Enrollment Management of Transfer Students

Lee F. Furbeck

Enrollment management has been defined as "a process that brings together often disparate functions having to do with recruiting, funding, tracking, retaining, and replacing students as they move toward, within, and away from institutions" (Kurz & Scannell, 2006, para. 6). The mix of students whose enrollment is being managed may include first-time, first-year students (both full and part time); adult students; transfer students; returning students; and graduate students. Until recently, transfer students have been an afterthought—a secondary consideration for enrollment professionals focused on bringing in or shaping a class. For many four-year institutions, transfer students were often viewed as an "off/on" valve—kept to a trickle when qualified first-year students are plentiful and turned on full blast when first-year student numbers are low. And except for reporting, two-year schools may not even have distinguished between first-time and experienced students. Even today, while transition and retention programs for first-year students are plentiful, few such programs exist for transfer students. Where they do exist, many transfer orientation and retention programs duplicate first-year programs or add transfer to events designed for first-time, traditional-aged college students.

For many reasons, enrollment management of transfer students has become increasingly important to a wide variety of institutional types. In a recently published review of the evolution of enrollment management as a practice, Kurz and Scannell (2006) acknowledged the importance of transfer students as a priority for growth and also recognize the need for inter- and intracampus collaboration. Recruitment staff alone cannot substantially increase and sustain transfer growth without the support and participation of academic leadership—deans and department chairs, as well as registrar organizations and orientation or student transition staff—providing timely and comprehensive services, such as credit evaluations and degree audits. Transfer students are very focused on time to degree; so for this group, course equivalency guides, articulation agreements, and 2+2 programs (i.e., lower-division course completion at a two-year institution and upper-division course completion at a four-year school) are important recruitment tools. Whether an institution seeks to increase, stabilize, or change enrollment, transfer students are an important piece of the overall enrollment management plan.

Successful management of transfer student enrollment begins long before a student moves from one institution to another. Essential to the development of any strategic enrollment plan is the recognition that while some transfer students have needs and motivators similar to those of first-time, first-year students, others do not due to more varied life and previous college experiences. Institutions that have excelled in their work with transfers recognize these differences and allocate resources to address the specific requirements of this population. Presented within this chapter are key considerations and best practices for attracting, recruiting, and enrolling transfer students while also positioning them for success so that they persist and graduate. While several types of transfer are discussed, the primary focus is on movement from the two-year to the four-year institution with the goal of baccalaureate degree completion (i.e., vertical transfer).
Factors Underlying the Growth of the Transfer Market

Facing demographic, financial, or other challenges, an increasing number of four-year institutions are looking to transfer students to make up for shortfalls among the first-year class. They are enacting specific strategies aimed at reaching out to students from underrepresented groups (e.g., students of color, first-generation students, new immigrants, students who work part-time while attending school, single parents, and older students) who tend to begin postsecondary studies at two-year institutions more frequently (American Association of Community Colleges, 2009). At the same time, the traditional linear vision of college attendance becoming obsolete as students swirl between and among two or more institutions on their way to a bachelor’s degree by supplementing enrollment to accelerate progress, alternating enrollment in two institutions, or enrolling concurrently at two or more schools (McCormick, 2003).

Community colleges play a key role in reducing the proportion of students who delay or forgo postsecondary education following high school graduation via concurrent and continuous enrollment programs (Adelman, 2005). For this reason, the 2/4 community college–baccalaureate function (i.e., transfer as access to the bachelor’s degree) has been one of the most important policy issues in higher education. Its success is central to many dimensions of state higher education, including access, equity, affordability, cost effectiveness, degree production, and quality (Wellman, 2002).

On the state level, there is growing public pressure on two- and four-year institutions to get serious about the transfer and articulation functions between these two sectors. These pressures are attributable to state policy makers as postsecondary leaders attempt to address concerns about access, equity, and stratification through attention to community colleges as a transfer process (Pusser & Turner, 2004). Indeed, several states have mandated transfer and articulation agreements among public institutions and an increasing number of states are changing state funding formulas for the public sector and giving more funding to institutions with persistence and graduation rates. The enrollment management function sits at the nexus of these public policy changes, and enrollment managers must stay abreast of these trends as they prepare to play advocacy roles as many of these questions are considered.

