

## Office of the President

### TO MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:

#### DISCUSSION ITEM

*For Meeting of January 19, 2022*

### TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS AND EXPERIENCE

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This discussion will focus on principles and approaches for supporting transfer students. The item describes select experiences of students who transferred to the University of California (UC) from a California Community College (CCC). The goal of this item is to inform discussion of how the University might enhance existing efforts to address transfer student success at UC.

#### BACKGROUND

A “transfer-affirming” culture is the result of a dual commitment by both California Community Colleges (CCC) and University of California (UC) campuses to provide the necessary resources for students to successfully transfer from community colleges to the University.<sup>1</sup> The success of transfer students is informed by the extent to which the “sending” campus (in this case, CCC) and the “receiving” campus (UC) are effectively aligned in their commitment to supporting and facilitating transfer between the two institutions. Components of a transfer-affirming culture include: viewing transfer as a shared responsibility between community colleges and four-year institutions; transfer and attainment of a bachelor’s degree as expected; support services and articulation that make transfer possible; and transfer as an essential mission to the institution.<sup>2</sup>

The community colleges have the responsibility of creating a transfer-*sending* culture wherein there is a campus-wide effort to prioritize transfer so that all students who want to transfer are able to do so.<sup>3</sup>

As one of the transfer-receiving systems, UC has a responsibility to establish and maintain a transfer-*receptive* culture. A transfer-receptive culture reflects UC’s commitment to provide the necessary support and resources for students to transfer into their campuses successfully.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Handel, S. J. (2011). *Increasing higher education access and success using new pathways to the baccalaureate: The emergence of a transfer-affirming culture*. San Jose, CA: Western Regional Office, The College Board.

<sup>2</sup> Handel, *Transfer-affirming culture*.

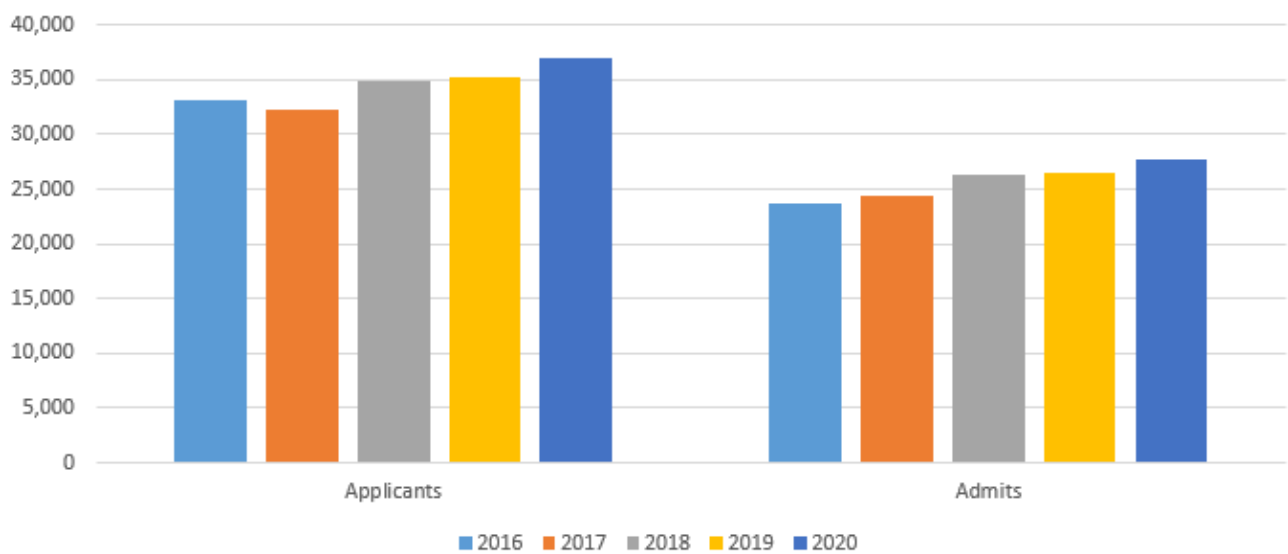
<sup>3</sup> Ornelas, A., & Solórzano, D. (2004). Transfer conditions of Latina/o community college students: A single institution case study. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 28(3), 233–248.

