFER PHILOSOPHY

Transfer students are not a high priority for FYU at this time. The university's primary focus is on recruiting new freshmen — particularly students with strong academic credentials and from outside the immediate area — and on improving low retention and graduation rates for native students. The university's 2011-15 strategic plan includes goals for improving retention and graduation for native students but not for transfer students, and it is not routine for institutional research to compare transfer students and native students in internal reports. In part, this situation has resulted from the university's relatively new status as a four-year institution. FYU is trying to become a more traditional university and hopes to attract more students who live and work on campus rather than commute. FYU administrators also candidly admit that the Texas Higher Education Accountability System and the interests of the state legislature are a crucial factor. While FYU is required to report the four-year graduation rate for transfer students, state accountability and funding approaches all revolve around increased enrollment and completion for first-time college students.

In addition, FYU's relationship with its main feeder college is complex and not entirely positive. The relationship was seamless when FYU was located on the community college campus. Students took classes at both institutions, and FYU shared advising and other services with the partnering community college. FYU's transition to a four-year institution changed the relationship. The community college's board of trustees voted to support FYU's expansion, but some tension remains. Some staff of the community college perceive FYU as competing for the same students, even though the community college was growing and could not accommodate all potential students. Others see FYU as pulling away faculty members from the partnering community college, some of whom are willing to trade high teaching loads with mandatory overloads for lighter teaching loads with a research requirement and equivalent or even lower pay.

Further, some FYU administrators question the quality of the education students receive at the community college, suggesting that its students have inflated GPAs, and that the community college functions more as a "13th grade" than as higher education. FYU would like more interaction between its faculty members and those at the community college, and some interaction has begun to happen through work on college readiness standards with the P-16 council. At this time, however, little work on aligning the partnering community college's standards with those in related programs at FYU is taking place, although education faculty from both institutions have met to discuss new teacher certification requirements. FYU administrators would also like to see improved advising at the partnering community college. They find that the partnering community college puts too many students into vocational programs without exploring student goals, in part because the partnering community college advisors have huge caseloads and pressure to fill classes.

Once transfer students are on the FYU campus, administrators note that it is really up to them to seek out services if they find themselves struggling. All of the university's proactive services are focused on freshmen with some now being expanded to sophomores. The FYU president acknowledges that transfer students "get the short end of the stick." The university knows the kind of intrusive, wrap-around programs that work to promote student success, but these programs are very expensive. FYU's first-year retention program was paid for with state money allocated for that purpose; its new sophomore program was paid for with Title V money. Some of those programs may also end up helping transfer students. In addition, the university is undertaking a major grant-writing effort and is working with local foundations and trusts to bring in new funds in addition to completing state and federal grant applications. If new funding is acquired, developing programs for transfer students may be possible.

TRANSFER POLICIES

FYU encourages students to transfer at around 60 credits (with or without an associate's degree). Administrators at FYU have discussed only accepting transfer students with a minimum of 30 hours that are applicable to a degree but learned that no other university does this and became concerned that this policy might reduce the number of transfers.

FYU has only one articulation agreement. A joint admissions program with the community college exists but is not often used; the university is working on renewing the agreement. The university publishes annual 2+2 transfer guides for the neighboring community college and one other, but these guides are not currently available on the web. Enrollment management plans to create a webpage for transfer students with drop-down menus showing course equivalencies for different sending institutions. FYU currently has no reverse transfer agreements with community colleges.

RECRUITMENT AND ORIENTATION

The FYU recruitment office's main focus is on recruiting first-time freshmen. Recruiters build relationships with prospective FYU students beginning their freshman year in high school. Transfer students do not maintain that close relationship with a recruitment officer after leaving high school, however, and have to make a second transition from community college to the university. Recruiting staff find it difficult to be as intrusive in recruitment at community colleges. They feel that they are seen as competition for students so community colleges limit their activity on campus. The recruitment office hired a recruiter this past year to focus on local community colleges, but less than 10 percent of FYU's recruitment budget is dedicated to transfer students.

