Chapter 5

Transfer Student Centers

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Transfer centers can provide support and advocacy for students whether they are leaving an institution or beginning at a new one. A transfer center is a hub of activity and has the greatest interface with students. By coordinating the collaborative efforts needed to provide the essential programming and services in the transfer process, centers can contribute to making the student’s next transition easier and smoother. They can also foster transfer student success through two-and four-year campus partnerships as well as supply departments at both sending and receiving institutions with feedback for program improvement.

Ideally, an efficient transfer center would be a one-stop shop consolidating the disparate offices, departments, and entities that routinely respond to the myriad questions and issues posed by transfer students. Such a center would be best staffed by personnel with knowledge and expertise in the most significant areas of students’ concerns to promptly respond and facilitate a smooth transfer and integration into the new institution. Primary areas of concern include admissions, registration, financial aid, credit transfer, degree options and requirements, plans of study, class scheduling, and scholarships. Secondary, but often equally important, issues related to students’ successful transitions are orientation, housing, transportation, student services (e.g., health, career and personal counseling, victim advocacy, visas, tutoring, veteran’s services, disability services), dining options, and campus facilities. Finally, a transfer center’s staff should be well versed and able to connect students to other centers and offices overseeing cocurricular, and off-campus opportunities (e.g., recreation, student organizations, Greek life, internships, and co-ops).

Unfortunately, most colleges and universities do not have comprehensive transfer centers. Services tend to be spread across several offices and departments that operate in an isolated and compartmentalized manner. This can lead to poor interdepartmental collaboration and a frustrating bureaucratic trail for the new transfer student to follow.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the growth of the transfer student population and a discussion of how the transfer center model can address the need for new support services. It continues with practical guidance for creating and maintaining an effective transfer center—from both the outbound and inbound student perspective. In doing so, it highlights institutions that are serving as exemplars in their efforts to accommodate students’ successful transitions through the transfer center model.

Transfer Students by the Numbers

Increasing numbers of students attend more than one institution prior to earning a baccalaureate, and more of them are starting their higher education journey at two-year colleges. Kirst (2007) estimates that nearly 45% of all students enrolled in postsecondary education are attending public community colleges. In 2003, the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2003) placed this figure at roughly 6.3 million students enrolled in two-year
institutions. Of these students, approximately 50% indicated an initial intention to con- a four-year degree, but only an estimated 25% with associate degree aspirations transfer- four-year school within six years (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). A more recent i (U.S. Department of Education, 2008) states that about 66% of the 2004 high school s; who immediately entered the community college intended to pursue a bachelor’s degree usi: community college as a stepping stone.

From a four-year institution perspective, this translates to transfer students compr isi increasing percentage of the total student body. U.S. News & World Report (Best Colleges: Transfer Students, 2010) identified more than 100 schools that enrolled over 1,200 transfer st in fall 2008. Table 5.1 lists the top 10 institutions and their transfer percentages.

Table 5.1
Top Ten Institutions With Transfer Enrollments Greater Than 1,200 Students for Fall 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Total number of transfer students for fall 2008</th>
<th>Total student enrollment for fall 2008</th>
<th>% of transfer students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Phoenix</td>
<td>35,515</td>
<td>391,145</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excelsior College</td>
<td>16,541</td>
<td>31,399</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona State University</td>
<td>5,446</td>
<td>52,734</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of South Florida</td>
<td>4,623</td>
<td>44,849</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Central Florida</td>
<td>4,455</td>
<td>50,275</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of North Texas</td>
<td>3,852</td>
<td>34,795</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Maryland-University College</td>
<td>3,753</td>
<td>46,578</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California State University-Northridge</td>
<td>3,672</td>
<td>36,208</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Houston</td>
<td>3,347</td>
<td>36,104</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty University</td>
<td>3,303</td>
<td>48,139</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*These institutions have large distance-learning programs.

