

University of Minnesota-Twin Cities Framework for the Transfer Student Initiative

Vision:

To understand and improve the transfer student experience at the University of Minnesota- Twin Cities (UMTC) in order to enhance their overall success, satisfaction, and timely graduation.

Goals:

- Understand the transfer student experience at the UMTC.
- Raise awareness of transfer students within the campus community.
- Work collaboratively across campus units to enhance the academic and social transition for transfer students.
- Increase transfer student satisfaction with their overall experience on campus.
- Increase transfer student participation in high impact activities and engagement.
- Increase retention and graduation rates for transfer students.

Guiding Principles:

- Success is achieved through collaboration with a range of stakeholders, both on- and off-campus.
- The campus encourages positive academic and personal outcomes for transfer students.
- Transfer students deserve experiences that create a lifelong connection to the campus community.
- Transfer students play an important role in our enrollment strategy and the state of Minnesota's higher education plan.
- Transfer students are a diverse group of students and often times require "high touch" and individual attention.

A Strategic Approach: Three stages of transition

To frame the institutional approach to serving transfer students, the Transfer Student Initiative considers three distinct stages of student transition. These stages serve as a guide to identify critical services, supports and interventions for transfer student success through their transition to campus.

Stage 1: Preparation for Transfer

Adequate preparation for the transition is required for students to be successful in their academic and personal endeavors at the institution. The Transfer Student Initiative supports this preparation as being aimed at helping students understand the necessary processes and policies that impact the transferring of credit. Additionally, special attention is paid to managing student expectations and helping students identify campus resources and institutional partners to be utilized in the beginning of their transition.

Campus units to support the initiative during this stage may include, but are not limited to:

- College-specific academic & student services departments
- Office of Admissions
- Academic Support Resources (Onestop, Finance, etc.)
- Housing and Residential Life

- Orientation & First-Year Programs
- Veteran Services (if applicable)
- International Student Scholar Services (if applicable)
- Partners at traditional ‘feeder’ institutions

Stage 2: Admitted and Confirmed Students

Transfer students will become successfully engaged members of the campus community through strategies that are deliberate and purposed for students newly admitted to the institution. The Transfer Student Initiative supports strategies that provide intentional outreach and engagement to foster a healthy academic and social transition. Campus units to support the initiative during this stage may include, but are not limited to:

- College-specific academic & student services departments
- Orientation & First-Year Programs
- Housing and Residential Life
- Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence
- University Counseling and Consulting Services
- Student Academic Success Services
- Center for Academic Planning and Exploration
- Office for Equity and Diversity

Stage 3: Progression to Graduation

Critical to the success of the Transfer Student Initiative is students’ ability to envision and achieve their personal and academic goals. The initiative supports students’ academic and co-curricular goals by providing experiences that maximize learning and development while supporting the ability to achieve timely graduation. Campus units that support the initiative within this stage may include, but are not limited to:

- College-specific academic & student services departments
- Office of Undergraduate Education
- Office for Student Affairs
- Office for Equity and Diversity
- Learning Abroad Center
- Student Unions and Activities

Informing the Approach

In 2013, the Office of Undergraduate Education (OUE) established a position to support and coordinate central efforts to enhance the transfer student experience. Through interviews with campus stakeholders and students, as well as a review of the literature relating to the transfer student experience, the following themes have been identified to aid in enhancing and improving transfer students’ success and overall satisfaction. Below is a review of these themes and findings.

Academic Adjustment:

The term ‘transfer shock’ is commonly used to characterize the slight decrease in transfer students’ grade point average (GPA) after their first semester on their new campus due to the myriad of challenges students face during their transition. This is especially true for students transferring from 2-year to 4-year institutions (Thurmond, 2007). Thirty-eight percent of transfer students for the 2014-2015 academic year transferred from 2-year MnSCU institutions, which are common ‘feeder’ schools. However, it is argued that the differences in 4 year institution types (private, public, selective admission or open access) can lead to similar ‘transfer shock’ for all students (Grites, 2013).