Recruitment maintains a satellite office at the neighboring community college, with a full-time advisor who is available four days a week. This office is a one-stop shop for admissions, financial aid, transfer of credit, and career counseling. FYU also sponsors a transfer fair at the community college each semester. The event lasts one week, with faculty and staff from a different FYU college going to the partnering community college each day to answer questions. FYU recruitment staff request a list of students from the partnering community college with at least 45 credits academic work and invite them to attend the transfer fair. At least one faculty member no longer attends the transfer fair, however, because he found it poorly attended.

Outreach to the partnering community college seems to be improving. The two institutions are talking about transmitting transcripts electronically to facilitate transfer. In fall 2010, staff members saw more students at the transfer fair who were not ready to transfer but wanted to make sure they were taking the right classes for a 2+2 plan. The director of the tutoring center at the partner community college brings students interested in transfer to visit the FYU campus, and FYU staff members plan to give her a pamphlet of information about the Learning Center, the Writing Center, and TRIO programs to share with potential transfer students.

The registrar's office at FYU plays an important role in facilitating transfer to the university. As transfer students' transcripts arrive in the office, the registrar runs daily reports to look at course equivalencies. The office then sends a letter to the student listing the courses that have transferred. The letter asks students to create an FYU email account and learn about the university's web portal, on which they can run their own degree evaluations. In addition, four staff members in the registrar's office work with transfers. A student's letter of acceptance asks him or her to make an appointment with one of these advisors. Advisors show students how to run their own degree evaluations and help them register for classes for their first semester. However, this process is not mandatory—many students can still register even if they don't come in for the advising appointment.

Orientation is required for all entering students at FYU, but this requirement has not been enforced for transfer students and less than 10 percent of transfer students participate in orientation. Many transfer students think that they already know what they are doing and don't want to go to orientation. Transfer orientation is currently offered as a single on-campus session and as an online module, but focus groups suggest that the online orientation does not provide sufficient connection to the university. As a result, the university is returning to the face-to-face approach to orientation and plans to emphasize the requirement that transfer students attend this session. FYU also produces a one-page information sheet about available services that is sent to transfer students with their acceptance letter.

TRANSFER ADVISING

Transfer students with less than 60 credit hours and those with unfulfilled developmental education requirements are required to be advised at the Advising and Mentoring Center prior to registration. One advisor at the center works with transfer students who have less than 60 credit hours and maintains a close relationship with the partnering community college. Transfer students with 60 credit hours or more are advised by academic programs, but this advising is not usually mandatory.

The College of Education is an example of an academic program that requires all of its students to meet with an advisor before they can register each semester. The college has three staff members in the teacher certification office who are the first point of contact for an incoming transfer student. These advisors make sure transfer students have completed the core curriculum and college-readiness requirements and help them select a degree program. The transfer student is then sent to the appropriate department for advising. Education also has a number of recruitment programs focused on transfer students. They have brought the partnering community college education

students to FYU campus for a tour. They have a Title V program that recruits prospective teaching students from community colleges and brings them into FYU as cohorts. They are also developing a Title V pilot program that will place education students in K-12 classrooms during their freshman year so that students can decide early on if a teaching career is right for them. This program will allow the partnering community college students to dual enroll, taking core courses at the partnering community college and the field placement course at FYU.

FINANCIAL AID

FYU does have an academic scholarship for transfer students. Students have to apply by June 1 or December 1 and have at least a 3.0 GPA. The award is for a full academic year and has been around $1,000 per semester with funding dependent on returns for endowed accounts. Around 80-100 students apply each year and so far all those eligible receive the scholarship.

The FYU financial aid office has a good relationship with the partnering community college financial aid office and attends the transfer fair at the partnering community college each semester.

SUPPORT SERVICES

FYU's new University Success Center houses all student services on campus although students seem to perceive it more as a business office than as a place to find services. The Division of Student Success includes both student life and enrollment management.

University College oversees all academic support services: the Learning Center, the Writing Center, the Advising and Mentoring Center, and the Testing Center. University College also houses TRIO programs. No academic support programs target transfer students specifically, although most are available to them. In general, programs don't distinguish between native students and transfer students because FYU students are mostly from the local area and many students take courses at both the university and the community college. However, first-year students are the most likely to learn about support services through intrusive services available only to them, such as required orientation and early alert.

The Advising and Mentoring Center provides an early alert program for first-year students only. For this program, faculty refer students who have missed class or performed poorly to a retention specialist who then intervenes and provides additional referrals to the Learning Center. The institution only has immediate plans to extend the center to sophomores.

