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Transfer Student Success - Sacramento State's Hidden Tracer

by Sutee Sujitparapitaya

Higher Education policy and practice surrounding issues in undergraduate education have been dominated by studies that track traditional students who enroll in college right after graduation from high school and remain at one institution throughout their college careers. However, in recent years, an emphasis on transfer students is becoming more important to both the CSU system as a whole, and to Sacramento State (Sac State). According to Vice Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer David S. Spence, the CSU enrolls about 55,000 community college transfer students each year, and two out of three graduating seniors are transfer students. During the academic year 2004-05, about 56% of Sac State's new undergraduates had started their post-secondary education elsewhere, and about 66% of our graduates were transfers. Thus, many pressures and prospects, both internal and external, have turned our attention to transfer students.

This issue of **OIRbits** is dedicated to providing a number of facts, related studies, theories, and comments concerning transfer student

success. We define **transfer students** as those students who first matriculated at a different post-secondary institution(s) and then enrolled at Sac State in some subsequent semester. Since a few scholarly studies referenced in this article tend to use a limited student population within a given institution that may or may not be sufficient for a comprehensive evaluation, it is important to be wary of generalizing the results of the studies presented in this article.

The CSU enrolls about 55,000 community college transfer students each year, and two out of three graduating seniors are transfer students.

Importance of CSU Enrollment Management and Transfer Policy

As mentioned above, the traditional 'linear-matriculation' image of college students who arrive right after high school and stay until graduation still influences higher education policy formulation and educational practice, despite the reality that the majority of 18- to 24-year-olds, as well as older students, do not experience their college education in a linear fashion [McCormick, 1997]. Recognizing this important issue, the CSU Board of Trustees, during a March 2000 meeting, adopted an enrollment management policy, effective Fall

the state's high school graduates who are California residents are the next in line to be accommodated in at least one CSU campus.

In addition, to provide an opportunity for CCC students to realize their academic goals more quickly and efficiently, the Trustees recently adopted the **Lower Division Transfer Patterns (LDTP)** project. With this agreement, community college students who complete the lower division transfer patterns will receive the highest possible priority for admission to the corresponding CSU campus

and major, although impaction criteria or requirements still apply. Thus, the LDTP project will provide community college students with clear road maps that show specific

Upper division California Community College (CCC) transfers who are California residents have the highest priority for admission

2001, to reaffirm that upper division California Community College (CCC) transfers who are California residents have the *highest priority* for admission. All CSU eligible freshmen in the upper one-third of

courses they need to take for a given CSU baccalaureate degree major. This streamlined transfer policy will take effect in Fall 2006. The anticipated result is that these students will graduate from CSU



with fewer units beyond the minimum required for the degree, and in doing so, create more space for incoming students. More information about the LDTP is available online at www.calstate.edu/acadaff/ldtp.shtml.

Dual Admission Program (DAP) is another CSU effort that allows students to enroll at a CSU and a community college at the same time. The goals of DAP are to provide students with a seamless and guaranteed transition from a community college to a CSU campus, help students focus on transfer early in their academic careers, increase the number of CCC transfer students who enter the CSU appropriately prepared for upper division course work, and move students to completion of the bachelor's degree in the most timely and efficient manner. For more information about the DAP, visit www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/docs/MOU_CSU_CCC_805_Final.pdf.

Furthermore, three separate Certification Processes are used to streamline the transfer process, with nearly all academic departments having participated in the development of articulation agreements. First, with the **California Community College Certification Plan for Transfer to the CSU**, the CSU recognizes General Education (GE) courses taught in California Community Colleges, as well as those of a few other institutions, as meeting Sac State's particular GE objectives. Second, another certification process applies to students transferring from other CSU campuses to Sac State. Students who have completed all or a fraction of their lower division GE requirements at another CSU will be recognized as certified for lower

division requirements at Sac State. If CSU transfers have completed their upper division GE requirements at their respective campuses, the courses are evaluated upon transfer and appropriately applied to the Sac State GE Program to meet the Sac State's upper division GE requirement. Finally, the Inter-segmental GE Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) plan is for a GE program that community college transfer students can use to fulfill lower division GE requirements in either the CSU or UC system without the need to take additional lower division GE courses after transferring to a 4-year college. For more information about these three certification processes, please visit the CSU Mentor web site at www.csumentor.edu.

At Sac State, we welcome transfer students from many types of post-secondary institutions - California Community Colleges, other California State Universities, University of California campuses, private institutions, out-of-state colleges and universities, and colleges and universities from around the world. To strive to make the transfer process as clear and uncomplicated as possible, students can access an analysis of their academic progress through CasperWeb at <https://casperweb.csus.edu>. The analysis of academic progress can be used to track academic progress toward degree completion. It is also important to recognize that different rules apply to transfer students depending on when and where the transfer(s) took place. For more information about the 2004-06 Sac State transfer policy, visit http://aaweb.csus.edu/catalog/04-06/IntroductoryPages/Admission_Trans.pdf.

What Is Known about Our Undergraduate Transfers?

Research underscores a trend in enrollment patterns in which undergraduates enroll at multiple colleges and universities - simultaneously or sequentially - on the way to degree completion [Palmer, 2000]. This phenomenon is referred to as "swirl". Each year about 85% of all CSU undergraduate transfers come from California Community Colleges. Only 5% of all transfers come from other CSU campuses. The remaining transfers come from the University of California (1%), California's private institutions (2%), other U.S. states (5%), and foreign countries (2%). At Sac State, about 93% of our

undergraduate transfers come from California Community Colleges. Slightly fewer than 4% of all transfers come from other CSU campuses. The remaining transfers come from the University of California (1%), California's private institutions, other U.S. States, and foreign countries (2%).