<sup>4</sup> Jain, D. J., Herrera, A., Bernal, S., & Solórzano, D. (2011). Critical race theory and the transfer function: Introducing a transfer receptive culture. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 35(3), 252–266.

Central to the transfer receptive culture framework is the belief that transfer students will be successful at the University *because* they are transfer students, not *despite* that fact. Previous research<sup>5</sup> has found that four-year colleges and universities do not meet the needs of transfer students, thus limiting opportunities for success. However, under the tenets of a transfer-receptive culture, transfer students are prioritized, and the community college experience is highlighted as one of several important pathways to earning a baccalaureate degree.<sup>6</sup> Key elements to a transfer-receptive culture include efforts *before* students arrive on campus, referred to as pre-transfer, and supports for students *after* they enroll at the University, called post-transfer.<sup>7</sup>

The UC system serves a large and growing population of students who transfer to a UC campus from a California Community College with the goal of earning a bachelor's degree. For fall 2020, 36,900 CCC students applied for transfer admission and 27,771 were admitted, resulting in a 75 percent systemwide transfer admission rate (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. 2016–2020 CCC Transfer Applicants and Admits to UC



Source: UC Info Center at <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/transfer-admissions-summary>

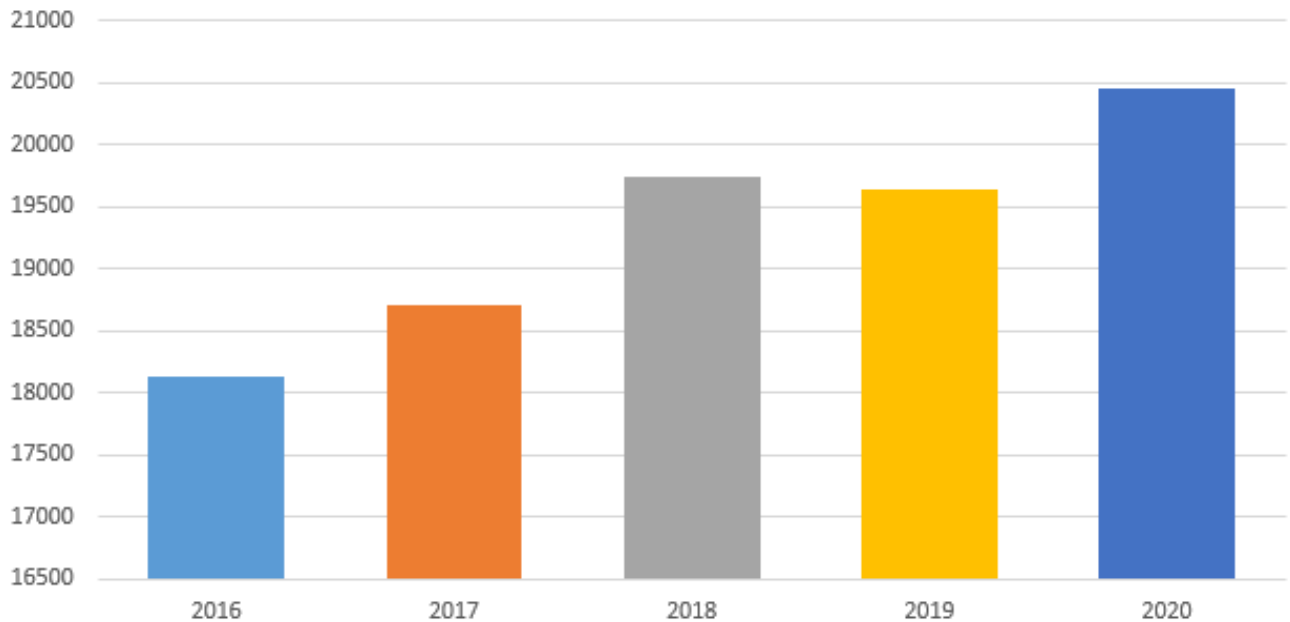
Reflecting the trend of increased applications and admissions, UC enrollment of CCC students has increased nearly every year since 2016, with CCC enrollees continuing to comprise the vast majority (20,453 or 94 percent) of all UC transfer enrollees (see Figure 2).