The University Learning Center offers free tutoring in fields such as math, science, history, and government. Last year, the center had 19,000 contacts with students, mostly freshmen. The center's emphasis is on core curriculum courses with high failure rates, and on developmental reading and math. The Writing Center assists students at any academic level, regardless of subject matter. The center sees mostly freshmen and sophomores plus developmental writing students. Between fall 2009 and fall 2010, there were 331 unique contacts with transfer students at the Writing Center and 232 at the Learning Center. Both centers also offer supplemental instruction support to developmental and lower-division courses with high failure rates.

FYU's TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program has been in place since 2001 and serves 160 students, only six of whom are transfer students. Program staff members have a good working relationship with the SSS director at the partnering community college who brings graduating students from the partnering community college's SSS program to the FYU campus for a tour each year. Students find the SSS program very helpful. Several felt lost when they first got to FYU and found it hard to get all the information they needed. They found that SSS staff know university policies well and can answer all of the students' questions in one place.

MAJOR TRANSFER CHALLENGES

ACADEMIC

Almost a quarter (23 percent) of transfer students at FYU end up earning grades of D or F grade or dropping a course each semester. Administrators at FYU are aware of the problem, but retention and graduation rates are currently so low for native students that they are more of a priority for the university.

One reason for poor academic performance is that many transfer students face higher academic expectations than they may have found at a community college. Some students say that they have to study harder for FYU classes than they did at the partnering community college. Some transfer students also say that it is an adjustment to go

from community college to a university even within the same city because the atmosphere is more professional and more responsibility is placed on the student.

FINANCIAL

Financial need is also a challenge for transfer students. Not as much financial aid is available for transfer students as for incoming freshmen, although the university is working on building donations to expand transfer scholarships.

Especially because Hispanic families tend to be averse to taking out student loans, FYU students often end up working full-time, which can slow down their academic progress. Many students do not understand that working less and graduating faster is actually economically better in the longer term.

INSTITUTIONAL

Many of the challenges faced by transfer students at FYU are the same ones experienced by most of the university's students and derive from the cultural context in which the university is located. Some students lack support from their parents, who do not see college as a valuable investment in the future or who do not understand how much time students need to spend studying. Male students may be expected to contribute financially to their families, and female students may be expected to live at home and help with family obligations.

The diversity among transfer students is a challenge for FYU. Staff members find a misconception that all transfer students are non-traditional and are not interested in engaging with the university but rather are focused on completing their education. In fact, some transfer students are just three years out of high school and need the same services and programs as native students. The university has had to recognize the economic reality that traditional students who are eligible for admission as native students may end up starting at a community college.

Because so many transfer students come to FYU with a large number of credit hours, the applicability of those credits and timely degree completion is a challenge for the university. FYU does not charge students extra for unfunded hours caused by the state's excess credit rule, which helps these students but reduces the university's income. In addition, many students transfer from community college with many credit hours but may not have completed the core curriculum because they were taking vocational courses. FYU has no general studies major, which means that transfer students who come with credit hours that cannot be applied to a degree program have no choice but to take many extra hours to complete a degree.

FYU trains students to get good jobs but finds that 70 percent of students stay in South Texas where the job market is depressed because of the drug wars in Mexico. Graduates are willing to accept lower salaries or lower prestige jobs in order to stay closer to home. It can even be difficult to get top students to move to Austin or Houston to get their doctorates. FYU staff members encourage students to spend time away from South Texas by emphasizing internships, study abroad, and research opportunities with faculty but find that transfer students are less likely than native students to take advantage of these programs.

University administrators also have the sense that community colleges, including the partnering community college, do not encourage students to transfer. They argue that the state needs a statute requiring community colleges to make transfer a priority and rewarding them for doing so successfully. The state also needs to provide incentives for universities to help transfer students succeed.

TRANSFER SUCCESS FACTORS

FYU administrators and staff members tend to attribute transfer student success to the motivation of those students who overcome the many barriers that may prevent them from transferring at all. They believe transfer students succeed because they are self-selected, serious, and already on the path to success before they arrive at FYU.

