



Supporting Transfer Students Series

PART 1: Understanding Students Who Transfer from 2-Year to 4-Year Institutions

Admission for transfer students at UCD has been steadily rising since 2009, with over 3,700 new transfer students enrolling in the 2016-2017 academic year (UC Davis Budget and Institutional Analysis, 2017). Transfer students represent a diverse collection of often nontraditional backgrounds and experiences; as such, these students have needs and expectations of their university educations that can be much different than their peers on more traditional pathways (Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013).

Characteristics of Transfer Students

Given the lower costs of attending less expensive 2-year colleges, transferring is a popular option among students from a variety of underrepresented populations, including first-generation students, veteran students, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds (CCCSE, 2012; Durosko, 2017; Fauria & Fuller, 2015, Mullin, 2012). 2-year colleges often offer much more flexibility in course scheduling, including night classes, which can make it easier for nontraditionally-aged students, students with dependents, and students working part- or full-time to attend. The Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE] (2012) outlines the following major characteristics of community college students:

Status	Part-Time Students	Full-Time Students
Enrollment status	59% are part-time students	41% are full-time students
Work status	42% work at least 30 hrs/week	19% work at least 30 hrs/week
Dependents	37% care for dependents at least 11 hrs/week	29% care for dependents at least 11 hrs/week
Course flexibility	40% take evening or weekend classes	13% take evening or weekend classes

Additionally, CCCSE (2012) found that 73% of community college students reported that their goal in attending a 2-year institution was to transfer to a 4-year college or university, indicating that while not all community college students choose to go on to attend 4-year universities, the above characteristics remain largely representative of the students who do transfer.

The importance of recognizing your students' current life situations

Given that many transfer students face a variety of challenges outside of school that may have a significant impact on their success in school (e.g., CCCSE, 2012; Miller, 2013), one way instructors can help promote transfer students success is by being willing to work with transfer students if/when their extracurricular responsibilities interfere with their curricular ones. Below are a some additional extracurricular challenges transfer students may face, and some suggestions for how to respond supportively:

Challenges	Explanations	Teaching Suggestions
<i>May have extensive and diverse demands on their time outside of school</i>	Transfer students often commute, work many hours, and have unusual schedules. They may have part-time enrollment status, interruptions in their enrollment, and occasional impediments to their persistence due to a variety of factors.	Time management skills are important for the persistence of community college students. Help students with time management by designing assignments and timelines that allow for research or collaboration to be done outside of class or off-campus. Do not require the use of resources that are limited or only available



		at certain times. Consider time management resources provided by SASC .
<i>May have dependents or other family demands</i>	Transfer students may concurrently support dependents or may otherwise work through demanding family situations.	Be understanding when life or family gets in the way of a student attending class or completing an assignment on time. Consider offering partial credit for late assignments, or extra credit if appropriate. Encourage students to stop by office hours if they miss class or fall behind on coursework.
<i>May face serious financial hardships</i>	Financial issues persist for many students.	Unless students need to buy particular supplies or apps for your class, be cognizant of additional financial burdens. For example, consider using open source software (e.g., R , Textable), open source textbooks, and other free course materials if possible.
<i>May be a veteran student or a nontraditionally-aged student</i>	According to the US Department of Education, the average age for returning veteran students is 25 (cited in Durosko, 2017). Similarly, many transfer students may also be nontraditionally-aged students who have returned to school after a long absence. These students may feel out of place around their younger peers, or may have difficulty engaging socially on campus.	Try to vary your approach to working with students in a way that considers their age and life experiences. Encourage students to utilize their prior knowledge and experience in coursework, and to share their unique perspectives during class discussions. For example, you could build in time before major exams or projects for students to discuss study methods that have been helpful for them in similar classes, and develop problem-solving strategies for when they get stuck.

Additional Resources

- [Transfer and Reentry Center](#)
- [Student Academic Success Center \[SASC\]](#)
- [SASC's Writing Assistance Services](#)
- [Veteran Success Center](#)

In addition to this resource, we would also suggest referencing our "[Supporting First-Generation University Student Series](#)," as the experiences of transfer students often parallel those of first-generation students more broadly.

Citation

Center for Educational Effectiveness [CEE]. (2018). Supporting Transfer Students Series. *Just-in-Time Teaching Resources*. Retrieved from <https://cee.ucdavis.edu/JITT>

References

Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE]. (2012). *A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success (A First Look)*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

Durosko, H. (2017). Five ways to support veteran transfer students. *Journal of College Admission*, 235, 42-43.

Fauria, R. M., & Fuller, M. B. (2015). Transfer student success: educationally purposeful activities predictive of undergraduate GPA. *Research & Practice in Assessment*, 10, 39-52.