New Undergraduates

The goal of CSU enrollment management policies is to preserve CSU's mission to provide access to all first-time freshman and upper division transfers who meet CSU's admission eligibility requirements within the constraints of campus capacity and budget

Figure 1: New Undergraduate Enrollment - Sac State

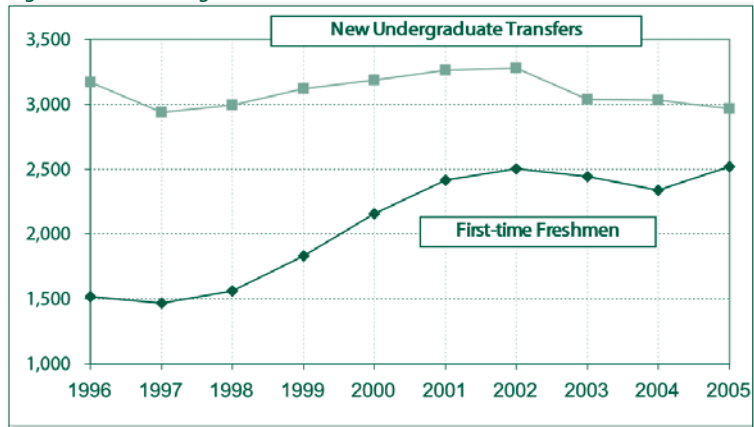
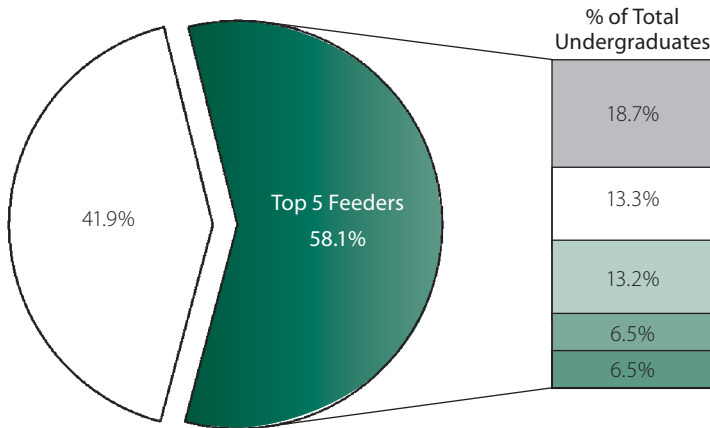


Table 1: Comparison of New Undergrads

Group Entering in	Total ⁽¹⁾ New Undergrad Headcount	% of Total	
		First-time Freshmen	Undergrad Transfers
Fall 2005	5,483	45.9%	54.1%
Fall 2004	5,370	43.5%	56.5%
Fall 2003	5,479	44.6%	55.4%
Fall 2002	5,782	43.3%	56.7%
Fall 2001	5,678	42.5%	57.5%
Fall 2000	5,341	40.3%	59.7%
Fall 1999	4,949	37.0%	63.0%
Fall 1998	4,556	34.3%	65.7%
Fall 1997	4,409	33.3%	66.7%
Fall 1996	4,692	32.4%	67.6%

Note: About 93% of transfers entered as lower division
Source: Office of Institutional Research

Figure 2: New Transfers from Top 5 Feeder Schools - Fall 05



resources. For many people, it's not simply a question of whether their children will go to college, but where. And for good reason - bachelor's degree holders earn almost twice as much per year as those with only a high school diploma. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the rate of college enrollment for new high school graduates, which was less than 50 percent in the 1970s, is now closer to two-thirds.

- During the last ten years, Sac State's new student enrollment has grown significantly. Figure 1 suggests that the increase was much higher for first-time freshmen (70.4%) than for undergraduate transfers (11.5%) during the period between 1997 and 2002. However, despite this growth, the majority of new undergraduates has been, and continues to be, transfer students - showing slightly over 54% for new transfers and 46% for new freshmen. The percent of new transfers was as high as 67.6% in Fall 1996.
- After 2002, total new undergraduate enrollment underwent a decline, but in 2005 showed a rebound of about 2% (see Table 1). This is due to a nearly 8% increase in first-time freshmen, despite a slight decrease of about 2% for undergraduate transfers.
- In consideration of a state-wide enrollment reduction of five percent in 2004-05, and limited growth in both 2002-03 and 2003-04, Sac State agreed to develop an enrollment management plan, aligned with the CSU enrollment policies, to place lower division transfers in the "low admission priority" category. As a result, the number of new lower division transfers has dropped for the last two years. Upper division transfers, on the other hand, have increased by 7%, contributing to a significant overall enrollment growth for this group of nearly 17% since 1996. More information relating to restrictions placed on selected new student groups is available online at www.calstate.edu/acadaff/codedmemos/AA-2004-04.pdf.

The majority of new undergraduates has been, and continues to be, transfer students - showing slightly over 54% for new transfers and 46% for new freshmen.

Enrollment at community colleges is increasing at a greater rate than at four-year institutions. According to Wellman [2002], the four

Table 2: Enrollment & Yield Rate for Top 5 Feeder Schools

Institution	Enrolled (Headcount)	Applied to Enrolled Yield Rate
American River College	554	54%
Sacramento City College	395	53%
Sierra Community College	392	49%
Consumnes River College	192	56%
San Joaquin Delta College	192	42%

Source: Office of Institutional Research

primary reasons are a) growth in the number of high school graduates; b) demographic changes that are increasing the proportion of low income and minority students; c) more stringent admissions requirements in many four-year institutions; and d) rising college tuitions. In compliance with the California Master Plan and Education Code, CSU gives the highest admission priority to qualified upper division California Community College transfers over other transfer applicants, including those from other four-year universities and CSU's own intercampus transfers. Thus, in the last five years Sac State has enrolled, on average, nearly 4 of every 10 California Community College students who apply (with an average of "applied to enrolled" yield rate of 36%).