FYU's overall approach to student success — particularly for first-year students — is very focused on students' individual needs with an emphasis on mentoring by people who have lived the experience of going to college. Important practices include very intrusive advising and counseling, outreach to families, and one-to-one interaction in tutoring and advising. FYU leaders believe they have to do these things because of the cultural environment in which their students live. FYU students report that they find the university a welcoming and supportive place and feel that people there want to see them succeed.

RESEARCH-FOCUSED UNIVERSITY (RFU)

Total transfer gap: -27%	
Undergraduate enrollment: 18,985	Fall transfer admits: 4,315
THECB classification: Emerging Research	Locale: city, large
Pell recipients: 33%	Underrepresented minority students: 33%

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

Research-focused University (RFU) is one of seven Texas universities seeking to become a Research I institution. It is a major undertaking for each of the campuses, requiring that each have a minimum of $45 million in research monies, a minimum $400 million endowment, a faculty with a minimum of 200 PhD's and outstanding undergraduate and graduate programs. RFU is strongly committed to this effort, and it came up time and again during our visit, particularly in our meetings with senior academic administrators.

Currently, RFU offers 78 bachelor's degree programs, 74 master's degree programs, and 33 doctoral programs.

At the same time, as RFU seeks to accomplish this, there is an awareness among faculty, staff, and administrators that the campus has been seen as, and in some significant ways still is, as one of the Deans put it, an institution "of convenience rather than choice." That same Dean pointed out that it is a campus located between two big cities, and off of two major highways, thus quite convenient for the local population.

Traditionally a commuter campus, RFU has built a number of residence halls to attract an on-campus student body and actively works with local apartment owners to expand the number of students living near the campus. In its effort to become more of a residential campus, the university now offers full day academic scheduling and, beginning last year, now houses a broad range of academic programs and services in one central location in the heart of the campus, the University College.

As part of its effort to achieve Research I status, the campus is making a concerted effort to increase the number of entering freshmen and developing a number of specific programs, such as the Freshman Interest Groups (FIG), for its first-year students. The goal of the FIGs is to build an academic community, enable students to make friends quickly, move them toward identifying a major, and, ultimately, increase graduation rates for those entering as freshmen.

TRANSFER CHARACTERISTICS

Transfer students at RFU are more likely than their native peers to be Pell recipients, over the age of 24 and attending part-time. While the differences between the two groups are lower than those seen at other institutions, students at the institution overall are exhibiting these at-risk characteristics at relatively high rates (see figure 17). Reflecting the broader population trend in the state, RFU has experienced a steady growth in its Latino student population, and the majority of students enrolled are the first in their families to attend college.

The majority of students — 65 percent — are transfers. Despite this, as a top administrator stated: "We only concentrate on first-time, full-time freshmen and frankly, that's a dying breed out there."

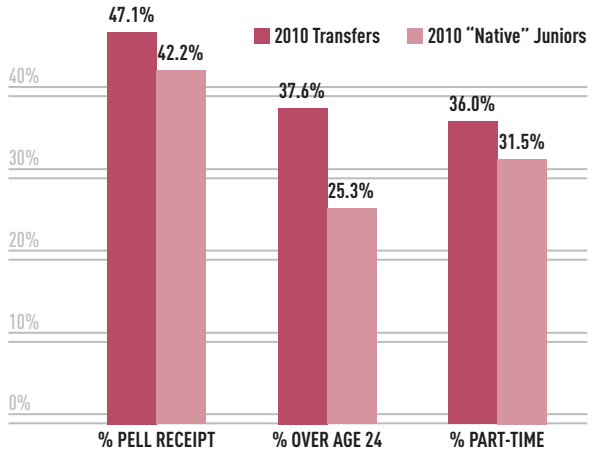


FIGURE 17. RFU TRANSFER VS. NATIVE AT-RISK CHARACTERISTICS

Source: RFU Institutional Research, 2011

TRANSFER PERFORMANCE

Research-focused University (RFU) has the largest gap in transfer success of all institutions visited, with a four-year transfer graduation rate of just 58 percent, 20 percentage points below native juniors and 7 percent below the state average (see figures 18-19). Transfers are also persisting to the second year at a rate 13 percent lower than natives. Despite all this, transfers graduate with a GPA just slightly higher than natives (3.13 compared with 3.06, respectively) (see figure 20). RFU is highly focused on research activities and not nearly as attentive as the other institutions visited to the needs of transfer students, or students with similar characteristics.