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Supporting Transfer Students Series

PART 2: Strategies for Supporting Social Engagement with Transfer Students

Recent research suggests that transfer students considered social engagement to be important to their success in college (e.g., Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013). Lester et al (2013) defined social engagement as “interacting with others broadly both inside and outside the university” (p. 211). However, researchers have also found that due to a variety of curricular and extracurricular factors, transfer students tend to be less socially engaged in their 4-year institutions than their traditionally enrolled peers, especially if they transfer late into their college careers (as juniors or seniors; Ishitani & McKitrick, 2010). Although, transfer students may primarily rely on social engagement outside of school for support, instructors can still play an important role in helping transfer students feel more socially connected to campus.

Strategies	Teaching Suggestions
Implement active and collaborative activities, and encourage students to work with a variety of their peers in class	Consider incorporating collaborative, active learning activities so that students can become acculturated to their peers and establish new study connections and friendships. Francis & Miller (2007) found that community college students may experience apprehension or anxiety communicating with others (including their peers). Consider using small group discussion activities in class to help students become more comfortable communicating and collaborating with others. For examples of active and collaborative learning activities, see our resource series titled “ Activating Your Lecture ” and “ Strategies for Covering Content ”
Encourage networking and professional development on and off campus	Show interest in your students’ extracurricular activities and professional networking efforts. This could include building an experiential or service learning component into your course, having an expert as a guest speaker (in-person or video conference), or offering extra credit for attending networking events or meeting with professionals in the field. Also, engage with students with on campus, outside-of-class activities, such as poster days, presentation opportunities, competitions, professional organizations (local, national, international), and independent study.
Help students build networks of support	Encourage all students to create networks of support (i.e., to “shrink” a larger campus into a more manageable community). Highlight various cultural, ethnic, religious, hobby, interest, or discipline-oriented clubs on campus that can offer social and academic support. Research has shown that engagement in these activities can have a positive effect on their educational outcomes (Ishitani & McKitrick, 2010; Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013). For students with off-campus commitments, the UC Davis All Events calendar contains a links to video streams of campus activities. Also, see Additional Resources for more campus partners.

Additional Resources

- [Transfer and Reentry Center](#)
- [Student Academic Success Center \[SASC\]](#)
- [SASC’s Writing Assistance Services](#)
- [Veteran Success Center](#)

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References

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Lester, J., Leonard, J. B., & Mathias, D. (2013). Transfer student engagement: Blurring of social and academic engagement. *Community College Review*, 41(3), 202-222.



Supporting Transfer Students Series

PART 3: Strategies for Encouraging Academic Engagement in Transfer Students

Academic engagement is important to transfer student success in college (e.g, Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013). Lester et al. (2013) defined academic engagement as “academic activities that include meaningful connections with faculty members as well as academic challenge and learning” (p. 213). The study also indicated that transfer students tended to view their engagement in academic activities as their primary focus, eschewing social activities on campus unless those activities were directly related to their classes, interactions with instructors, or opportunities within their majors. While both types of engagement are important, this resource will focus on encouraging academic engagement.

Strategies	Explanations	Teaching Suggestions
Design your class to fit a diverse range of student needs	Transfer students may represent a variety of ages, experiences, backgrounds, and knowledge; they may understand and approach the classroom in vastly different ways from each other and from their peers on more traditional pathways, and may therefore have more diverse needs within the classroom.	Consider designing activities that will allow for a variety of approaches and perspectives. For example, “learning journals” are term-long projects where students are provided with a set of open-ended prompts that facilitate the development of critical reflection skills by allowing them to consider their learning throughout the course. For sample learning journal prompts, see this conference poster from Richardson, Fatherly, and Thomas (2017) .
Create a class attendance policy that will allow you to be flexible when needed	Consistent class attendance is important for sustaining success with community college and transfer students. However, keep in mind that transfer students may have significant extracurricular demand on their time that might at times make attending class difficult.	Try to be flexible when possible, especially if your policy connects attendance with a grade. For example, you could allow students to miss up to XX number of classes without loss of attendance points.
Encourage students to participate and ask questions during class discussions	Fauria & Fuller (2015) found that transfers students who participated in class discussions or asked questions during class were more likely to be able to persist to graduation.	Try to create a learning environment in your classroom, where students’ responses (even incorrect ones) are acknowledged and considered. For example, if a student provides an incorrect response, ask to see if another student can provide additional information or “help” clarify the first student’s response.
Encourage students to set clear goals, both for your course and for the future	Have a discussion with your students about what they will know, what they will be able to do, and the types of attitudes and social/career skills that they will develop by the end of your course.	Consider conducting a diagnostic assessment (e.g., a short quiz or in-class writing exam) at the beginning of the term at gauge your students prior knowledge and experience. Give your students time to ask questions and/or clarify your expectations. You might begin by clarifying your expectations and discussing how the course was designed for student success.