- The University works in partnership with the community colleges to make the process of applying for transfer easier each year. Over the summer of 2005, officials from Sac State and Sierra College announced new agreements on student transfer programs and other projects to promote this initiative. Sierra College is currently the third-largest source of transfer students, with 392 students transferring this fall.
- The top ten feeder schools, all community colleges, contributed over three-quarters of all new transfers. Figure 2 indicates that the top five feeder schools for our transfers are community colleges that had contributed nearly 60% of total new transfers this fall.
- The five next largest feeder schools are Solano Community College (3.9% of total and 41% yield rate), Yuba College (3.1% of total, 53% yield rate), Diablo Valley College (3.1% of total, 53% yield rate), Folsom Lake College (3.1% of total, 53% yield rate), and Santa Rosa Junior College (3.1% of total, 53% yield rate). More descriptive statistical information about our top feeder schools is available online at www.oir.csus.edu/Reports/FactBook/UN/UNTOC.cfm.

Since fall enrollment is used to guide Trustee budget development, the FTEs generated by transfer students each year have been a significant force in Sac State's new General Fund appropriations.

Total Undergraduate Transfers

Figure 3: Undergraduate FTEs by Admission Basis - Sac State

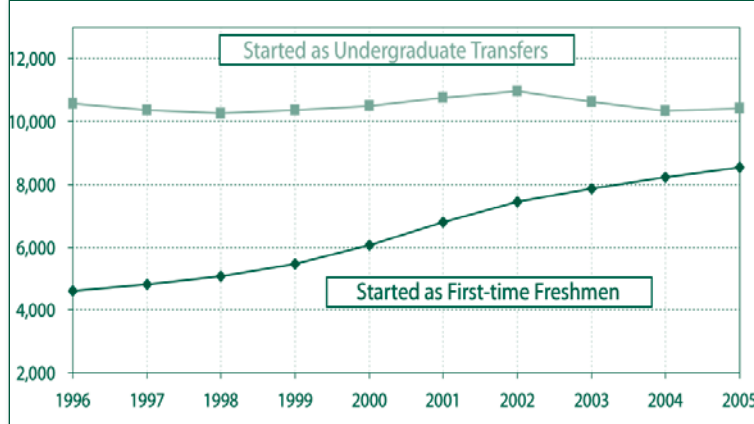


Table 3: FTEs Comparison of Total Undergrads

Group Entering in	Total ⁽¹⁾ Undergrad FTEs	Started as	
		First-time Freshmen	Undergrad Transfers
Fall 2005	19,136	44.7%	54.5%
Fall 2004	18,730	43.9%	55.2%
Fall 2003	18,641	42.2%	57.0%
Fall 2002	18,571	40.2%	59.1%
Fall 2001	17,699	38.3%	60.8%
Fall 2000	16,713	36.3%	62.8%
Fall 1999	15,968	34.3%	65.0%
Fall 1998	15,451	32.8%	66.5%
Fall 1997	15,300	31.5%	67.7%
Fall 1996	15,295	30.2%	69.2%

(1) Included Undergraduate Transitory Students
Source: Office of Institutional Research

- Since fall enrollment is used to guide Trustee budget development, the FTEs generated by transfer students each year have been a significant force in Sac State's new General Fund appropriations. Table 3 indicates that transfers still remain a majority - showing over 54% of total FTEs in 2005, compared with 44% for those who started as first-time freshmen, in spite of the recent drop in Fall 2002.
- Similar to the trend of new undergraduates, illustrated in Figure 1, overall undergraduate enrollment this fall seems to be on a rebound - showing a 2.2% increase in both freshman (4%) and transfer starters (0.8%). However, the gap between freshman and transfer starters is closing due to a significant growth in new freshmen since Fall 1997.
- Table 4 suggests that more transfer starters are in the upper division category, tend to enroll part-time, and work full-time.

Table 4: Detailed Breakdown of the Fall 2005 Undergraduate Enrollment⁽¹⁾ - Sac State

	Started as First-time Freshmen	Started as Undergrad Transfers
Gender	Female = 60%	Female = 56.6%
Enrollment Type	Full-time = 90.8%	Full-time = 71.7%
Class Level	Lower Division ⁽²⁾ = 62.7%	Upper Division ⁽²⁾ = 96.1%
Ethnicity⁽³⁾		
African American	9.4%	6.6%
American Indian	1.0%	1.3%
Asian	18.8%	14.2%
Filipino	7.5%	4.4%
Hispanic	20.1%	15.2%
Pacific Islander	1.1%	1.1%
White	42.1%	57.2%
Age		
19&under	48.0%	1.8%
20-24	50.3%	58.1%
25-29	1.5%	22.9%
30-44	0.1%	13.3%
45&over	0.0%	3.9%

(1) Excluded transitory students; (2) Lower division = freshmen and sophomores; Upper division = juniors and senior; (3) Excluded foreign national and unknown category
Source: Office of Institutional Research

- A decline in minority enrollment for transfer starters is offset by an increase in their freshman counterparts. Nationwide, one-fourth of all community college students are minorities - higher in Sacramento due to its high minority population. As indicated in a study by Nora and Randon [1990], minority students have significantly lower retention rates and higher transfer losses. The continued under-representation of minority transfers has several contributing factors - parents' education, encouragement, initial goal and institutional commitments, social integration, and academic integration.
- Sac State is also experiencing more transfer starters who are 25 and older, in school to either update their skills or prepare for second or third careers. The enrollment of middle-aged students has also grown rapidly during the last ten years and is likely to accelerate with a continuing shift toward an information and service-based economy [Sacramento Region Quality-of-Life Index, 2002].