As the transfer student population grows, both two- and four-year institutions will n evaluate policies and procedures and make changes to accommodate the diverse needs di; distinct student group. Transfer centers provide an efficient and flexible strategy to ensure e are in place that can support transfer students’ successful transition, retention, and gradu

Transfer Center Models

While most community colleges offer some form of transfer services, they are varied in nature, level of quality, and focus. Cohen, Brawer, and Associates (1994) describe three t; that guide the direction of transfer centers: (a) student development model, (b) docu model, and (c) academic model. The student development model focuses on providing t
advising to students regarding transfer opportunities, criteria for transfer, academic plans and course selection, college costs, and financial aid. The primary intent of the documents model is to develop and maintain formal or official agreements related to course equivalencies (i.e., individual course equivalencies, general education agreements, and/or major-specific articulation agreements) as well as state or legislative reports related to transfer persistence and academic performance. The academic model concentrates on faculty-to-faculty collaborative efforts to align courses and programs, reach common understandings within disciplines about expected content and rigor at the lower-division level, and bridge understanding between two- and four-year institutions.

While none of these models are mutually exclusive (e.g., a hybrid transfer center might focus on faculty relationships in specific disciplines while offering extensive advising services), most centers have one model as a guiding principle. Institutions interested in developing, expanding, or revitalizing the transfer services on their campuses would benefit from campus discussions related to these models and identifying a primary focus.

Outbound Perspective

Transfer centers at community colleges provide services to students preparing to transfer to four-year institutions to complete their bachelor’s degrees. The transfer center at Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC) in Lexington, Kentucky, provides an example of a successful center, which yielded an increase in the college’s transfer rate.

BCTC opened its transfer center in 2006, funded by a Title III grant from the U.S. Department of Education with a goal of increasing the transfer rate of BCTC students. The transfer center functioned as a hybrid model with a primary focus on transfer advising (i.e., student development model) and tasked with developing transfer articulation programs with local four-year institutions (i.e., documents model). Within two years of implementing the center, BCTC met its goal of increasing the transfer rate (by 4.4%) and led the state in both its transfer rate as well as the overall transfer numbers (Transfer Center Momentum, 2009). BCTC’s transfer center became a model for other colleges in the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, and by the end of the 2008-2009 academic year, all colleges implemented some form of transfer center or transfer services on their campuses.

The early success of the BCTC transfer center, combined with a state initiative to increase transfer numbers, provided a foundation for the expansion of the transfer emphasis at community colleges and universities across the state. Six key elements critical to the success of the BCTC Transfer Center were identified and shared with colleagues across the state, including the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education: (a) dedicated transfer advisors, (b) a highly skilled team, (c) institutional support, (d) strong collaboration with four-year institutions, (e) adequate funding, and (f) evaluation and assessment.

Dedicated transfer advisors. Regardless of the model chosen, strong transfer centers include a focus on individual transfer advising. Because of the large knowledge base needed to provide effective transfer advising, it is critical that this task becomes the primary responsibility of dedicated transfer advisors. Unfortunately, it is probably far more common that transfer guidance is simply one of many responsibilities held by professional advisors and/or faculty advisors.

Like the academic advisor, a transfer advisor combines knowledge and information with counseling and educational skills. However, he or she has the added responsibility of developing and maintaining an understanding of the academic requirements of the partner university or universities, which can encompasses numerous departments and colleges and change frequently. Successful transfer advising often focuses on timely completion of the associate degree or pre-major program and preparation for transfer. A team of skilled and dedicated personnel helps ensure that
transfer information is complete and above all accurate, avoiding an inefficient and frustratin
transfer process for students and institutions alike.

**A skilled team.** In addition to dedicated transfer advisors, a transfer center team is critical to providing the necessary services to students and guiding the institution toward increasing transfer opportunities for students. At BCTC, this team is comprised of (a) a director responsible for overall leadership of the center, building and maintaining partnerships with universities and colleges, directing marketing initiatives, developing guaranteed transfer programs with four-year institutions, guiding the staff toward meeting grant and institutional goals; (b) an associate director tasked with maintaining articulation agreement records, developing a website, implementing peer mentor programs, and providing transfer advising; (c) a part-time research analyst with a focus on program evaluation, assessment of grant goals, and research related to student needs and satisfaction; (d) full-time, dedicated transfer advisor; (e) a transfer coordinator with combined responsibilities of transfer advising and peer mentoring program development; and (f) an administrative assistant. Further, strong collaborations with four-year institutions resulted in the placement of transfer advisors from three key partner universities in the BCTC transfer center. The part-time and full-time advisors were funded by their respective universities.

**Strong institutional support.** Institutions need to be committed to the goal of increasing the transfer rate and provide adequate funding and staffing to meet that goal. Creating a strong transfer culture has been identified as one of the key indicators of high transfer rates; students must be aware that transferring is valued and supported (Cohen, 1996). Cohen found that institutions with higher transfer rates had active and highly visible transfer centers, a culture of transfer expectataion among staff, and a university located in close proximity with admission standards that support transfer students.