Demographic Variables

Depending on a particular institution’s reach, national, regional, and/or state demographic trends are key for predicting and facilitating transfer student enrollment. Postsecondary enrollment projections and secondary enrollment figures highlight the importance of transfer. While students are expected to enroll in postsecondary education over the next decade, that growth is not evenly distributed in all areas or among all types of students. Recent history and projections suggest an increase in the importance of the transfer market. Between 1993 and 2007, a period of 14 years, enrollment at postsecondary institutions in the United States increased 28%. Likewise, projections from the National Center for Educational Statistics (Hussar & Bailey, 2009) suggest that enrollment at U.S. postsecondary institutions is to increase about 13% between 2007 and 2018. The increases in enrollment at these postsecondary institutions in the next few years are nontraditional students and part-time students, likely seeking flexibility to accommodate work/family schedules—enrollment patterns typical of transfer students. Table 2.1 shows predictions by student group and educational...
### Table 2.1
2007-2018 Postsecondary Institution Enrollment Increase Predictions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By group</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
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<table>
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<th>By level</th>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate degree programs</td>
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*Note. Adapted from Predictions of Educational Statistics to 2018 (NCES Report 2009-062) by W. J. Hussar and T. M. Bailey, 2009.*

In developing an enrollment strategy, higher education administrators must also consider the overall number of high school graduates and the resulting changes in demand for postsecondary education. According to data interpreted by the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE, 2008), the number of high school graduates in the United States peaked nationally in 2007-2008, concluding a period of rapid expansion and initiating a subsequent moderate decline. However, the change in numbers among regions and states varies significantly. The number of high school graduates is projected to increase most in the South and West while growth will be slowest in the Midwest (Hussar & Bailey, 2009). For institutions in high-growth areas, accessibility and the ability to shape an incoming class by enrolling the desired mix of students becomes more complicated. For institutions in slow-growth areas serving primarily traditional-age, full-time, and often full-pay, students, an increase in the number of new undergraduate students enrolling is not likely unless factors impacting enrollment decisions are altered.

At the same time as the pool of available students is shrinking nationally, diversification is escalating. By 2014-2015, non-Whites are projected to account for 42.1% of public high school graduates nationally, an increase of 7.5% over present ratios. Non-Whites' projected share of high school enrollments in 2014-2015 rises to 47.9%, driven by steep declines in White, non-Hispanics and by rapid growth in minority populations, especially Hispanics (WICHE, 2008). With fewer students overall graduating from high school and rising numbers of students traditionally more likely to enroll initially in a community college, enrollment managers must look to transfer to meet institutional goals.
Enrolling additional transfer students makes sense not only for the short term on an institutional level, but also on a broader societal scale. Multiple factors are converging to create an increase in the number of transfer students. The West is projected to be majority/minority in 2010, and the South to follow by 2017. As of the class of 2005, California, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Texas are already graduating minority/majority high school classes. Additions to the class of 2015 will be Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, and Nevada (WICH 2008). Minority, part-time, and low socio-economic students have historically relied on community colleges for access to the baccalaureate because of rising four-year college tuition and the reduction of remedial education in public four-year colleges (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006).

For institutions looking to attract more students from underrepresented groups, community college transfers are a source of diversity not to be ignored. In 2009, community college students constituted 44% of all U.S. undergraduates and 40% of first-time, first-year students. Fifty-two percent of Native American undergraduates, 45% of Asian/Pacific Islanders, 43% of Black/African American undergraduates, and 52% of Hispanic/Latino students were enrolled at community college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2009). However, there is a significant transfer gap between the number of students who enter two-year colleges with the intention of transferring to four-year institutions and the number who actually do. Attention to closing this transfer gap has great potential for promoting economically disadvantaged and underrepresented students' access and achievement of the baccalaureate degree (Cuseo, n.d.).

The United States once produced the highest percentage of bachelor's degrees in the world but now trails behind five other countries, including Canada, Japan, and South Korea. In fact, near 80% of the nation's postsecondary students attend nonselective four-year and community colleges and less than half of those students graduate (Rigoglioso, 2005). Without attention to transfer recruitment, policies, and practices, the United States is likely to fall further behind.

Highly selective institutions and those at capacity can also look at transfer students to meet institutional goals. Because attrition is typically lower than at less selective schools, elite institutions tend to admit low numbers of transfers in general. And when transfer students are admitted, they most frequently come from other four-year schools. Unlike less selective schools that use increased recruitment and marketing to boost application numbers and growth enrollment, highly selective institutions are often able to look to well-qualified students who were initially denied admission or placed on a waiting list (Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008). Gabbard et al. (2006) identify several ways to facilitate the transfer of low-income, two-year students to higher selective institutions. Methods include seeking faculty recommendations to identify prospective transfer student institutions or honors programs tailored to transfer students, assessing financial aid policies with an eye toward transfers, and making sure that faculty and staff are well-informed about transfer population.