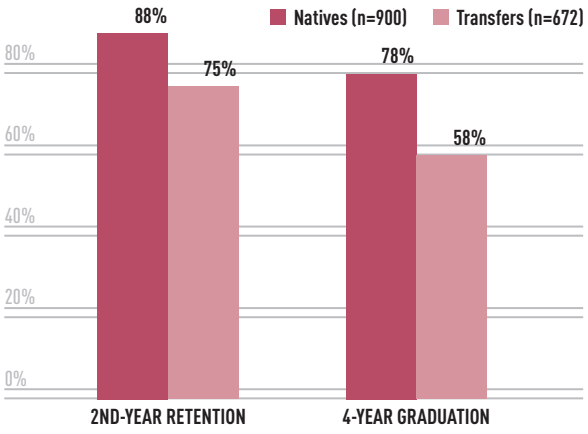
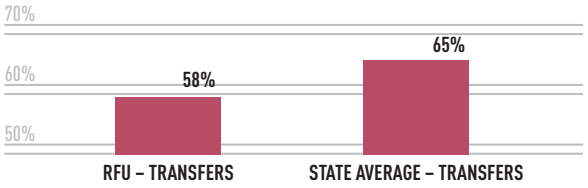


FIGURE 18.

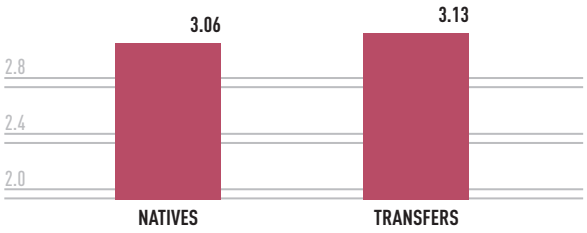
Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010



4-year Graduation

FIGURE 19.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010



GPA at Graduation

FIGURE 20.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010

COMMUNITY COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS

A joint admissions program gives participating community college students access to RFU campus services while still at the two-year institution. This is intended to help ease the transfer students' adjustment to the four-year campus by providing exposure to university life and allowing them to build a network before arriving on campus. Students learn about this program through information sessions on the community college campus. Once they enroll at RFU, however, they are no longer connected to the program in any way.

Though transfers are, by a significant margin, the largest portion of the student body, there is a gap between core completion at the community college and preparation and readiness for university study. Faculty members with whom we met pointed out the gaps between university and community college course descriptions, syllabi, and class assignments and cited the need for ongoing discussions with community college faculty. Science majors, in particular, often need a stronger background in the sciences.

Though it has met resistance from some faculty members, the recent development of a general studies program accelerates graduation for students who, as one faculty member put it, "had been circling the airport but couldn't land." While not an interdisciplinary program, this general studies program allows students to choose courses from three different areas (15 units per area for a total of 45 units) in order to complete their degree. General studies caters to students with GPAs between 2.0-2.5 who have not selected a major or met the grade point requirement to graduate from their major (for example, students in Fine Arts must have a cumulative 3.0 GPA to graduate). It requires a close working relationship, either by phone, email, or in person, with an academic advisor. Some 40 percent of University Studies students are transfers, many of them working adults.

TRANSFER PHILOSOPHY

Staff and administrators we met with felt that the university's emphasis has shifted from transfers to first-year students as it focuses on attaining Research I status. The university is striving for "higher caliber" students to increase its freshman retention rates. While some individuals expressed a commitment to supporting transfer students, the institution as a whole seems to be shifting its image from a commuter school to a more traditional campus.

TRANSFER POLICIES

Students transferring with at least 24 credits must have at least a 2.25 GPA; those with less than 24 credits must have a 2.5 GPA and meet freshman standards for admission including class rank and SAT/ACT scores.

TRANSFER ADVISING

Transfer students entering with less than 30 credit hours are required to meet with an advisor through the central advising center, prior to registration. Students transferring over 30 credit hours, however, are advised through their specific college, which students did not find to be effective or enforced.