Faculty, administrators, and counselors can also contribute to the success of community college students transitioning to four-year institutions by serving as transfer agents and providing both emotional support and practical information related to transfer (Nora & Rendón, 1990; Pa Bensimon, Malcom, Márquez, & Park, 2006). To that end, the BCTC Transfer Center offered voluntary online transfer advising training program to faculty and staff who had significant contact with students. This training program was designed to increase general transfer knowledge across campus. As Nora (2000) notes,

Faculty play an important role in identifying and facilitating student acquisition of academic competencies needed to complete general education requirements, and they play a critical role in the design of programs and practices to bring underprepared students into the high education mainstream. (p. 6)

Additionally, periodic reports to staff and faculty at meetings of the academic divisions, student affairs staff, and administrative assistants, provided an opportunity to increase transfer knowledge across the campus.

In an effort to demonstrate strong institutional support to its students, BCTC publish transfer facts on campus through the use of digital signage systems, electronic marquees, the website, and print publications. To create a vibrant transfer culture on campus, messages display to the students through the various media outlets highlighted key BCTC transfer statistics (e.g., BCTC is the top transfer school in the state).

**Strong collaboration with four-year institutions.** Collaboration with four-year institutions is perhaps one of the most critical elements of successful transfer centers. Often, concerns about transfer issues begin and end at one institution. Administrators, faculty, and advisors across institutions must form partnerships with each other. While high-level, institutional agreements provide the strongest pathways for students, these agreements most frequently develop out
relationships between individual staff or faculty members. Strategies must be in place to address negative perceptions or experiences that could preempt effective partnerships. Obstacles may include (a) complaints from four-year institutions that community college transfer students do not have correct transfer admission requirement information, (b) community college complaints about not being able to access premajor course information from four-year schools or being kept out of the loop of program changes, (c) student complaints about courses not transferring or receiving misinformation, and (d) campus myths ranging from perceived typical demographics to level of engagement (or lack of) of the transfer population. All of these scenarios may ring true at times; however, issues can often be resolved through open and frequent communication between partnering institutions.

BCTC identified its key institutional partnerships and invested time, energy, and resources to improving and maintaining those relationships. Campus visits, frequent phone calls, and inclusion in key meetings led to even stronger partnerships. In the context of a statewide effort to increase transfer from community colleges, both BCTC and its partnering institutions knew they had much to gain from these collaborations, resulting in the following added services for BCTC students:

- Three additional full-time university transfer advisors in the transfer center, funded by the four-year partner institutions
- Transfer scholarships that provide financial assistance, including awards allowing students to continue their education at the university while paying BCTC tuition rates
- Clear articulation agreements, transfer-friendly admissions policies, and collaborative support of transfer students
- Guaranteed admission transfer programs with two Kentucky universities, including the ability to take a limited number of premajor courses while a student at BCTC at the BCTC tuition rates
- Support during the transition process through transfer centers at the four-year institutions

*Adequate funding.* Funding should be primarily directed to human resources. While publications, transfer resources, computer labs, and digital signage systems can supplement advising and services offered through the transfer center, investing in personnel who provide those services is critical. People are at the heart of successful transfer support. Without effective personnel, the most well written institutional transfer agreement will be confusing or become invisible. Students need to know about transfer agreements and since each student's transfer plans are different, they need individual advising.

The accomplishments of the BCTC transfer center are due, in no small part, to the support of the Title III grant. Totaling close to $1.5 million, the grant provided adequate funding for staff, professional development, marketing materials, technology services, and other resources. Although grant funding is effective in helping an institution establish or improve a project such as a transfer center, in order to be successful, grant-funded initiatives must become institutionalized in terms of continued funding. BCTC began funding its transfer center incrementally, taking over an increasing percentage of financial support in the fourth and fifth years of the grant.

*Evaluation and assessment.* Assessment of student transfer aspirations, student satisfaction, and transfer perceptions provides a foundation for the creation and delivery of effective transfer services. Additionally, an understanding of the broad transfer literature provides a strong backdrop for integration of scholarly research into program development and evaluation.