Maximizing Enrollment Capacity

In terms of maximizing enrollment capacity, the institutional costs of enrolling transfer students must be considered. Institutional costs for upper-division courses are typically much higher than costs for lower-division courses, and courses in particular fields requiring laboratory or studio space are more expensive than courses in the humanities. Yet, when the cost of offering a course to 20 students is the same as offering the course to 25 students, filling the additional seats can increase the per student cost and increase enrollment revenue. Qualified transfer students who prepared for upper-division coursework can fill the seats vacated via attrition of native students in programs that are generally underenrolled.
However, simply increasing the number of enrolled transfer students will not always serve enrollment management goals. Enrollment managers should also be aware that any reduction in the availability of upper-level courses, due to factors such as budget cuts or lack of qualified teaching faculty, can negatively impact both recruitment of new transfer students and graduation rates for both transfer and native students. While transfer students represent all student levels (i.e., first-year to senior), many vertical transfers come to a four-year institution having completed most, if not all, of their general education coursework and, frequently, entry-level requirements for their major. To complete their degrees, they need to take the required courses in their major, sometimes in sequence. If upper-level seats are not available, attracting additional transfer students to make up for first-year class shortfalls may not be a realistic solution. In fact, continuation of this trend will jeopardize the institution’s ability to achieve steady enrollment of new transfers or a higher target if required to meet overall enrollment goals.

Further complicating the issue, several popular majors for transfer students, such as nursing, have caps on admission into the major that also make attracting and enrolling transfer students more difficult. Any institution looking to enroll additional transfer students must first undertake a careful analysis of which academic programs can accommodate these students. The results of this analysis will allow the institution to focus on intentional recruitment of transfers into specific programs.

When setting a realistic enrollment target, one must also be familiar with the number of potential transfers in a defined recruitment area. Community college students who are traditional-aged and enrolled full-time in programs appropriate for transfer are most likely to move on to a four-year institution in pursuit of a bachelor’s degree. Therefore, a clear understanding of the potential for future community college transfer student enrollment requires comprehensive data regarding the number of traditional-aged students attending full-time in transfer-track programs offered on the campus rather than at a distance (unless the potential receiving institution offers online degree completion programs). If specific programs are to be targeted, academic interests should be entered into the mix as well.

**Transfer Students and Finances**

Tuition levels and fees have a long history of being adjusted by state policy makers and college administrators to accomplish institutional and societal goals, ranging from making up revenue shortfalls to expanding equal opportunity to building a national reputation designed to attract business and industry (Paulson, 1998). Students seek to maximize the return on their college investment—the ratio between what they pay for college and the monetary benefits they receive from a particular college education. Consequently, enrollment should decrease when a college increases its tuition as students may feel they can improve their rate of return at a lower-priced institution (Shin & Milton, 2006). Indeed, students transferring from one institution to another sometimes do so for this reason. However, other factors must also be considered by enrollment managers seeking to understand how students make decisions about transfer. The full model must encompass not only tuition and estimated future wage premiums, but also financial aid (including scholarships), economic conditions, institutional characteristics (e.g., why a degree from a particular institution is worth more or less than the same degree from another), competitors’ tuition, and credits (i.e., academic units and time) left to degree.

Schools enrolling prospective transfer students from out-of-state are likely very different from those being considered by in-state transfer students, particularly for students weighing the merits of in-state versus out-of-state tuition at public institutions. Nontraditional students may place a premium on less time to degree or a more flexible class schedule regardless of tuition costs. In short,
transfer students vary more widely than traditional-aged first-year students in which school selection criteria will trump another. Consequently, institutions may need to introduce independent pricing and/or messaging strategies for the different student populations they are hoping to recruit.

**Scholarships and Aid**

Aside from those institutions that either have institutional cultures attuned to transfer or that have adjusted practices due to increased competition for transfer students, most institutions do not provide significant financial support for transfer students (Gabbard et al., 2006). In most cases, the majority of awards received by transfer students are need based, and there are few awards specifically for transfer students or even for which transfer students are eligible. Having aid available is important to students who are particularly sensitive to the cost difference between a community college and a four-year institution. Additional financial support can also boost outreach efforts, especially in the case of awards provided specifically to particular transfer students, such as Phi Theta Kappa (i.e., an international honor society for students attending two-year institutions) members.

At the same time, institutions must examine their criteria for awarding transfer scholarships to ensure that funds are supporting recruitment efforts. Scholarships awarded to students entering a limited enrollment program with a low accept rate and a high yield may not be the best use of funds. Groups of students, such as readmitted students and students entering an institution to obtain a second undergraduate degree at the same level (e.g., a second associate or bachelor’s degree), generally have very specific reasons for wanting to enroll at a particular institution and are not likely to be influenced by the availability of scholarships.

Although the factors discussed here typically result in transfers being less price-sensitive than first-year students, it is still important for institutions to use historical data effectively to understand what aid strategies for transfers will produce the best results (e.g., maximize enrollments, increase net tuition revenue, meet diversity goals). Some institutions are using sophisticated statistical analyses to determine price elasticity—the significance of an applicant’s total financial package—to increase enrollment, manage resources more efficiently, and predict transfer student yields. Less sophisticated tools can also be used to estimate the impact of changes in awarding strategy for targeted enrollment goals.