<sup>5</sup> Eggleston, L. E., & Laanan, F. S. (2001). Making the transition to the senior institution. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 114, 87-97.

<sup>6</sup> Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solórzano, Transfer receptive culture.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Figure 2. 2016–2020 CCC Transfer Enrollees



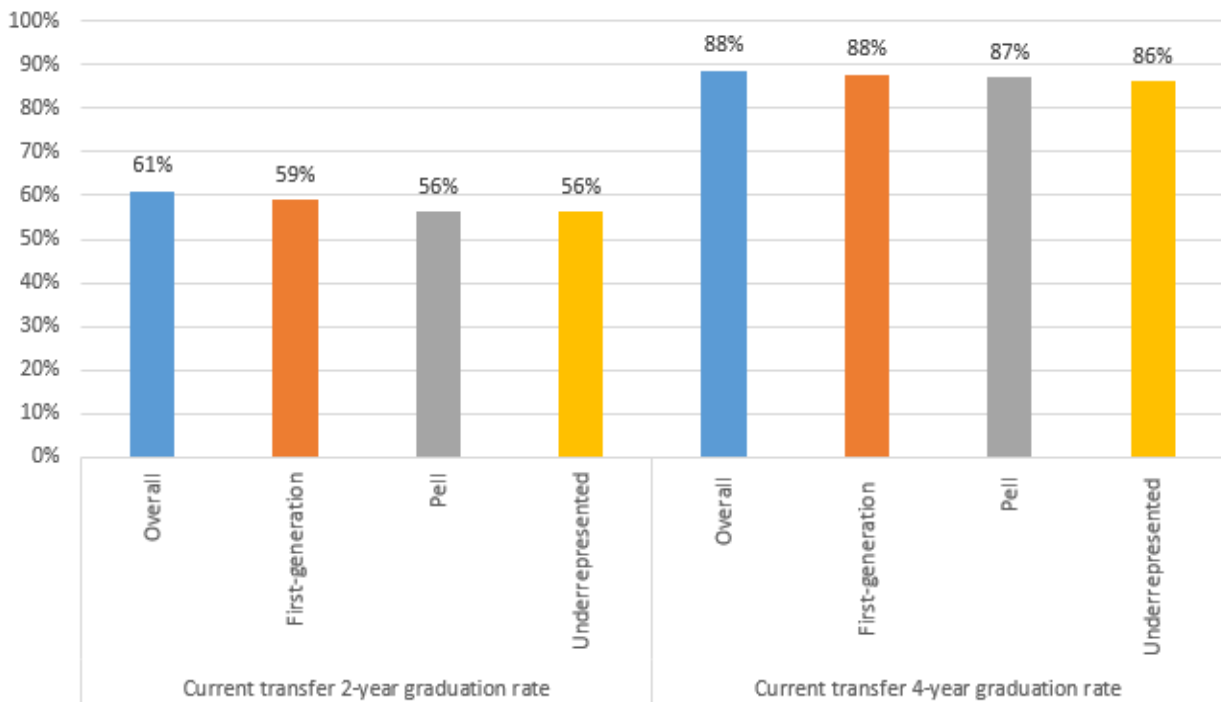
Source: UC Info Center at <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/transfer-admissions-summary>

UC’s transfer students not only reflect greater diversity than their first-time freshman peers, but also come from homes with a lower median income. Compared to first-time freshmen, transfer students are more likely to be the first in their family to attend college, come from historically underrepresented groups, and receive Pell Grants—the federal aid programs for families with incomes of roughly \$50,000 or less.

Two traditional measures of student achievement are graduation rates and time-to-degree. By both measures, UC transfer students are highly successful. Transfer students’ two-year graduation rate has increased from 41 percent for the 1999 entering cohort to 61 percent for the 2018 cohort. The most recent four-year graduation rate for transfers (2016 entering cohort) is 88 percent, an increase of about six percentage points since 1999. Further, about 87 percent of transfer students receiving Pell Grants completed their UC degrees within four years of transferring.