SUPPORT SERVICES

The university provides a central location for a number of student services, aimed primarily at freshmen students. This center houses a career services, advising, counseling, orientation, supplemental instruction, and two TRIO programs, Student Support Services and McNair. The majority of those services are geared towards first-year students, however. For example, early alert advising is only provided for freshmen. And the center recently began offering free tutoring for freshmen, but all other students (including transfers) must pay for the program. While the TRIO programs are both open to transfer students, freshmen are more likely to visit the center, and therefore more likely to learn about the availability of TRIO. Some staff suggested that a mandatory transfer orientation might help to make transfer students more aware of services such as TRIO available to them.

While the campus is seeking to find ways of improving their services for and, in turn, the graduation rates of students, it is also confronting the realities of budget shortfalls and cuts. In one of our meetings, the senior administrator responsible for overseeing the center pointed out the challenge of maintaining student support programs as a priority during budget cutbacks.

The students emphasized that at RFU, the onus is on the student to navigate issues such as transfer of credits or financial aid. Administrators seemed to have a defeatist attitude regarding personal student challenges; not all see it as the institution's role to help students with childcare or transportation. Other institutions serving similar students, however, have considered and provided for those common and often critical logistical barriers.

MAJOR TRANSFER CHALLENGES

SOCIAL

The campus is becoming more residential, and off-campus students including transfers have a hard time finding a sense of community. The institution strategically placed the activity center next to a large commuter parking lot, and advertises its services to these students.

ACADEMIC

Math and science are "huge barriers" for all students, and academic departments are trying to respond. There is a Resource Center for Science and Math, as well as departmental clinics offering drop-in individual and group tutoring and staffed by upper-division students in Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, and Physics. The Department of English also sponsors a writing center for students in English and across a series of disciplines.

INSTITUTIONAL

While feeling very positive about their university experience, those transfer students with whom we met were not at all satisfied with the lack of services and programs for transfers. Several pointed out that orientation is not required for transfers and one, now a McNair student, who did attend a session, said she had not received a campus tour or met with an academic advisor.

All the transfers with whom we met pointed out the difficulties they encountered in transitioning from their community college to the university, citing the differences in campus climate and culture. They did not know where to find support and felt that programs and services were not widely advertised or promoted. One student said she'd "had trouble getting acclimated," and needed resources "to get used to the culture of the university." Though

they said they understood the importance of freshmen in achieving Research I status, they all agreed that more support was needed for transfers. One student said that that importance was "no excuse for overlooking transfers" and that "transfers need some type of program," though not necessarily the same as that for freshmen.

TRANSFER SUCCESS FACTORS

Despite feeling a lack of support or direction initially, the students we met with were quite determined to find their place on campus. Several of the students heard about SSS or McNair either through friends or professors. They did not feel either program was well-advertised on campus; however once they were involved, they felt it made a big difference in their acclimation to and success on campus. One student became so involved she now works as a tutor for SSS.

All shared what is often a common experience among low-income and first-generation college students, having found their university calling while at the community college despite initially feeling that they weren't university material. One student said she'd been "raised to graduate from high school and go to work," but was inspired to return to school by the birth of her first child. Another was a teenage mother who, motivated by her young daughter, went to community college, transferred, and intends to pursue and complete an MSW, in order to work with and guide other young mothers. Yet another had entered community college thinking "it would be enough" but once there decided to transfer and complete her university degree. A working class man, raised in a household that never spoke of college, working in what he called a "dead-end" job, raised two children that attend RFU. Inspired, he enrolled in community college, discovered he wants to teach, and transferred to RFU, where he has now taken courses with his two children. A McNair student, the mother of four grown children had doubted herself and felt like she would never fit in at the university. But, inspired and encouraged by one of her professors, she now intends to pursue a Ph.D.

CONCLUSIONS

In addition to challenges typically faced by low-income, first-generation, and nontraditional-aged students, community college transfer students face challenges specific to the institutional transition. A lack of social engagement, gaps in financial aid, and problems with applying transfer credits to specific degree programs were commonly cited issues among the staff, faculty and students we interviewed. Moreover, a cultural shift — from close-knit community college environments where students receive a great deal of individual guidance, to larger, less personal four-year institutions — underlie these challenges. Although transfer students are not attending college for the first time, they do not necessarily know how to navigate the services of a large university, and do not necessarily feel as though they are a part of a community.