Kurz and Scannell (2006) outline one procedure for developing yield tables in order to explore the impact of financial awards on enrollment behavior. First, they suggest segmenting the data on multiple years (e.g., two or three should suffice) of transfer admits into categories of transfer college GPA in order to look for breakpoints in yield at different GPA levels. Depending on where breaks occur, the cohorts are segmented into groups by GPA. Analyzing the yield patterns for each quality group comes next. This can be done by examining financial need and total grant levels and determining the appropriate amount of grant assistance to offer. The point at which additional grant funds to students with similar need levels does not substantially increase yield rates provides the line where the total grant is too generous and not a wise use of resources. If additional funding does improve yields, financial aid awards should be increased in order to increase enrollment and net tuition revenue. This may be the case, for example, at a higher cost, private institution (Kurz, Scannell, & Veeder, 2008).
Transfer Recruitment

Clear goals, accompanied by measurable enrollment objectives are imperative for institutions engaging in competitive transfer student recruitment and admissions. Because of the wide variety of transfer student needs and motivations, successful recruitment strategists must have an understanding of how and why students move between and among institutions of higher education and what motivates them to choose a particular institution. Vertical transfers may initially enroll at the community college for a variety of reasons, including cost, proximity to home, athletics, cultural expectations, poor academic preparation, change of career plans, rejection from a school of choice, or lack of knowledge about college in general. In contrast, lateral transfers (e.g., transfer from a four-year to a four-year institution) more frequently use transfer to improve institutional fit (Cheslock, 2005). Swirling students may be motivated by financial limitations, scheduling limitations, or the need to earn a degree quickly. Nontraditional students—a fast-growing segment of the college-going population—may be looking specifically for opportunities to earn a degree via distance education or on nights and weekends. Institutions unable to accommodate the specific needs of the transfer students being sought must change either institutional policies and practices or seek students with motivators more compatible with the institution’s climate.

Effective enrollment managers must not only be cognizant of transfer students’ needs but they must also be able to identify their competitors to position the institution favorably within the students’ narrowed selection process. Typically, transfer students are considering fewer options than first-year students during the college application process. While it is not uncommon for first-year students to apply to 8 to 10 different colleges, transfers typically only apply to one or two. As a result, transfer yield rates are much higher—often more than double—than first-year yield rates at the same institution. As noted, transfers care about affordability, but they may make enrollment decisions based on other factors: the number of credits accepted for transfer and consequently the time required to earn a degree at the receiving institution, the quality of the major, the timeliness and accuracy of information (i.e., they are more sophisticated consumers), flexibility of course offerings, and location. Customer service and course availability are sometimes more important priorities for transfers than paying less for a degree. Institutions that are successful in enrolling transfers have figured out what they need to do organizationally and operationally to ensure transfers feel a sense of fit and belonging.

The first step to effective transfer recruitment is identifying prospects and an effective recruitment range. Community colleges, especially those geographically closest to the four-year school, are the most obvious source of prospective transfer students. For public colleges and universities with different tuition rates for resident and nonresident students, all public community colleges in the same state are potential suppliers of transfer students. Although students attend community colleges for a variety of reasons, the lower cost and proximity to home are often the key factors in the decision. Using resources to attract transfer students across state lines (e.g., for public institutions) or from an area that would require the student to move or travel a long distance from home may not be the best use of time and effort.

The right combination of factors can also make a four-year institution attractive to potential transfers from two-year institutions in other states. Many public institutions have reciprocal tuition agreements with neighboring states or particular counties in neighboring states. Where reductions in the amount of tuition assessed nonresidents is not possible, scholarship awards (e.g., tuition discounting) can be employed to bring the cost to a level acceptable to potential transfers. When enough additional students are enrolled so that the awards are offset by the tuition revenue increase, a win-win situation is created. Private institutions have the flexibility to define their effective recruitment areas without regard to state lines. However, administrators at such
institutions must also be aware of the actual out-of-pocket cost a transfer student is willing to pay to attend and plan allocation of resources accordingly. In cases where cost is not the primary concern, enrollment managers may have the freedom to define the effective recruitment area differently. Space in limited enrollment programs or a flexible schedule of course offerings can attract students willing to pay for educational opportunities and convenience.

Finally, four-year institutions with limited program overlap can partner with more comprehensive four-year institutions to provide opportunities for transfer. For example, a liberal arts college may partner with a larger university to offer a program to students wishing to major in an area offered only at the more comprehensive institution. Engineering programs have taken advantage of this model, creating plans where students study first at a liberal arts college then move to the university.

Colleges and universities have numerous sources for prospective first-year students, but few sources exist for populating the transfer prospect pool. Phi Theta Kappa is one source. Other sources include returning students and nonmatriculated students (i.e., former applicants or prospects) as well as current high school students who intend to enroll initially at a community college.