When we focus on the percentage of total degrees conferred, each year over 64% of baccalaureate degrees awarded have been to transfer students. That number was as high as 70.1% in 1997-98.

Baccalaureate Degrees Awarded

A notable goal for a majority of undergraduate programs has been to increase the number and percentage of students who persist in their studies through degree completion. With enrollments booming and state budgets tight, public institutions have been looking for ways to enroll more students without spending additional state funds. One cost-saving measure under consideration is to stimulate the progress of those students who take longer than the customary four years to complete their bachelor's degrees in order to open up space for more students.

The extensive literature available relating to college student retention describes several important factors that facilitate student success. Chief among these factors are: having completed rigorous college preparatory courses in high school; attending classes full-

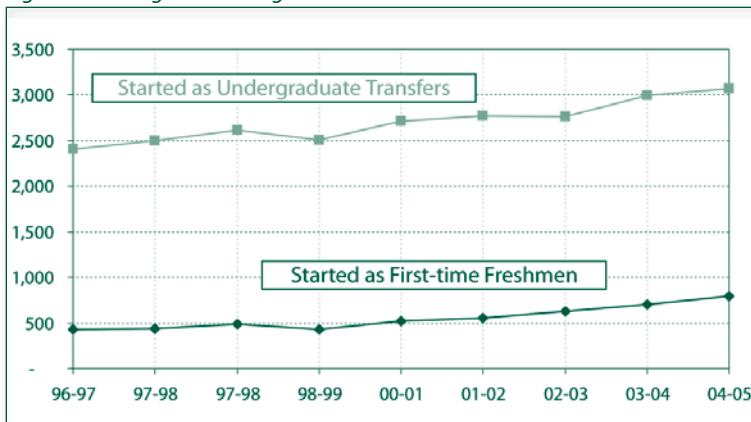
time; living on campus; and minimizing off-campus work commitments [AASCU/NASULGC, 2002]. The vast majority of Sac State students do not conform to this portrait. Many current undergraduates have notable deficits in their high school academic records; about 20% attend classes on a part-time basis; no more than 4% live on campus; and four-fifths of undergraduate students work off-campus an average of 30 hours per week.

- Although the number of new students transferring to Sac State has declined in recent years, the number of transfer starters who received their undergraduate degree has continued to rise (28%) since 1996-97.
- When we focus on the percentage of total degrees conferred, each year over 64% of baccalaureate degrees awarded have been to transfer students. That number was as high as 70.1% in 1997-98.
- Looking at total earned units at graduation, graduating students who started as transfers consistently had accumulated slightly more units (averaging about 3 units) than those who started as first-time freshmen. Since nearly 3,000 transfer starters graduated in the most recent year, that translates to almost 10,000 units or 700 FTEs that were accumulated without fulfilling graduation requirements.

Retention and Graduation Rates

Student success has occupied a significant place in state and federal accountability systems for more than a decade, particularly as measured by retention and graduation rates. Unfortunately, many students these days start college and never finish. According to the National Center for Education Statistics [2002], every year more than one million first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students begin their undergraduate careers at four-year colleges and universities with every hope and expectation of earning a baccalaureate degree. Of those students, fewer than four in ten will actually meet

Figure 5: Undergraduate Degrees Awarded – Sac State



Source: Office of Institutional Research

Table 5: % Total Degrees Awarded & Earned Units ⁽¹⁾

Group Graduated during College Year	Started as First-time Freshmen		Started as Undergrad Transfers	
	% of total Undergrad Degrees Awarded	Average Earned Units	% of total Undergrad Degrees Awarded	Average Earned Units
2004-05	17.0%	138	66.0%	142
2003-04	15.4%	138	65.7%	142
2002-03	14.8%	139	65.5%	142
2001-02	13.1%	139	65.6%	142
2000-01	12.7%	140	66.4%	143
1999-00	11.6%	141	67.3%	144
1998-99	11.2%	141	64.3%	144
1997-98	13.2%	142	70.1%	144
1996-97	11.9%	140	66.9%	143

(1) Excluded 2nd Baccalaureate Degree Recipients

that goal within six years; barely six in ten will make it out in ten years. Hundreds of thousands of students, year after year, don't get the degree they want, work for, pay for, and truly need. Similar to the national trend, every year, approximately 5,000 new students begin their undergraduate careers at Sac State. Of those students, approximately 37% will actually graduate with a bachelor's degree within six years; only 44% will make it out in ten years.

According to Tinto's [1993] theory of departure, the primary causes of departure from higher education can be identified as a student's "intention" and "commitment." Obviously, there are many experiences in college that can affect students' intentions and either strengthen or weaken their resolve to finish. Students who withdraw early

may be experiencing difficulty adjusting to the challenges of college life [Berger and Braxton, 1998; Ishitani and DesJardins, 2002-2003; McGrath and Braunstein, 1997]. For instance, the work may be too difficult or their chosen field of study unsuitable (what Tinto refers

to as "incongruence" or "lack of fit"). Some students, especially those who come from families where no members have previously attended college, find the social adjustment to college just too difficult. Still others, especially older students, are faced with responsibilities such as family and work, which limit their time and ability to participate fully in academic life.