- *Transfer aspirations.* While the BCTC transfer center had general support from staff and faculty, there were some who questioned whether students really wanted to transfer. Research shows that students attending community colleges consistently indicate a high intention
to transfer and earn a baccalaureate (Adelman, 2005; Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 1992). Scholars provide varying reports on transfer aspirations ranging from the U.S. Department of Education’s (2007) high estimates of 86% of two-year institution students to Dougherty’s lower estimate of 30-40%.

Through a survey of incoming first-year students, the BCTC transfer center measured transfer aspirations. The incoming cohort reported high transfer intentions with indicating they definitely will transfer and 28% stated they probably will transfer. Asked about their goals for attending the community college, 65% noted that transfer is a primary goal. The findings of this research provided a foundation for college discussions related to supporting students in their transfer aspirations.

- **Student satisfaction.** Assessing student satisfaction with transfer advising and other services can provide helpful information for practitioners interested in increasing the effectiveness of these services. Advising services, events, and programs are only successful if students participate in them and find them informative.

Through ongoing assessment of student satisfaction, the BCTC transfer center was able to make continuous improvements to its advising, events, publications, and website. Students completed satisfaction surveys after every visit to the transfer center and after participating in transfer center events. The surveys continually showed student satisfaction in the 90s.

- **Transfer perceptions.** Critical to the development of services is an understanding of students’ perceptions of transfer. In particular, it is essential to understand the value of a bachelor’s degree, what it takes to transfer to a four-year institution, self-efficacy in meeting their goal, the four-year institutions in the area, and what it takes to be a successful student at a university.

Determining and raising community college students’ self-efficacy is especially relevant to the transfer process. Researchers have explored the relationship between students’ self-efficacy and their educational aspirations and persistence. Students’ beliefs about their abilities to transfer and the educational pathways that are open to them can influence behavior and transfer choices, as Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (2001).

Such beliefs influence aspirations and strength of commitments to the quality of analytic and strategic thinking, level of motivation and perseverance in the face of difficulties and setbacks, resilience to adversity, causal attributions for and failures, and vulnerability to stress and depression. Among the mechanisms of human agency, none is more focal or pervading than people’s perceived self-efficacy. Unless people believe they can produce desired outcomes by their actions, there is little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors may operate as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one’s actions. (p. 187)

In addition, Nora and Rendón (1990) found that academically successful students were more likely to engage in transfer behavior and were more likely to be positive about the transfer process.

Two BCTC transfer center focus group studies assessed (a) students’ perceptions of the website and print publications and (b) student perceptions of transfer in general. Studies found that while students liked the website and the ability to schedule appointments for advising appointments.
online, many of them did not know the site existed. Students also indicated they chose their four-year institution based on proximity, cost, and major; were intimidated by the thought of large class sizes at their transfer school; and held misconceptions regarding admissions criteria and the likelihood of being accepted at a university. These findings resulted in immediate changes to the format, design, and information on the website, as well as further marketing of the website services across campuses. In addition, four-year partners collaborated with BCTC to develop marketing materials that addressed admission standards for transfer students and establish specific transfer admission days and tours to draw attention to the small class size of upper-level courses.

The transfer center worked to increase transfer self-efficacy through a variety of targeted approaches, such as campus marketing messages highlighting BCTC’s transfer rate and student transfer success. Faculty were also encouraged to ask students during advising appointments and/or interaction in the classroom if they had considered transferring. Additionally, information regarding the academic success of BCTC students at four-year institutions was shared with students, faculty, and administrators.

**Inbound Perspective**

In serving transfer students from a four-year institution standpoint, the first challenge is to understand and assess the needs of this population. Transfer students are not all the same and are as varied as the general population. They may come from two-year, four-year, public, and/or private schools; be traditional and nontraditional students; have associate degrees or be returning to college after an absence; have attended one or more institutions; have earned accelerated credits in high school; be dually enrolled in two- and four-year schools; be full- or part-time; and come from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. The second challenge is working with community college partners to develop appropriate services and programs that help students prepare academically for transfer. Third is to provide mechanisms, pathways, and programs to ensure the seamless transition to the university. This challenge is especially relevant to the issue of transfer credit since many institutions have specific requirements, but in some cases, state legislatures or governing boards have created statewide policies for public institutions. Finally, faculty and staff at four-year institutions must advocate for transfer students fostering their acculturation into the campus community, assuring their progress to the bachelor’s degree.