**Predicting Yield**

Predicting enrollment and yields is a key component of transfer student enrollment management. Projecting the yield at each stage in the recruitment process is possible using historical data when figures are stable and consistent or if trends are present over time and can be factored into enrollment planning. For many transfer students, the first recorded contact with a potential transfer institution is the application for admission. According to a study conducted by Noel-Levitz (2007), the application for admission was the first contact for 49.1% of fall 2006 transfer applicants to four-year, public institutions and 41.5% of fall 2006 transfer applicants to private, four-year colleges. In contrast, the application for admission accounted for only 29.9% of first contacts for first-year applicants to four-year publics and 22.1% of applicants to four-year privates. As a result of students entering the funnel at different stages, communication and recruitment efforts initiated by status changes lose their effectiveness. Because they do not follow a single, institutionally prescribed path to enrollment, transfer students are not exposed to key messages delivered at prescribed stages (Copeland, 2007).

To predict transfer enrollment and use resources wisely, institutions must have an awareness of top feeder institutions and the role of geography. Enrollment managers need to do the necessary research to determine the percentage of in-state community college transfer students who transfer to an institution in the same state, the percentage who go out of state, and who these students are demographically. Typically, the state governing board for community colleges (e.g., Board of Regents or Department of Education) will have these data available.

It is also important to consider specific attributes of one's own institution when predicting transfer enrollment. At an institution where undergraduate degree programs, course scheduling, cost, and method of instruction cater to traditional-age, full-time students with adequate financial support and where transfer credit policies benefit students who have taken courses in the liberal arts and sciences, the number of potential transfers from the community college system depends on several variables. A sense of whether that pool is growing or shrinking depends not only on head counts but also on the number of those students who are likely to best fit the institutional environment.

An important resource for transfer student enrollment management is the National Student Clearinghouse. Data from the Clearinghouse allow enrollment managers to trace enrollment patterns over time. For example, the University of Kansas (KU) utilized Clearinghouse data to determine that the majority of transfer students admitted to but not enrolled at KU for fall 2008
chose to enroll at other four-year public institutions (57%). Another 31% enrolled at two-year public institutions, many likely returning to the institution at which they were currently enrolled (i.e., most at Kansas public two-year institutions). About 16% enrolled at four-year privates. Four-year publics were also the institutions of choice for fall 2009 KU transfer admits (57%), and 30% enrolled at two-year public institutions, again with most at Kansas public, two-year institutions. About 15% enrolled at four-year privates. In general, 2009 nonmatriculated transfer students tended to enroll at a public university in their resident state. For the past two years, the percentage of students enrolling at other four-year publics, two-year publics, and four-year privates has been remarkably consistent. This information is helpful in identifying trends, and at least 30% of the students enrolled at the two-year publics can still be recruited as future transfer students.

Recruitment Materials and Activities

Each year, hundreds of thousands of view books—expensive, multipage brochures filled with campus photos and descriptions of idyllic student life—are mailed to prospective students by colleges and universities hoping to spark interest in just the right mix of students. For the most part, the view book is the centerpiece of recruitment with content specifically designed to appeal to an audience of high school students preparing to leave home and launch themselves into the world via college. A recent analysis of 48 college and university view books across the United States uncovered almost no mention of commuters, nontraditional students, or transfers, instead depicting students as “a diverse, young, fun-loving crowd” (Hartley & Morpew, 2008, p. 678). Yet, many institutions of higher education choose to use this piece as an introduction for experienced students who are looking for more than glossy photos, pretty buildings, and fun. A view book or brochure targeting transfer students must contain the right mix of rational argument and emotional appeal.

Many transfer students are making decisions about where they will continue their education before institutions even have a chance to court them with printed materials and prospect communications. For transfer students who may only apply to one or possibly two schools that appear to meet their needs, an institution can be on or off the short list before even knowing about a prospective student. Colleges and universities with admissions websites referring only to first-year, senior-year, or required high school courses convey a negative message to transfer students regarding their lack of importance and suggest they are not welcome. On the other hand, an easily navigable site with clear information about transfer admission requirements, transfer of credit, and a nod to previous experience as a college student signals a more welcoming environment.

For the transfer student visiting a campus, access to faculty and advisors in specific academic programs is crucial. All other offerings are secondary to this key component of the visit. Including prospective transfer students in visit programs centered on first-year students sends the message that transfer students are outside the norm. When first-year and transfer students are present, the needs of both must be addressed. Welcome sessions and enrollment presentations should be appropriate for both groups, and departmental or organizational representatives at information fairs should be aware that both first-year students and transfers may be attending. Breakout session topics should include those important to transfer students (e.g., transfer of credit).