- Whatever the reason for early withdrawal, approximately 15% of our CCC transfers leave and do not return by the beginning of their second year. This rate has remained steady over the past

four years, despite the fact that enrollment has been decreasing. In comparison to the system-wide rate, as shown in Table 6, the 1st year retention rate for Sac State's CCC transfers has increased since Fall 1996.

- Although the 5-year graduation rate for the last four cohorts of Sac State's CCC transfers has increased, from 58.6% for the 1996 cohort to 61.6% for the 1999 cohort, the rate has been lower than the CSU state-wide average.
- Almost all CCC transfers who graduate from Sac State do so within five years. Less than 1 percent of the entering class graduates after six years. The average time to degree is 3 years.

Do Our Transfers and Natives Have Equal Access to Academic Success?

The community college has the potential to be a powerful point of launch for baccalaureate study. In 2004 alone, community colleges accounted for 45 percent of all first-time freshmen enrolled in higher education. About half of that number had the goal of attaining a bachelor's degree. Research has consistently illustrated that community college students, when they transfer, perform as well as students who initially enroll in four-year institutions [Dicroce, 2005]. With this evidence, and the recent changes of a streamlined transfer policy adopted by the Trustees, it is important to examine whether or not transfer starters have equal access to academic success in terms of persistence and other common measures in comparison to freshmen starters.

To begin our evaluation, we argue that the direct comparison of these two groups is inappropriate and leads to an incorrect conclusion. One reason is that CCC transfers are survivors of a lower division college curriculum and have had the benefits of a post-secondary education experience prior to enrolling at Sac State. They have had an opportunity to develop useful collateral skills, including the ability to navigate the administrative structures of post-secondary institutions, as well as experience with organizing their time to manage the demands of work, school, and family [Nora, Attinasi, and Matonak, 1990; Nora and Rendon, 1990]. These advantages essentially translate into earlier graduation for transfers in comparison to first-time students.

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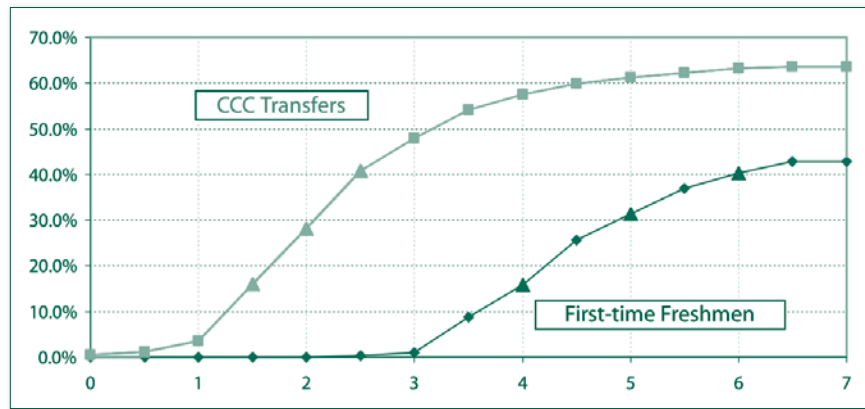
Table 6: 1st year Retention and 5-year Graduation of CCC Transfer Students (Sac State vs. CSU System-wide)

Fall to Fall	1st Year Retention	
	Sac State's CCC Transfers ⁽¹⁾	CSU State-wide CCC Transfers ⁽²⁾
2004-05	84.6%	n/a
2003-04	84.4%	83.3%
2002-03	84.5%	83.2%
2001-02	84.4%	83.4%
2000-01	82.6%	82.9%
1999-2000	82.0%	81.6%
1998-99	82.9%	81.6%
1997-98	82.4%	80.4%
1996-97	80.5%	79.6%

Group Entering in Fall	5-Year Graduation	
	Sac State's CCC Transfers ⁽¹⁾	CSU State-wide CCC Transfers ⁽²⁾
Fall 1999	61.6%	n/a
Fall 1998	63.6%	64.8%
Fall 1997	61.3%	61.9%
Fall 1996	58.6%	64.0%
Fall 1995	60.1%	58.5%
Fall 1994	60.2%	59.0%
Fall 1993	63.0%	59.2%
Fall 1992	64.3%	58.5%
Fall 1991	62.3%	57.0%

(1) Included CCC Transfers with Alternate Admission; (2) Community College Transfers at CSU Campus of Entry
Source: Office of Institutional Research and CSU Chancellor's Office

Figure 6: Direct Comparison of Graduation Rates between First-time Freshmen and CCC Transfers – Fall 1998



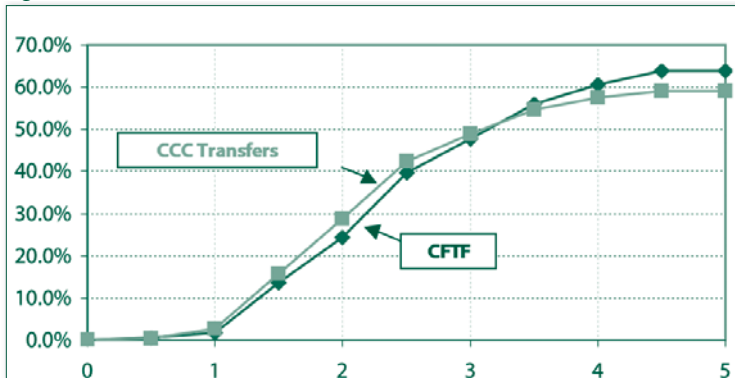
Source: Office of Institutional Research

- In order to utilize the most recent 6 year graduation information available, a 1998 cohort was chosen. Figure 6 indicates that about 28.2% of CCC transfers graduate within two years after entering Sac State, while it takes about five years for 31.3% of native first-time freshmen to do so.
- Similarly, it takes just about two and a half years for 40.9% of CCC transfers to graduate, with first-time freshmen taking nearly six years to get to this mark. Thus, the graduation rates of these two groups are not equivalent.