A transfer center model can assist a university or college in meeting these four challenges. A full-service transfer center is responsible for more than recruitment, admissions, or advising and is the key office on the campus to develop partnerships and programs that assist students in making a successful transition and ultimately earning a baccalaureate. Center staff become the key transfer advocates at the institution to ensure that policies, procedures, programs, and services are designed with the transfer student in mind. The center also takes on the responsibility for assisting students in understanding university policy and procedures while helping them acclimate to the university environment. This assistance might include everything from advising and career exploration to sponsoring student organizations for transfer students.

The Transfer and Transition Services (TTS) office at the University of Central Florida (UCF) was designed to meet the challenges and opportunities beyond the admission process at a growing institution where transfer students are approximately half of the undergraduate population. UCF has a long history of collaborating with partner community colleges and enrolling a significant transfer student population. For nearly 40 years, the University has made a commitment to admit graduates from Florida’s public community colleges. It has worked with community college partners to create
strong pathways for transfers through articulation agreements and other collaborative partner
in a 2+2 state, where the legislature instituted articulated transfer into the State University Sys
with common course numbering and a state-mandated general education requirement tha
many of the transition issues (Florida Department of Education, 2004).

UCF and local community colleges have created unique partnerships, including joint
facilities, where the community colleges provide classes for the first two years, and UCF
junior- and senior-level classes. The continuing two-year to four-year collaboration prov
foundation for building a unique system of access to higher education in Central Florida. Succ
programming over time has been due in large part to the partnerships and collaborative rel
ships intentionally developed within the university and with the state community colleges
& Stinard, 2005). Chapter 4 provides a more detailed discussion of this partnership.

TTS has been successful in creating a welcoming environment for transfer students by
ing on effective communication; a peer mentor program; a three-stage implementation
(i.e., preparation, transition, and progression); and assessment of services and students. TTS
to offer pre-admission and transition advising, including an unofficial assessment a student's
facilitation of an official credit evaluation upon admission. Through classroom visits
community college, programs focusing on the importance of academic planning, and easy
to pre-admission information and resources, TTS transfer staff set the stage for successful tr

Communication. An exchange of information between (or among) all consti
 Alexandra, counselors, students, parents, faculty, staff, administrators) is essential to identify ne
 transfers and create solutions to meet those needs. Multiple methods of commun
should be used, including publications, websites, e-mail, phone calls, outreach programs, c
visits, and social media sites.

UCF and TTS address the communication needs of transfer students and others in the
owing ways:

- Website designed by students for transfer students providing information on major
  transfer process, and links to other important University sites, which serves as a
  resource for parents, counselors, and currently enrolled students
- Online counseling manual with requirements for majors and minors from the Undergraduate
  catalog and other UCF community and academic resources
- Online and printed advising guide for transfer students at two-year institutions regarding
  degree and certificate requirements and contact information for relevant academic
  service offices
- Electronic updates for both students and counselors posting immediate informa
  changes at the University that impact advising
- Orientation survival guide with instructions for printing academic records and infor
  to contact TTS for pre-orientation advising sent to all incoming students re
  for orientation
- Outreach to self-identified undeclared transfer students prior to orientation to
  exploration of majors and careers and provide access to free online self-assessment
- Counselor workshop at UCF for all Florida community college counselors
- A dedicated phone line in the transfer center for advisors allowing immediate con
  transfer staff for specific questions, information, and assistance
- A dedicated e-mail address and phone hotline for transfer students providing dire
  to advising and University resources
**Peer mentor program.** A peer mentor program can play a significant role in many aspects of transfer student success. Well-trained peers can provide pre-admission academic advising, make connections with potential students, offer programs to meet the needs of transferring students, and assist with the transition to the new institution. Peer mentors are also important to ensure that the student voice is heard, student perspective is heeded, and services intended to assist transfers are appropriate.

TTS established a transfer peer mentor program in 2004 that continues to play a significant role in all aspects of transfer student success. Peer mentors, transfers themselves, provide first-level academic advising one-on-one, by phone, e-mail, and appointment. They offer personal, student-to-student connections and serve as a resource for prospective and current UCF transfer students.

Peer mentors assist and welcome transitioning students at orientation and continuing to serve as a resource during the transfer students' first semester. They are responsible for developing and implementing workshops on topics relevant to transfer students (e.g., study abroad, safe sex, study skills) and work closely with student organizations to promote social activities that connect new students to one another and encourage engagement in the new campus community. TTS peers also organized a new transfer student club to introduce new students to the array of campus resources.