The case study institutions' approaches to addressing these transitional challenges varied. Some institutional staff argue that transfer students have unique challenges that require specific, designated services. Others contend that offering transfer students separate services only serves to stigmatize rather than integrate these students into the institution. Institutions that best serve their transfer students based on the total "transfer gap" rate seem to be the most aware of both transfer challenges and effective transfer support.

Rather than a planned, concerted effort, however, the majority of institutions offer a smattering of transfer services that appear to be more of an afterthought in reaction to increased transfer enrollment. It would serve institutions well to consider the transfer student population in their strategic planning and goals, particularly now that community colleges are becoming a more common entry point into postsecondary education, both in Texas and nationwide. Institutions should consider the entire transfer experience within the context of relevant state and institutional policies as they plan the programs and services that guide their transfer students toward bachelor's degree completion.

Many aspects of the transfer experience warrant further research. Several faculty members expressed a concern that some community college courses, while aligning with a degree plan, may not adequately prepare transfer students for the level of rigor required at the four-year level. Certainly, student learning outcomes may be difficult to measure, but the need for developmental writing coursework, for example, may serve as an adequate indicator for the level of transfer student preparation. Institutions can further contribute to the greater understanding of transfer student success by regularly tracking transfer student graduation rates against comparable groups, particularly since transfer students are often excluded from both national and statewide databases.

Finally, a greater sample size would allow for a more definitive connection between institutional transfer philosophies and transfer success rates. This study, while gleaning a great deal of insight into the transfer experience at four-year institutions in Texas, was exploratory in nature and scratched the surface on a number of challenges and strategies at student, institutional and state levels. Further refining the connection between practice and success is critical to better serving economically disadvantaged students who begin the postsecondary pipeline at the two-year level with aspirations of achieving a bachelor's degree

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APPENDIX A

CASE STUDY INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS[5]

INSTITUTION	THECB CLASSIFICATION	LOCALE	SIZE (UNDERGRADUATE HEADCOUNT)	MSI STATUS (IF ANY)
TSU	Doctoral	town: distant	14,302	
TAU	Doctoral	town: fringe	24,810	emerging HSI
TEU	Emerging research	city: midsize	27,812	
FYU	Comprehensive	rural: fringe	5,315	HSI
RFU	Emerging research	city: large	18,985	

INSTITUTION	% PELL RECIPIENTS	% UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITY	% PART-TIME ATTENDANCE	% OVER 24 YEARS OLD
TSU	33%	28%	16%	14%
TAU	21%	28%	19%	18%
TEU	17%	26%	23%	18%
FYU	70%	94%	37%	21%
RFU	33%	33%	30%	28%

	FIRST-YEAR STUDENT ACCEPTANCE RATE	TRANSFER STUDENT ACCEPTANCE RATE	SIX-YEAR GRADUATION RATE
TSU	68%	96%	44%
TAU	56%	86%	54%
TEU	73%	95%	45%
FYU	100%	98%	37%
RFU	76%	88%	36%

INSTITUTION	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS		
	BA	**MA**	**PhD**
TSU	79	54	5
TAU	97	89	9
TEU	97	101	49
FYU	70	70	1
RFU	78	74	33

[5] Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2010

INSTITUTION	TRANSFER ADMISSION POLICY		
	# credits	GPA	Other requirements
TSU	18	2.0	
	12-17	2.5	
	<12	2.5	Class rank, SAT/ACT
TAU	30	2.25	
	<30	2.0	Class rank, SAT/ACT
TEU	45	2.0	
	30-44	2.25	
	<30	2.5	Class rank, SAT/ACT
FYU	30/2.0	2.0	
	<30	2.0	Class rank, SAT/ACT
RFU	24	2.25	
	<24	2.5	Class rank, SAT/ACT

INSTITUTION	TRANSFER SCHOLARSHIP	
	Requirements	Amount
TSU	45 credits/2.75 GPA	$1,000-3,000/yr based on GPA 3.25 GPA required for renewal the second year total 800 students/$1.3 million awarded per year
TAU	no transfer scholarship but multicultural scholarships available for low-income, first-generation students (approximately 25% of recipients are transfers)	$1,000-2,000/semester
TEU	45 credits/3.25 GPA	$3,000+/yr based on GPA; renewable second year if student meets GPA requirements; some transfer scholarships limited to Phi Theta Kappa/Honors students 400 awarded per year
FYU	3.0 GPA	$1,000/semester
RFU	24 credits/3.5 GPA	$1,350-3,000/yr based on GPA major need-based institutional scholarship may not be funded in 2011-12