To make meaningful comparisons, equalization of first-time freshmen to CCC transfers is needed. This was done by capturing a cohort of first-time freshmen who have survived two years, known as “Comparative First-time freshmen - CFTF.” The cohort of CCC transfers, on the other hand, were also refined to include only upper division transfers who earned a 2.0 GPA in at least 56 transferable semester units, and complete courses required for admission. This transfer cohort is known as “Selective Upper Division Transfers - SUDT.”

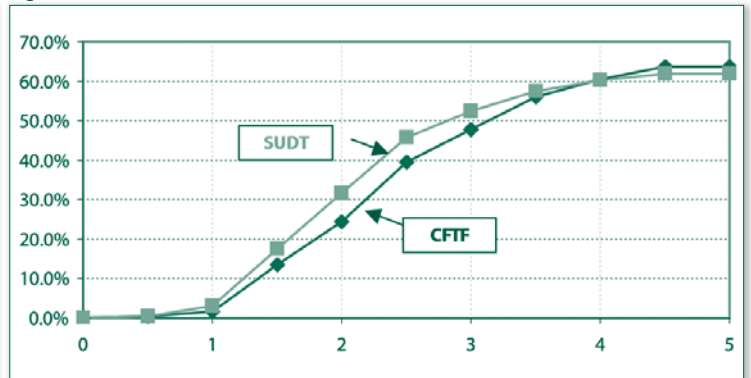
Equalized Comparison of Graduation Rates

Figure 6a: CFTF vs. All CCC Transfers



Source: Office of Institutional Research

Figure 6b: CFTF vs. SUDT



- When compared to the 1998 comparative first-time freshmen (CFTF), Figure 6a suggests that CCC Transfers were found to graduate faster during the first three years, but then declined.
- On refining the cohort of CCC transfers to include only upper division transfers, Figure 6b shows that the graduation rates of transfers improved only slightly. During the first four years, selective upper division transfer (SUDT) graduated at a higher rate than overall CCC transfers, but this advantage starts diminishing at the beginning of their fifth year.

Table 7: Detailed Breakdown of CFTF, SUDT and all CCC Transfers

	Comparative First-time Freshmen (CFTF)	Selective Upper Division Transfers (SUDT)	All CCC Transfers
Total Cohort	992	2,301	2,648
Average Entering GPA	2.82(1)	3.23(2)	3.20(2)
Graduated within			
• 3 years	47.8%	52.5%	49.0%
• 4 years	60.6%	60.4%	57.6%
• 5 years	63.8%	61.8%	59.1%
Left after 5 years			
• Transferred out	21.3%	27.3%	28.6%
California 2-year Institution	4.9%	3.9%	5.5%
California 4-year Institution	15.9%	22.9%	22.4%
Out of State 2-year Institution	0.1%	0.0%	0.6%
Out of State 4-year Institution	0.3%	0.5%	0.1%
• Dropped out	7.8%	6.3%	7.6%
Total	29.0%	33.6%	36.2%
Average semesters toward graduation			
Average semesters toward graduation	2.6 Years	2.6 Years	2.7 Years
Average cumulative earned units at graduation			
Average cumulative earned units at graduation	137.5 Units	139.8 Units	139.5 Units

(1) Average cumulative GPA at the end of 2nd year; (2) Average Transfer GPA
 Source: Office of Institutional Research; National Student Clearinghouse Database

- Enrollment outcomes of the equalized cohort comparison, suggested in Table 7, show comparative first-time freshmen (CFTF) who returned after two years have a much lower cumulative GPA than selective upper division (SUDT) and other California Community College transfers.
- After three years the graduation rate of CFTF was also lower than that of their counterparts. A reverse trend started to take place after four years in favor of CFTF - with a lower drop-out rate, shorter enrollment and fewer cumulative earned units at graduation.
- According to the Enrollment Tracker data, the majority of students who left after five years had transferred to either a 2-year or 4-year institution, and fewer than 8% had actually dropped out.
- Table 8 below lists the top five two-year and four-year institutions that these students transferred to at the end of their fifth year, using the National Student Clearinghouse’s database.

Table 8: Top 5 Institutions of Initial Transfers for Dropped-outs

	Selective Native First-time Freshmen (CFTF)	Comparative Upper Division Transfers (SUDT)
Two-year College	1. Sacramento City College 2. American River College 3. Cosumnes River College 4. Sierra College 5. Solano Community College	1. Sacramento City College 2. American River College 3. Cosumnes River College 4. Sierra College 5. San Joaquin Delta College
Four-year University	1. California State University – East Bay 2. California State University – Fresno 3. San Jose State University 4. Devry University – Fremont 5. University of The Pacific	1. University of The Pacific 2. California State University – Chico 3. California State University – East Bay 4. California State University – Monterey Bay 5. Chapman University – Orange County

Note: National Student Clearinghouse’s database contains over 2,700 institutions that represent more than 90% of higher education’s total enrollment
 Source: Office of Institutional Research and National Student Clearinghouse

In future studies, it seems appropriate to further refine the CCC transfer cohort by selecting only those with a high school graduation date of 1998. This group of CCC transfers, known here as the “Elite CCC Transfers”, was presumed to have spent exactly 2 years in a community college before transferring to Sac State. At this point, high school graduation data is currently unavailable. We hope that the newly developed administrative computer system will make a more appropriate comparison possible. In addition, gender and ethnic-specific differences in persistence rates should be included. However, in most cases, one should exercise with caution when comparing rates across ethnic groups. This is due to the fact that rates for minority ethnic groups are likely to be unstable, across time on a given campus, as they are based on small sample sizes, by definition of a minority group. In the next issue of OIR Bits, we will discuss in more detail the various changes and enrollment policy implications affecting our student body for the last ten years.