While most high schools welcome college and university representatives hoping to recruit their students, most colleges and universities do not. Baccalaureate-granting institutions, however, have traditionally sent representatives to two-year campuses to recruit transfer students, but these individuals are typically trained to recruit first-year students and seldom are able to answer the majority of questions asked. Visits to community colleges and attendance at transfer fairs demands a different, more academically-oriented approach designed to identify prospective transfer students and to provide necessary information to those already planning to attend.
Effective visits can take many forms, ranging from attendance at transfer fairs to onsite advising appointments to presentations to classes or student organizations. Institutions with a significant percentage of transfer students from one or two top sending schools should arrange for the presence of an advisor or counselor at the community college on a regular basis. This can take the form of an advisor borrowing office space and meeting on a weekly basis with students planning to transfer or a staff member with a part-time appointment at both institutions. Formal partnership programs can allow advisors at the sending and receiving institutions to collaborate in serving a student from the time of initial enrollment.

While involvement and support of academic units can enhance first-year student recruitment efforts, it is crucial for transfer recruitment. Recruitment staff, academic advisors, faculty, and administrators need to recognize the value of adding transfer students to the enrollment mix and commit resources to recruiting, welcoming, and retaining them.

Transfer Processes

With the majority of students now receiving bachelor’s degrees from institutions other than the ones at which they began their postsecondary education, increased efficiency in the transfer of credits is more important than ever. Neither legislatures nor students want to pay twice for the same course. Institutions seeking to increase enrollment must balance academic integrity with flexibility, and those institutions with unmet demand must ensure that students are not repeating courses unnecessarily (Shoenberg, 2001). For the student intent on transferring, the process is often ineffective or incomplete. Some students transfer with many credits that either are not accepted by the receiving institution or do not count toward the specific requirements for a bachelor’s degree. Sometimes, students transfer without having completed a transfer curriculum, reducing the potential cost-efficiency benefits of completing lower-division requirements at the less expensive community college. Finally, many students transfer to a four-year college before earning an associate degree, and those who do not graduate are left without any degree.

Institutional policies and practices often create barriers for transfer students. To successfully recruit and graduate transfer students, barriers must be identified and addressed. A common obstacle is the students’ perception—and perhaps the reality—that the institution is an impersonal and difficult place to navigate. This view often arises from cumbersome admission and enrollment procedures, including the inability to access consistent information on how transfer credits will apply; the enrollment criteria for specific programs, which can vary widely within a single institution; and campus resources and services.

A second barrier is the inability for students to access or transfer required lower-level courses for selected programs of study. When prerequisite courses required for entry into upper-division coursework or into a specific academic program are not available at sending institutions, students are unable to progress toward their intended degrees. For most students, this adds at least one semester if they have completed an associate degree. Another barrier is the fact that general education requirements may vary widely among schools and majors within the same institution. Students must choose a major early or risk delaying time-to-graduation significantly. A lack of program-to-program and general articulation agreements with primary sending institutions creates uncertainty and impedes the ability of potential transfers to plan their curricula. Without formal agreements, institutions and academic units within institutions are free to change degree requirements and equivalencies, and students and staff at the sending institution may not always be made aware of changes that occur at the receiving school in a timely manner. Likewise, the absence of
required academic advising or orientation programs can result in lack of information and poor course choices for transfers.

Institutional priorities can also inhibit transfer student enrollment. High tuition rates coupled with the lack of scholarship awards deter transfer students. Given some of the primary reasons that students chose to enroll initially at a community college, this barrier may be particularly problematic for public institutions that are comparatively more expensive than other in-state options. Finally, the lack of a timely option for students graduating with a career or technical degree (e.g., Associate of Applied Science or AAS) to obtain a bachelor’s degree excludes large numbers of potential vertical transfers. Without an inverted degree option (i.e., the applied degree is followed by two years of general education courses at a four-year institution that awards the bachelor’s degree), students graduating from career and technical programs can expect three or more years of full-time coursework to earn a bachelor’s degree following two years of full-time enrollment (i.e., 60 credits) required for the AAS.

**Credit Transfer and Evaluation**

Aside from geography, which is not a concern for transfers considering online options, a primary consideration for transfer students is transfer of credit. At the core of any transfer-friendly institution is a set of generous, established, and consistent guidelines and procedures for accepting transfer credit. The absence of guidelines and procedures or inconsistent application of guidelines creates barriers for transfer student enrollment as does curricular rigidity of four-year institutions regarding acceptance of courses offered by other institutions. Additional barriers are curricular changes made by four-year institutions without consideration of implications for potential transfer students; agreements not being adhered to at the college, school, or department level; and the lack of formal transfer credit agreements (Caseo, n.d.). Transfer students want to know up front how much of their credit will transfer and how it will apply to a particular degree program. Institutions that do not make this information available to prospective transfer students early in the process, even prior to application, are at a competitive disadvantage. On both the state and institutional levels, a variety of databases designed to assist students in determining how their courses will transfer have been implemented in recent years. The most sophisticated of these allow students to compare how their credits would transfer to two or three institutions or to various degree programs at a specific institution.