	Martin, Galentino, & Townsend (2014) found that transfer students who set clear academic and career goals for themselves were more likely to be successful in their 4-year universities.	Have students write personal and career goals that they want to achieve during the term, and then have them connect those goals to the learning outcomes of your course.
Create opportunities for personal and career relevance	Have students consider how your course will fit into their degree programs, and more importantly, their future career plans.	Encourage them to integrate the concepts of your course with their personal/career interests and activities (e.g. work, extracurricular activities, volunteering, experiential- or service-learning, and discipline-specific organizations and activities).
Implement authentic activities and assignments	Consider designing your course around authentic assignments and practical tasks. The goal of these assignments are to help students not only understand <i>what</i> they are learning, but <i>why</i> they are learning it, and how it will <i>apply</i> to their work in the future. Consider designing and implementing projects that mirror real world tasks completed by professionals in the field.	Try designing inquiry- or problem-based projects, or other authentic assignments that provide students with opportunities to engage in the types of writing and problem-solving common in their disciplines and/or careers. For example, you could provide students with a case study describing a real world and/or field-related problem, and have them work to teams to develop a solution. For more suggestions on developing inquiry-based projects, see our " Strategies for Covering Content Series ".
	Assignments that allow students to interact with established members of their discipline or professional in their career area are also effective authentic assignments.	If possible, offer experiential or service learning opportunities, and encourage students to explore internship opportunities outside of class, as these (CCCSE, 2012; Ishitani & McKitrick, 2010).
Encourage students to make use of their prior knowledge and experiences	Transfer students may have extensive prior experiences and knowledge, particularly veterans and nontraditionally-aged students (Durosko, 2017). Tap into students' prior experiences and prior knowledge and help them explore how they can apply it to the new content of your course.	For example, you could have students complete a short survey or diagnostic where they outline their prior experience with the course subject, and then use the results to design activities or homework tasks where students can apply that knowledge to course material.

Additional Resources

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Supporting Transfer Students Series

PART 4: Strategies for Encouraging Instructor-Student Interaction with Transfer Students

Research has found that for transfer students, interactions with instructors are a particularly strong indicator of student learning (Fauria & Fuller, 2015; Levin et al., 2010; Lundberg, 2014). Fauria & Fuller (2015) note that while “transfer student persistence and completion rates towards baccalaureate degree attainment continue to be lower than non-transfer student persistence and completion rates” (p. 40), they also found that interactions with instructors through feedback and direct encouragement had a positive impact on transfer students’ cumulative GPAs. Below are a few suggestions for how to foster supportive interactions with transfer students:

Strategies	Explanations	Teaching Suggestions
Make feedback an integral part of class	Fauria & Fuller (2015) found that transfer students who received <i>timely</i> written or oral feedback on their academic performances were more likely to persist to graduation.	Consider making it an integral part of your class activities for students to seek help and/or feedback. Endeavor to provide feedback in a timely manner (within a week, depending on class size), so that students have an opportunity to integrate your comments into their next assignment. For more feedback strategies, see our “Effective Feedback Series.”
Encourage students to come to office hours, and create opportunities for student-instructor interactions	Transfer students may feel uncomfortable contacting instructors if they need help (CCCSE, 2012), or may have difficulty making time in their schedules to attend office hours.	Reach out to students who seem to be struggling in your class (or work with a TA do so). Remind your students about your office hours frequently. For example, you could give students an idea of things they can do during office hours to encourage them to come (e.g., ask for additional feedback, get strategies for solving problems, discuss research and/or job opportunities, etc.).
Make your students aware of your high expectations for them	Research has shown that educational outcomes for transfer students are improved when instructors hold students to high standards, but help support students in achieving those standards (e.g., Fauria & Fuller, 2015; Levin et al., 2010).	Encourage students to be self-motivated and hardworking, but remind them that you are there to support them if they need help. For example, Fauria & Fuller (2015) suggest challenging your students to meet your high expectations by working harder than they think they can, but make sure to also respond promptly with feedback or answers to questions. Also, consider outlining your expectations on topics like attendance, participation, and teamwork in the syllabus and/or the Canvas site.
Encourage students to seek help outside of the classroom	Help students navigate the higher education system and identify resources where they can receive the help they may need.	Include information on various university support services in your syllabus (see below in Additional Resources, as well as our Campus Resources Guide for transfer-specific services).



Self-identify if you were a transfer student	If you were a transfer student yourself, publicly identify yourself as such; this can help your students feel more at ease in your classroom, while also providing them with a potential mentor.	Invite students to ask questions and learn more about your academic journey or visit you during office hours to discuss your experiences in more depth.
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