Transfer shock can be attributed to institutional differences (structure, access student support resources, faculty expectations, etc...) and assumptions made of the both the student and institution. Some of the institutional assumptions about students’ academic preparedness and creating a one-size-fits-all approach to serving a diverse population can lead to overlooking student needs and concerns. Students’ assumptions are often related to overconfidence in knowledge of their new institution and ability to navigate it successfully, as well as the ‘at my other school’ syndrome where students assume institutional policies and practices based on their previous institution, which could result in penalties (Grites, 2013).

Additionally, Cuseo (2012) notes, “the working assumptions of those at most 4-year campuses are embodied by two generalizations: a) Transfer students have the same needs as students transitioning from high school, or b) transfer students need little institutional support because they are already experienced college students” (p.144). At the UMTC, some transfer students experience their academic adjustment differently than students who enter as freshmen. The following describes some transfer students’ challenges with their academic adjustment:

- Transfer students are seeking more interaction with faculty and advisors (OFYP Survey and SERU).
- Students have perception of professors being more focused on research than teaching (stakeholder interviews).
- Institutional data (SERU, 2011-2015) indicates transfer students have lower satisfaction, compared to NHS on following items related to academic adjustment/experience.
 - General education experience
 - Access and availability of courses needed to progress in desired academic program.
 - Transfer students spend less time working with and getting to know faculty (in 2014 & 2015 this trend has reversed)
 - Transfer students are less likely to work with classmates outside of class.
- Findings from SERU (2011-2015) indicate that transfer students report better behaviors around academic engagement than NHS students, such as:
 - Fewer reports of skipping class sessions
 - Preparing for classes by doing course readings before class
 - Asking questions of professors during/after class sessions.

Financial Concerns:

Nationally, students are utilizing the transfer pathway to offset the cost of obtaining a degree. Many students find this pathway through traditional means of attending a community or technical college for lower-level “general education” courses before transferring to a 4-year university. Increasingly, students from lower income families and underserved groups, including African American, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander students especially value using the transfer pathway as a means to achieving a bachelor’s degree (Handel, 2013). At the University of Minnesota, 30.8% of transfer students were Pell-eligible and 39.5% were first-generation within the 2014-15 transfer cohort (OUE, 2014). Additionally, research suggests that institutional policies and practices that affect access to financial aid can be unfriendly to transfer students in the following ways, “a) sending acceptance letters to transfer students after financial-aid application deadline dates have passed, b) granting little or no portability of financial aid to transfer students, and c) providing few or no scholarships earmarked specifically for transfer students” (Cuseo, 2012, pp. 145). These practices can place practical barriers for student persistence.

At the UMTC, scholarships are used to help entering freshmen offset their college costs; however, access to scholarships is very limited for transfer students (interview with Office of Student Finance). Students report that financing their education is one of their top concerns at the beginning of their transition, and this holds true 6 weeks into the first semester on campus (OFYP surveys). Additional transfer students concerns related to financing their education includes the following:

- Students are concerned about limited access to scholarships as they transfer to campus; especially if they know their cost to attend classes will be increasing when compared to their previous institution’s tuition and fee rates (student & stakeholder interviews).
- Transfer students are interested in finding a job on campus in lieu of scholarships, but find it especially difficult to get connected to these opportunities before arriving on campus due to lack of knowledge of institutional structure (student & stakeholder interviews).
- Whether working on or off campus, transfer students struggle to find a balance between working enough hours to pay college expenses and successfully completing a full-time credit load (student & stakeholder interviews).

Social and Cultural Integration:

A review of national literature asserts that institutions should acknowledge transfer students’ social and cultural integration when considering their sense of belonging and satisfaction. From institutional traditions to cultural aspects commonly overlooked by those who have already been integrated into the community, transfer students struggle with feeling as though they are a part of the their new institution (Grites, 2013).

On the Twin Cities campus, transfer students struggle to integrate into the community and its culture (SERU & stakeholder interviews). Without events such as new student convocation, which teach students’ some of the institution’s culture and traditions, transfer students struggle with feeling pride in and belonging to their institution (student interviews).