The 2005 administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) found that transfer seniors were generally less engaged across the board in learning activities.

Student Engagement

Contemporary transfer students differ from native students in many ways. According to Johnson and Miller [2000], the fundamental difference is that transfer students come to campus at a different stage in their academic career, and subsequently, with different expectations. They typically are less in need of an in loco parentis approach to student life than they are of a coaching and facilitating of the educational process. They tend to be more attuned to vocational or professional outcomes, and treat college experience as a stepping stone to the world of work, rather than primarily of self-growth [Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux and Myrsiades, 2001]. Some transfer students are moving (or running) away from one environment (for example, those who leave one four-year institution due to incompatibility or a bad fit) in search of something different, while others are running to something (such as completing a four-year degree or transferring from a community college). The result for the transfer student is often the same: arrival on campus at what is loosely determined “an unusual” time and therefore lacking the now typically developed transitional programming.

In a study of 60 four-year institutions in the southeast, Swing [2000] found that transfer students receive only modest institutional support, even though they continue to demonstrate heightened

adjustment difficulties. Many institutions, while thinking of students, only think in terms of new freshmen, continuing students, and graduate students, and fail to fully recognize that transfer students compose a significant percentage of their campus community and, in addition, are a unique group of students with their own needs, challenges, and contributions.

These issues are a challenge for Sac State as well. The 2005 administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) found that transfer seniors were generally less engaged across the board in learning activities. Although senior transfers appeared to perform academically on par with native seniors, in that they reported comparable grades and similar degree of academic challenge, they were less involved in the other four (of five) benchmarks of positive student engagement: active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment. Table 9 below shows the notable negative engagement responses by transfer seniors, in comparison to the native seniors.

To address these negative engagement characteristics, a change in culture would be required that would foster the concept that transition issues be supported by a broad range of professionals in both academic programs and student services. It also would mean supporting and rewarding faculty for providing increased opportunities for students to communicate with them on educational issues

Table 9: Sample of Negative Engagement Responses by Transfer Seniors

Seniors engagement in	Native Seniors (n=201)		Transfer Seniors (n=195)		CSU Consortium (n=1,019)	
	Avg.	% often & very often	Avg.	% often & very often	Avg.	% often & very often
working with classmates outside of class to complete class assignments	2.65	51%	2.48	45%	2.84	63%
tutoring other students	1.77	17%	1.54	11%	1.88	22%
working with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)	1.53	11%	1.34	7%	1.99	19%
discussing career plans with a faculty member or advisor	2.17	30%	2.04	24%	2.25	35%
discussing ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)	2.82	62%	2.70	59%	2.88	65%

Key: 1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often

	Avg.	% quite a bit & very much	Avg.	% quite a bit & very much	Avg.	% quite a bit & very much
perceiving the campus environment as supportive of their academic success	2.75	63%	2.52	52%	3.20	67%
perceiving the campus environment as supportive of their social needs	1.88	20%	1.67	12%	2.02	28%
perceiving the campus environment as supportive of their participation in campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc.)	2.40	42%	2.22	33%	2.42	47%

Key: 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much

Source: 2005 National Survey of Students Engagement (NSSE)

[Helm and Cohen, 2001]. And finally, it would mean that we (receiving four-year institutions) would pay more attention - more positive attention - to transfer students [Kuh, 2002].

Recent changes in the transfer policy and enrollment management, at the CSU system level and with California higher education in general, have taken place to allow for easier student transfer for the purpose of degree completion. This development has dual implications. The first is opportunity: Institutions must work harder

to accommodate those transfer students already on campus. The second is challenge: Institutions which fail to accommodate their transfer students will find that other institutions are more than willing to “raid” the enrollment of dissatisfied transfer students. Like other CSU campuses, Sac State is facing savvy and sophisticated college students who see higher education enrollment as a commodity, and who, if the institution does not deliver a perceived level of acceptable “product,” may well look (enroll) elsewhere.

Conclusion

Historically resistant to the concept that transfer students are part of the market place, today’s institutions of higher education must become responsive to their constituents. It is inaccurate to assume that Sac State’s students are those who arrive in their first year of college and that transfer students are add-ons. We must recognize that transfer students are also “our” students. All students equally deserve the same care, attention, and expectations for success.

Research suggests that transfer students’ experiences are diverse with respect to their arrival on campus, integration into it, preparation for life as a Sac State student, and expectations or desires for their life as a student here. They subsequently are also faced with

we need to be aware of are total earned units at graduation and overall graduation rate. With nearly 3,000 transfers graduating each year, that translates to nearly 700 FTEs that were consumed without fulfilling any graduation requirement. Also, looking at the most recent four cohorts (1996-1999), our 5-year graduation rate has been lower than the CSU average. Since we believe that “the leadership begins here”, an early and effectual relationship, combined with an institutional commitment and academic support, is needed to enhance transfers’ overall experience and success as Sacramento State Students.