Several best practices that allow transfer students to plan and manage their curriculum have been identified and applied by institutions successfully engaged in recruiting, enrolling, and graduating transfer students. The creation of a comprehensive, strategic transfer recruitment and retention plan that addresses the needs of transfer students is an important first step. By designating an institutional transfer coordinator, appointing transfer liaisons in academic and student affairs, and establishing a regular forum for discussion of transfer issues, colleges and universities can ensure that policies and practices benefit all types of students. Finally, assessment is crucial to transfer student success. Both assessment of processes such as curricular gaps or disconnects, course availability, and scheduling issues and the development of tracking mechanisms that make sense for students who are transferring, enrolling concurrently, and swirling must occur on a regular basis (Noel-Levitz, 2007).

Two examples of successful transfer forums are Iowa State University's (ISU) Articulation Coordination Council and DePaul University’s Office of Community College Partnerships. The purpose of Iowa State’s Council is to enhance programmatic and institutional articulation between ISU and institutions or programs that are significant or potentially significant sources of transfer students with a primary focus on the Iowa community colleges. The Council is sponsored by the
Office of the Provost, chaired by an associate provost, and includes membership from admission
the Office of the Provost, student affairs, each academic college and school, the faculty senate, an
student government. DePaul’s program, established in 2006, was created to (a) represent the insti-
tution for statewide initiatives involving transfer; (b) connect curriculum, faculty members, an
advisors; (c) create formal partnerships and agreements making transfer consistent and predictab-
dl) create communications for faculty members, advisors, and students that advertise, promote
and clarify transfer agreements, policies, and procedures; and (e) maintain records of agreements
and partnerships (Brennan, Chaden, McLaughlin, Sanders, & Bonguis-Petersen, 2009). Both ini-
tiatives provide a mechanism for clear, open communication regarding the strategic develop-
ment of transfer policies and procedures.

Articulation policies have been developed most frequently between public four-year and com-
munity colleges. However, some private colleges, particularly less selective ones, have also adopte
articulation agreements with specific community colleges (Dowd & Melguizo, 2008). While man
stitutions may be quick to enter into agreements for the sake of positive publicity, it is crucial
that these agreements establish substantive collaborations and partnerships between institution
and specifically address policies to provide flexibility and consistency of information and process
ing to a broad spectrum of transfer students. With or without an articulation agreement in place
transfer students seek institutions that value and respect transfer credit.

Accountability regarding the effectiveness of articulation agreements and partnership program
is problematic. Because transfer students vary so widely in their intentions, needs, and goals, a
single rate can capture all transfer activity. As a result, no consensus about which students count a
potential transfers has been reached to date (Wellman, 2002). However, there is little doubt that such agreements do encourage closer communication and general goodwill between colleague
at the partner institutions. These partnerships can be recruitment and retention tools, allowin
students to persist and graduate at higher rates.

Orientation and Enrollment

For first-year students, orientation and enrollment are often a hand off or a rite of passag
whereby the student transitions from admitted to enrolled and from the admissions and recruit
ment staff to the staff who work with new student programs or orientation and academic advising
Most of the students (i.e., greater than 90%) who commit to a particular institution as first-yea
students will matriculate; therefore, orientation is more of a transition than a recruitment event
And unless a first-year student is entering directly from high school with a large number of transfe
credits already earned, chances are he or she will be able to enroll in a variety of courses that fulfill
degree requirements.

Differences between transfer and traditional orientation programs at institutions of high
education highlight many of the mistaken ideas colleges have about transfer students and the robust
ness of transfer orientations is an indication of how concerned a college is about the postregistra
tion well-being of a transfer student. Even a cursory examination of institutional practices will prov
that transfer students often experience abbreviated orientation programs. In particular, transfe
students are shunted on logistics, career counseling, and retention initiatives, in comparison wit
their direct-entry, first-year student counterparts. Students who transfer may experience a dra
matic change in the size of the campus, the ratio of students to faculty, the availability of parking
residential accommodations, and other physical constraints that are indirectly or directly relat
ed to academic performance. At a minimum, transfer student orientation should include advisin
and course registration and time to (a) meet with representatives from the major department
(b) attend to business, such as purchasing a parking pass and obtaining a student ID; (c) spea

with current students who have transferred; and (d) ask specific, individual questions (Hockey, Corbin, Keffer, & Lamb, 2008).