**Three-stage implementation model.** Creating a transfer center depends on a vision of student success and a passion for helping students. TTS at UCF instituted a three-stage process to achieve its vision of success.

- **Stage One – Preparation.** Collaboration between sending and receiving institutions to promote academic advising is a critical component in preparation for transfer from the community college to the university. In 2004, the Central Florida Higher Education Consortium developed the DirectConnect to UCF program, guaranteeing University admission to the graduates of four partner colleges (i.e., Brevard, Lake Sumter, Seminole, and Valencia). DirectConnect intensified collaboration and located UCF advisors at each of the four partner colleges. These embedded advisors share with their community college partners the academic advising responsibilities for AA/AS-tracked students intending to transfer to the University. At 30 credit hours earned, students who have joined the program are assigned a UCF advisor in addition to their community college academic advisor. The DirectConnect advisor reviews the students' academic plan for their intended major at the University prior to transfer.

The shared advising structure promotes academic preparation and assures that students are on track to graduate from the two-year school and ready for their major at the University. The program ensures that transferring students have guidance on taking appropriate general education and prerequisite classes and selecting a major. It also helps students develop a clear understanding of the transfer process. Embedded advisors are supplied office space, attend regular meetings with the community college advising staff, and provide extensive programming, promoted throughout the campuses, in addition to individual advising.

The DirectConnect programs are designed to take the community college student from exploration of majors and careers, through their application to the University, and up to their transfer.

To augment pre-admission academic advising, TTS staff members also collaborate with University faculty and staff in academic departments to present information sessions on majors, including realistic expectations about major requirements and how to prepare appropriately. This shared responsibility between the UCF academic colleges and TTS staff
helps mitigate the effects of transfer shock, which Hills (1965) described as a decline in grades during the students’ first term at the four-year institution.

Substantial numbers of transferring students come to UCF from outside the consortium structure and also require admission and transition advising. TTS staff ensure that information and advising are available to all students who call, e-mail, or visit the campus. The TTS website provides easy access to the resources transfers and their parents commonly need, including links to admissions, financial aid, and academic resources. Working with undergraduate admissions, TTS is the referral point for academic advising questions and issues for transfers. Transfer advisors and peer mentors assist potential students one-on-one with information about the transfer process, course equivalencies, and preparation for their major at the University.

◊ **Stage Two – Transition.** Transferring into a larger institution, with its own culture and mores, creates another set of hurdles for students who need to learn about their new environment, policies, procedures, expectations, and campus culture. Mandatory transfer orientation can help students make a smooth transition and ensure they receive academic advising in the college of their major. Whether the campus is primarily residential or commuter, the orientation process serves as the single most important transition point for the university to influence transfer success. As will be discussed in chapter 6, orientation models differ, and should, depending on the size of the incoming transfer class. Transfer programs at smaller institutions can bring students to campus for extended orientations (e.g., two-day to weeklong events), with time to begin to establish social as well as academic connections. Larger institutions must create those connections in mass orientations where group advising is the norm. A successful transfer orientation should also introduce new students to the differences in policies, procedures, and institutional expectations that promote transfer success.

UCF, with more than 9,000 transfer students enrolled in 2009-2010, offers multiple transfer orientation sessions with approximately 500 students and 150 parents attending each session. TTS plays an important part in the process. Transfer staff and peer mentors facilitate the Transfer Student Success program and the advising session at the UCF parent orientation program. They assist the academic colleges with advising on general education and prerequisites and provide assistance in the registration process. Transfer peer mentors help new students transition to the campus by connecting with as many students as possible. During the Transfer Student Success program, peer mentors introducing the degree audit (i.e., an important advising and registration tool), describe student and University expectations, and emphasize ways to engage with the campus community. Students are provided with an option to complete part of their orientation online and still have the opportunity to talk with an advisor in person.

Undeclared transfers need particular attention at orientation, as they are specific retention risks (Lewallen, 1993). TTS collaborates with Career Services staff to present a program during the college advising sessions that offers a brief assessment, matching skills and interest with potential majors. TTS staff also provide critical individual advising for the undeclared students who are expected to register for their first semester classes before leaving orientation.

Welcome week activities at UCF are an important element in easing new students’ transition and providing opportunities to explore and discover their new school. Transfer students can attend a number of peer-mentor-designed and led workshops on relevant transition
issues or join a student organization specifically for transfer students to meet other transfers and learn more about the campus.