This study is not an attempt to promote the idea that graduation rates measure student success. We know that there are many different reasons why students enroll in college and do not earn

It is inaccurate to assume that Sac State’s students are those who arrive in their first year of college and that transfer students are add-ons. We must recognize that transfer students are also “our” students.

a degree. Some of those reasons have to do with the students themselves, their financial resources, family circumstances, and motivation. Research indicates that successful undergraduates

having to make decisions more quickly, particularly since they must declare a major and begin coursework in the major almost immediately upon arrival [Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux and Myrsiades, 2001; Johnson and Miller, 2000; Nora, Attinasi, and Matonak, 1990; Nora and Rendon, 1990]. Therefore, it is difficult to make sweeping generalizations about their experiences. We should recognize that some of their needs may be distinct from those of other new students, and that academic support programs and services designed for them will be more effective when they are designed to meet their unique needs and characteristics.

The main purpose of this study is to stimulate further questions and dialogue on issues related to transfer student success. For the last ten years, the majority of our new undergraduates have been, and continue to be, transfer students. They have generated more enrollment FTEs, and contributed to more enrollment income, than native students. In the end, more baccalaureate degrees have been awarded to them, with that number continuing to rise since 1996. However, a few concerns

need the kinds of strong preparation in their K-12 education that far too many students, particularly low income and minority students, fail to receive [Berger and Braxton, 1998; Ishitani and DesJardins, 2002-2003; McGrath and Braunstein, 1997; Yorke and Thomas, 2003]. The decisions of state and federal lawmakers also make a difference; the policies they adopt, and the resources they choose to allocate, have impact. All of these things matter, and yet none of them are under our control.

However, universities play a role as well. Four-year universities, including Sac State, are exceptionally complicated enterprises requiring a high degree of skill, expertise, and good judgment to operate well. Decision-makers make choices every day that greatly affect the lives of their students. Among competing priorities, thoughtful consideration should be made to marshalling resources and focusing energies to maximize student learning and success for as many undergraduate students as possible. For many students, these decisions and policies, as well as the choices that they oblige, make all the difference in the world.

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Appendix

In consideration of our new transfers, it is important to recognize that academic experience at four-year universities will be both stimulating and challenging. Students will be stepping into a new environment, and much of their success in adjusting will depend on their own initiative. Research suggests that transfer students should be aware of the following factors when entering to the four-year universities:

Expecting rigorous coursework: Most of incoming transfers' coursework will be at the upper division level, which may be more demanding than they are used to. Subjects will be presented in more depth and with a tighter focus than in the broad-based survey or foundation courses they took in preparation of transferring. And while some of their classes may be larger than they are used to, big lectures are typically paired with small group discussions. Many campuses also offer seminar-style courses each term that enable them to have more one-on-one interaction with instructors.

Giving courses priority over work: Many community college students are used to fitting part-time classes around a full-time job. At the four-year university, the expectations are different. With financial assistance provided through financial aid, transfer students may be more able to keep their work hours manageable. The best way for transfer students to deal with all of the changes that they'll encounter is for them to allow more time for their studies at the university level.

Seeking out career contacts early: Successful student/faculty relationships require effort beyond merely attending weekly lectures. It is important for students to visit faculty during office hours and ask about internships or research prospects in their field. Faculty often are the key to unadvertised opportunities that can give students vital career experience, particularly if they plan to attend graduate school. Career Centers also can help transfers research career or graduate school options.

Getting involved: Our campus offers clubs and organizations where students can quickly get to know their fellow students. Unlike many other campuses, our campus does not have transfer centers or specialized support services to foster a smooth transition.

Concentrating on preparing for the major: Most important in making the transition to four-year universities is the academic preparation at the community college level. The more comprehensive and challenging the community college programs, the better prepared students will be for university work, and the better their chances for academic success. Concentration on classes required as preparation for upper division work in their intended major, and completing their major preparation coursework and general education requirements while at community college can help students become more competitive applicants and help them graduate sooner after transferring.

The OIR Welcomes Two New Members

We are pleased to welcome two new members, Nathaniel Blair, Academic Planning Database Coordinator and Nancy Hardy, Administrative Support Coordinator, to the Office of Institutional Research.



Nathaniel Blair

Nate joined the Institutional Research staff in October 2005. He received a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics from Ohio University, and a Ph.D. in Psychology from Indiana University. He has been teaching Cognition and Perception part-time for Sac State's Psychology Department since 2003.

Nate is our campus liaison to the Chancellor's Office for the Academic Reporting Data Base (APDB). He is also available to answer questions you have regarding faculty workload, course assigned/reimbursed/ administrative time, section related information, and other mysterious workload indicators, such as WTU's, FTES, SCU, and SFR. He will, of course, always be happy to spend hours discussing his baby daughter, so you probably shouldn't ask about her. He can be reached at 8-7419, or by email at nblair@csus.edu.



Nancy Hardy

Nancy is an alumna of Sacramento State with a Bachelor's degree in English. She has been with the Office of Institutional Research for a little over a year joining in September of 2004. Her responsibility is to provide office support functions, supervise the student assistants, and

coordinate both internal and external survey administration. She also provides general responses to data requests and assists users in data interpretation.

She enjoys spending quality time with her husband and two daughters. When not working or taking care of a newborn and a four year old, Nancy enjoys cooking new and interesting dishes, dabbles with oil painting and loves watching movies, Hitchcock being her favorite. She also enjoys reading lots of books, chiefly Literature - Shakespeare is a favorite. Nancy can be reached at 8-6566 or by email at nhardy@csus.edu.

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