INSTITUTION	ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS	OTHER AGREEMENTS	OTHER COMMUNITY COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS
TSU	50 agreements/40 colleges	• 16 reverse transfer • 5 joint admissions	• TSU provides community college advisor training workshops on TSU campus • TSU advisors visit community colleges
TAU	1,023 majors/19 districts	1 reverse transfer	• TAU advisors visit community colleges • Partnering community college provides office space for regular TAU advising • Transfer meetings with community college representatives on TAU campus • Community colleges participate in transfer day on TAU campus
TEU	10 majors/7 districts	• 1 reverse transfer • 1 inverted BAAS	• Consortium with 24 community colleges providing professional development • Campus visit days • TEU advisors at community college campuses and TEU recruiters at transfer fairs • TEU colleges outreach to community college faculty
FYU	1 agreement/1 college	1 joint admissions	• FYU advisors at community college transfer fairs
RFU	89 majors/28 colleges	• 12 reverse transfer • 1 joint admissions	• RFU advisors visit community college campuses

INSTITUTION	TRANSFER ORIENTATION?	REQUIRED?	TRANSFER ADVISING REQUIRED?
TSU	yes	no	First two semesters before registration
TAU	yes	yes	Every semester before registration
TEU	yes	yes	First semester (at orientation)
FYU	no	no	<60 hrs or developmental needs
RFU	yes (online)	no	<30 hrs central, >30 hrs specific college

INSTITUTION	TRANSFER PHILOSOPHY
TSU	Transfer students are a priority for TSU. University leaders recognize that transfer students make up a substantial portion of the student body, and represent a key area for growth. TSU responds to this recognition by tracking transfer student experiences as a part of the university's institutional research efforts. At this time, relatively few programs and services at TSU are tailored specifically to the transfer student population. Several TSU staff members mentioned that the goal is to have transfer students feel as though they are a part of the university as quickly as possible and that transfer student needs are already addressed by existing services. The overall approach to student success at the university is to provide the services needed by any student defined as "at-risk" (i.e., first-generation, nontraditional-aged), and to then offer those services as widely as possible.
TAU	TAU is highly aware of the challenges facing transfer students, who represent half of undergraduate students at the institution. Due to transfers being in the majority, TAU does not offer transfer-specific support services but rather considers the needs of transfers in all of its services. TAU targets transfer student characteristics through programs available to all students, including SSS, the multicultural office, non-traditional and first-generation organizations, and veterans organizations.
TEU	TEU administrators emphasize that transfer students are a significant part of the undergraduate population, and the success of these students has become an important topic at the university. TEU staff members find that students don't want to be labeled as "transfer students", so the university's philosophy is to help them become integrated into campus life as quickly as possible. This philosophy has led TEU to focus its services for transfer students on transitional issues, especially during the student's first semester, and on making sure students know about available services.
FYU	Transfer students are not a high priority for FYU at this time. The university's primary focus is on recruiting new freshmen — particularly students with strong academic credentials and from outside the immediate area — and on improving low retention and graduation rates for native students. Once transfer students are on the FYU campus, administrators note that it is really up to them to seek out services if they find themselves struggling. All of the university's proactive services are focused on freshmen, with some now being expanded to sophomores.
RFU	Staff and administrators we met with felt that the university's emphasis has shifted from transfers to first-year students as it focuses on attaining Research I status. The university is striving for "higher caliber" students to increase its freshman retention rates. While some individuals expressed a commitment to supporting transfer students, the institution has a whole seems to be shifting its image from a commuter school to a more traditional campus.

APPENDIX B: REFERENCES

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ABOUT THE COUNCIL

Established in 1981, the Council for Opportunity in Education is a non-profit organization dedicated to expanding educational opportunity throughout the United States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands. Through its numerous membership services, the Council works in conjunction with colleges, universities, and agencies that host federally-funded college access programs to specifically help low-income, first-generation students and those with disabilities enter college and graduate.

The mission of the Council is to advance and defend the ideal of equal educational opportunity in postsecondary education. The Council's focus is assuring that the least advantaged segments of the American population have a realistic chance to enter and graduate from a postsecondary institution.

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