Stage Three – Progression. A campus-wide, transfer experience committee can be a valuable tool for the institution to raise and resolve transfer-specific issues and concerns. The development of the transfer experience committee can be a top-down initiative or a grassroots effort among all those concerned at the institution. Committee members share their efforts to promote transfer success and progress to graduation. For example, probation intervention programs might be particularly important at institutions where transfer shock affects certain majors; exchanging that information and pooling resources can promote transfer success across the campus community and may also lead to efforts at sending schools to identify and address targeted pedagogic issues. For transfer students coming from smaller classroom environments, intervention assistance can be provided by transfer center staff and peer mentors. Through identification of ongoing concerns and promotion of assistance across the campus community, the transfer center staff are able to provide ombudsman-like services. These services assist students and other constituents who encounter challenges that are best resolved by a transfer advocate who understands the college or university climate (Poisel & Stinard, 2005).

UCF created a transfer experience committee led by the director of Transfer and Transition Services through a grassroots effort of advising and student services staff interested in finding ways to ease the transition and promote transfer student success. Composed of representatives from academic departments, advising offices, admissions, financial aid, veterans’ services, registrar, student success center, orientation, career services, student involvement, and faculty, the committee has worked to plan and implement revised orientation programs as well as deliver specialized programming at the UCF partner colleges. Committee members raised issues and discuss methods for resolving them in a timely fashion. They recommend both short- and long-term solutions to improve transfer student success.

Part of the progression stage is ensuring that transfer students are able to get assistance at the university after making the transition. At UCF, juniors make their advising home in their major college; however, TTS continues to assist upper-class students by helping them assimilate into their new campus, the last stage of assuring transfer success. TTS staff advocate for the needs of transfer students as they progress to graduation and encourage student engagement in the campus community. The UCF experience has been that the transfers from two-year institutions, which are largely nonresidential, want a university experience, but have difficulty engaging with the campus; TTS provides the resources and direction to make those connections.

Assessing the transfer center: The assessment process can provide valuable information about who transfers are, their expectations, and what they need to be successful at an institution. An analysis of institutional or student demographic data can also be used to identify at-risk populations and intentionally focus services to students who will benefit from them, leading to increased retention rates for the institution (Duggan & Pickering, 2008). Effectiveness is measured by the satisfaction of the participants and by whether learning outcomes are achieved. Transfer centers will also want to examine services provided to students, faculty, and staff at sending institutions and use feedback from their close partners at host institutions to improve the programs and services offered to students. Joint assessment programs can be built so that students are evaluating
their transfer process from one institution to the next, thereby providing information about outbound and inbound experience.

Many different types of assessment can be used to gather important data from students and others. Surveys and focus groups with students and counselors can provide feedback about services and experiences that are valuable in the transfer process. Whether data are gathered through orientation, during office visits or workshops, through graduating senior surveys or transfer student focus groups, the use of analyzed information will help centers make critical improvements to enhance the transfer experience for all participants (Poisel & Stinard, 2005).

New student surveys at UCF have provided TTS with critical information for success programming of support services. New transfers indicated their intention to work part-time, take a full load of classes, become involved in some campus activity, and study less than the recommended time—all while maintaining a B average. By clarifying transfer students’ expectations and understanding that students will not learn everything they need to know at orientation, TTS has been able to introduce a variety of programs throughout the semester to encourage campus participation and promote academic success (e.g., welcome week activities, midsemester academic department events, workshops and seminars, student organizations).

Since the late 1990s, TTS has assisted UCF departments and programs by providing them information about transfer student success and how to meet the unique needs of transfer students. Through a partnership with UCF Regional Campus Administration, Undergraduate Studies, and departmental faculty, a curriculum alignment project has brought faculty and staff together from the University and several local community colleges to ensure that students are having a similar academic experience at all institutions and are well prepared for future sequential and core courses. Part of the discussion has revolved around analysis of data and feedback from students about what needs to occur in the classroom to ensure academic success after transfer to UCF. Finally, partnering with institutional research, planning and assessment, and operational excellence has allowed for the most effective means of collecting and reporting data that has been a key factor in the assessment process.

**Conclusion**

Both the outbound and inbound student perspectives must be considered when developing or improving transfer centers. Collaboration among the transfer colleges is imperative to have a seamless and successful transition.