Additional UMTC cultural aspects commonly overlooked include: a) faculty expectations around using office hours, teaching assistants, tutors or peer study groups as supplemental to classroom lectures; b) cultural expectations related to student co-curricular and extra-curricular engagement as enhancing student learning and development; c) assumptions of students' knowledge of institutional-specific acronyms when referencing departments, colleges, resources, etc. (student & stakeholder interviews).

Institutional research shows transfer students are overall less satisfied with the campus climate when compared to freshmen (SERU). This may be due to the diversity of backgrounds and experiences found within the population. Whereas freshmen enter with common backgrounds and shared experiences, transfer students are transferring from various institution types, have various levels of academic standing, or they are possibly returning after time away from an educational setting. Transfer students are challenged to integrate in the following ways:

- Students are challenged with breaking into pre-established groups within academic and social settings (student and stakeholder interviews).
- Students struggle learning institutional expectations and cultural norms of 'being a U of M student' (stakeholder and student interviews).
- Students are interested in getting involved with co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities on campus, but struggle to do so (stakeholder interviews).

Career Development:

Many transfer students are beginning their academic career with a sense of being 'behind' in academic achievements and post-degree planning when compared to non-transfer students at the same academic level or student status (stakeholder interviews). For the transfer students entering in fall 2015, 42.8% were upper division students with 60+ credits transferred (OUE, 2015). Cuseo (2012) offers that institutions should supply students with a "preparatory foundation" for college exit that "introduces students to campus resources that will help them find relevant internships...apply to graduate schools, prepare a resume and portfolio, and locate post-graduation employment opportunities" (p.146).

Interestingly, transfer students are less interested in traditional experiential opportunities or high impact practices (i.e. study abroad, undergraduate research, or joining student organizations) unless there is a clearly identifiable link between the experience and employment post-graduation. The feeling of being 'behind' leads students to dismiss some of these high impact opportunities that could, paradoxically, help students gain and strengthen skills to aid in securing post-graduation employment or entry into graduate programs (stakeholder & student interviews). Apart from students' willingness to engage in high impact practices, the following are additional concerns for the transfer student population related to career development:

- Over 50% of transfer students are at some level of exploring academic majors, regardless of student status with 3% having no idea and requesting assistance (Pre-orientation survey, 2015).
- For many students transferring from 2-year institutions, there is a lack of intentional major and career exploration/planning prior to arrival. Students' previous institutions may not stress career

development as important for students, especially if they are planning to transfer (student & stakeholder interviews).

- Students who intend to transfer commonly prioritize completing ‘general’ courses over major or career exploration (student & stakeholder interviews).

References:

Cuseo, J. (2012). Facilitating the transfer transition: specific and systemic strategies for 2- & 4-year institutions. In T. J. Grites & C. Duncan (Eds.), *Advising student transfer: strategies for today’s realities and tomorrow’s challenges* (pp. 135-152). Manhattan, KS: NACADA.

Grites, T. J. (2013). Successful transitions from two-year to four-year institutions. In J. Marling (Ed.), *Collegiate Transfer: navigating the new normal*. (pp. 61-68). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Handel, S. J. (2013). The transfer moment: the pivotal partnership between community colleges and our-year institutions in securing the nation’s college completion agenda. In J. Marling (Ed.), *Collegiate Transfer: navigating the new normal*. (pp. 5-16). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Thurmond, K. C. (2007). *Transfer shock: Why is a term forty years old still relevant?*. Retrieved from <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/clearinghouse/advisingissues/transfer-shock.htm>

Additional references:

OFYP Surveys: analysis of institutional survey data from pre-orientation and post-orientation check-in surveys facilitated by Orientation and First Year Programs (OFYP) office.

Student Experience in the Research University survey (SERU): analysis from 2011, 2012, 2013 survey results.

Office of Undergraduate Education (OUE): institutional data provided by analysts in OUE.

Stakeholder Interviews: Formal and informal interviews conducted with campus staff members working with and around transfer student issues on campus (i.e. college academic advisors, collegiate student services directors, etc.)

Student Interviews: Information gathered through formal focus groups and individual meetings with students in various colleges.