Finally, transfer students should be able to register for courses at the same time as other students who have earned a similar number of credits. This can be accomplished through early orientation and enrollment programs held during the spring and fall semesters at a time and on date convenient for an institution’s primary transfer population. Advising and enrollment could even take place on the campus of primary sending institutions. For a more in-depth discussion of recommended practices for transfer orientation, see chapter 6.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Developing an institutional transfer enrollment strategy calls first for analysis of the current transfer population and potential areas for change, whether that be by growth or by shaping the class. An honest assessment of the institution’s transfer policies and procedures will allow administrators to identify areas for improvement. Following are a series of potential starting points for institutions looking to improve transfer:

◊ Both sending and receiving institutions should create, update, and promote awareness of articulation agreements and academic program transfer guides. Effective agreements are updated on an annual basis and are easily accessible to the public and internal and external stakeholders, particularly students planning to transfer and their advisors in order to make well-informed curricular decisions. Furthermore, agreements and plans should be publicized regularly so that prospective transfers are aware of them earlier in their college careers.

◊ Information regarding curricular changes needs to be communicated on a timely basis to all who are potentially impacted or who are responsible for communicating curricular information to students, such as school and college administrators, admissions staff, the registrar, and advisors at all primary sending and receiving institutions. Students planning to transfer courses and their advisors must be confident that the course will transfer as promised with no surprises. Any change in curriculum or degree requirements has the potential to impact other internal units; therefore, the consequences of the change should be examined during the decision-making process and advanced notice provided to the affected units to allow time to react or inform advisors and students of the change.

◊ Prior to investing a substantial amount of money or effort, prospective transfer students want to know exactly how credits earned will apply to various degree programs and should be able to estimate the number of credits needed for graduation. Transfer students (and new first-year students with credit earned) are becoming increasingly concerned about time to degree and are using this information to make decisions regarding attendance. Many universities have or are in the process of implementing technology that makes this information available to students prior to admission. Institutions unwilling or unable to provide this information in a timely or inexpensive manner will be at an increasing competitive disadvantage.

◊ Strong relationships between two- and four-year institutions need to be cultivated and maintained. Regular communication at all levels encourages collaboration and removes ill-founded false impressions (e.g., a perceived lack of respect on the part of the four-year institution for the role community colleges play). When initiated by the four-year institutions, events such as summits or other opportunities for upper-level administrators to discuss transfer issues send the message that the four-year institution is interested in receiving
transfer students and working closely with community college partners in other ways. These events have proven successful in building mutual respect and promoting understanding.

- An understanding of which transfer students persist to graduation and their rates of persistence is crucial for any institution that enrolls students with previous college experience. Based on this knowledge, problematic issues can be addressed and resolved.

- The right staffing is critical to transfer enrollment management efforts. The most successful staffing patterns have more to do with roles and responsibilities than where transfer functions are housed (e.g., admissions vs. registrar vs. transfer center). Enrollment management of transfers and transfer recruitment activities call for different levels of expertise and experience. A senior administrator should oversee articulation efforts; internal an external relationship-building; partnership or dual-degree programs; campus-wide an state-wide efforts; and development of new linkages, programs, and collaborations with other institutions. Responsibility for overseeing transfer communication and recruitment plans, equivalency guide updates, transfer admission policies and procedures, transfer visit days, and website and publication updates as well as serving as a contact for advisors sending institutions requires a different skill set and level of expertise. For highly decentralized institutions, a senior-level transfer-focused position is a must, no matter where it is housed. Transfer-focused staff work closely with academic and student affairs units at provide for a first point of contact and source of general information for newly admitted and matriculated transfer students and personnel from sending institutions. Having an appropriate number of transfer-focused staff empowered to make decisions enables a receiving institution to provide necessary, consistent, up-to-date information to transfer students. A centralized transfer-resource center or staffing pattern can be a cost-effective way for universities to provide necessary services and programs for transfer students through salary offsets, elimination of redundancy, and increased tuition revenue.

- At the state or system policy level, sufficient resources (i.e., human and monetary) should be allocated to address the growing population of transfer students. Key factors in promoting seamless transfer begin with aligning high school graduation requirements with college admission requirements and providing postsecondary enrollment options to high school students. Establishing a system-wide common general education core curriculum and common course numbering can help students navigate higher education more effectively while also encouraging regular interinstitutional faculty meetings to negotiate transfer agreements by major and curricular alignment (Boswell, 2004).

A combination of economics, mobility, and demographics has made transfer students important part of any enrollment management plan. Indeed, transfers are the key to sustaining or growing enrollment for many institutions. To effectively influence transfer student behavior, enrollment managers must understand the needs and motivation of the specific transfer population the institution attracts and is seeking to attract. Staff and monetary resources need to be allocated to serving the transfer population, both prior to and after transfer, ensuring that transfer students persist and graduate. Seamless transfer depends on the cooperation of multiple entities in college or university setting. Without support from academic and service units who understand, appreciate, and are willing to differentiate between transfer and first-year students and to allocate resources to serve this population, growth in transfer enrollment cannot be sustained. Finally, four-year institutions and community colleges should work together to serve students who value higher education as a single entity rather than as a set of unique institutions. The landscape of higher education is changing, and institutions must change with it or risk extinction.