**Outbound Transfer Student Services**

Although a significant portion of community college students indicates that their intention is to transfer to a four-year institution (e.g., Adelman, 2005), there is not always concerted effort by the two-year college to provide the requisite preparation or information to their students for the transfer process. Counseling and advising staffs are heavily engaged in helping students successfully complete their associate degrees, which is a primary focus of two-year institutions. In fact, most schools are measured, and often funded, based upon students’ persistence and degree completion, while there is no meaningful or consequential assessment for a community college or its staff based upon the students’ successful transfer to a four-year school or their subsequent performance after transfer.

Community college students who have a clear idea of where they want to go should be able to find the institutional resources to help them map the way to get there. Academic advising is
to ensuring that the student has fulfilled all the requirements at the lower level to proceed to the upper-level institution for their intended major and, thus, to efficient degree completion. In many cases, this requires earning a specific associate degree with an explicit set of prerequisite courses to enter the upper-level academic major. The community college counselor or advisor should be able to provide the required program of study for the receiving institution prior to transfer. Previously, that meant having access to volumes of college and university catalogs to identify the plan of study for the entire spectrum of degree programs that students may be interested in transferring into at each potential receiving institution. Today, nearly all this information is available online.

For those community college students who are undecided on a major or career path, the college should have resources to assist them in making early decisions. With the growing limitations and pressures imposed on students by institutions, governing bodies, or state legislatures to complete degrees in four years or less, it has become more important for students to decide early about their academic goals. Many community college students may opt to pursue an academic path that is not conducive to future transfer to the baccalaureate. For some students, this is an appropriate choice, but the two-year schools must also be forthcoming about which degrees, courses, certificates, and training are not considered appropriate credentials for transfer to an upper-level institution.

Inbound Transfer Student Services

Many four-year institutions are working intentionally to ensure that transfer students are sufficiently oriented into their schools at the point of entry. Ideally, transfer student orientations are mandatory one- or two-day affairs to make sure this population receives that same or similar introduction to the campus, resources, culture, and processes as the incoming first-year cohort. However, transfer orientation varies widely from campus to campus ranging from little to no individualized programming to comprehensive, specialized events with online components. Beyond the initial orientation of transfer students, the four-year school's continued effort to integrate students into the campus culture, mitigate transfer shock, and provide ongoing support is critical.

The research by many reputable scholars (e.g., Adelman, 2006; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Nowak, 2004; Townsend, 1995) reveals that numerous factors can influence transfer student success, including the number of credit hours earned prior to transfer, on or off campus residence choice, rigor of high school curriculum, level of interaction with college peers, extracurricular engagement, full- or part-time status, domestic obligations, and employment status. Others have examined the social aspects of the transfer process (e.g., Laanan 1996, 1998; Nora & Rendón, 1990). The cumulative impact of this research on transfer students' adjustment to a new academic environment should be a resounding call for receiving colleges and universities to examine their policies and practices to ensure they are doing everything possible to quickly integrate students into their institutional culture and are providing this population with the essential supports needed to persist and successfully complete a degree.

Recommendations

To help all institutions develop successful transfer centers and programming initiatives, Poisell and Steinard (2005) recommend the following basic guidelines:

- Conduct a review of student demographics to determine the types, quantity, and backgrounds of transfer students coming to the institution
- Develop a plan for a transfer center that includes the specific needs of faculty, staff, and transfer students on the campus
Appoint an advocate who will be the voice of the transfer student when it comes to policy development and serve as the ombudsperson to help resolve transfer student issues.

Involve faculty, staff, and students from both receiving and sending institutions to build a strong collaborative program that will have the greatest impact on everyone.

Build a communication system that provides critical information to all constituents in a timely and efficient manner with regular updates.

Construct a transfer center with appropriate assessment measures to ensure that the role the center will play on campus is effective, efficient, and needed.

Hire a dedicated staff, including peer mentors, who can implement the plan for the new transfer center.

Assess and revise programs and services regularly as part of a continuous quality improvement effort.

A dedicated transfer center with appropriate staffing and resources can provide the foundation for transfer students' success. Some of the greatest impacts on transfer success do not require large budgets, only a dedicated staff willing to do everything they can to assist students in making a smooth and seamless transition. Intentional and planned institutional efforts will work to the benefit of the students and the institutions as students are retained and graduate in higher numbers. With increases in the number of transfer students and the resulting impact on two- and four-year campuses, transfer centers provide a focus on this important college demographic and allow institutions to provide the services required to address student needs.

References