Despite the increase in graduation rates for transfer students overall, there are still opportunity gaps for transfer subgroups. First-generation students, low-income students (Pell Grant recipients), and students from underrepresented groups have slightly lower average graduation rates, especially for the two-year graduation timeframe (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. UC Transfer Graduation Rates



Source: UC Info Center at <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/ug-outcomes>

Removing barriers for all students is critical to their academic success. Providing access to key supports, such as pre-transfer academic readiness programs, academic support centers, financial aid, basic needs centers, and other academic and social supports improves the overall campus experience for transfer students and fosters their retention and graduation.

### Existing support programs for transfer students

About one third of new UC students enter via the transfer pathway, and this number grows each year. It is critical that UC welcome and engage transfer students in order to ensure a smooth transition to and through UC.

Transition programs improve transfer student retention and success by helping students make immediate progress toward degree objectives, acclimate to campus life, and engage with advisers and faculty. All UC campuses offer transfer orientation programs or residential and/or one-day summer programs for newly enrolled transfer students. These programs offer a range of opportunities including but not limited to academic advising, introductions to campus resources and community, presentations on majors and colleges, information on campus safety, and explorations of the area surrounding the campus. Furthermore, the majority of campuses offer both credit-bearing transition courses and workshops that introduce students to campus culture, structure, policies, and procedures.

UC campuses have transfer support centers that provide critical orientation, academic success

workshops, academic advising sessions, guidance on career and graduate or professional school, exploration of research options, and community-building and networking opportunities with faculty, students, and alumni. Furthermore, every UC campus offers peer mentoring programs for newly enrolled transfer students, and some campuses also offer faculty mentoring programs. Many campuses offer resources and services that are specifically targeted to transfer students and that seek to enhance their UC experience.

Another example of unique transfer-student services includes opportunities to plan for life after the bachelor's degree. For example, UC Davis has a program for transfer students to prepare for graduate or professional school or careers by exploring options and taking advantage of campus partnerships and other networking opportunities. The first-year transfer student Career Discovery Group offers a course in career exploration, skill building, and learning to navigate a research university. An additional program component that is only available to first-year transfer students is a fall quarter course where students are paired with a graduate student mentor to learn about graduate opportunities as well.

Transfer students enter UC with a wide range of life experiences, many with nontraditional backgrounds, including veterans, first-generation college students, and parenting students. UC offers centers and/or staff or faculty coordinators dedicated to these populations at all campuses. Common programs and services for all students in these populations include but are not limited to:

- Academic advising in the program center/office or a dedicated academic adviser
- Health and well-being counseling in the program center/office or a dedicated counselor
- Mentoring programs with peers and/or faculty
- Specific student clubs and organizations
- Living learning communities
- Dedicated liaison with the Veterans Administration

UC campuses also engage parenting students or students with dependents in a variety of ways. Most campuses provide online resources with information on transportation, health care, local schools, childcare, and summer or after-school recreational programs. Some have formal programs with professional staff, while others incorporate services into larger centers, such as nontraditional student centers or offices of equal opportunity and diversity. The majority of campuses guarantee at least one year of housing for transfer students, and family housing is available at all campuses, with the exception of UC Merced.

UC Riverside has a number of programs for student parents and their children to integrate them into the community. UC Riverside's Early Childhood Services provides a safe environment for young children, where daycare tuition and meals are covered. R'Kids is a student organization that provides support for families across the Riverside campus, including discussion topics, sharing of experiences, and involving children in campus-wide activities.

First-generation and low-income students and those from underrepresented groups may also participate in a variety of programs. Some campuses offer an Educational Opportunity Program

(EOP). Other campuses have the Academic Advancement Program (AAP) or the California Community College Partnership Program (CCCP). All campuses offer student clubs and organizations for students from underrepresented backgrounds to support their cultural, professional, and personal growth. These include cultural centers such as Black Resource Centers or Chicano/Latino Resource Centers. These provide a culturally enriched environment that encourages a more positive campus climate. There are also academic and social enrichment programs that center the experiences of students from underrepresented groups to provide a variety of opportunities for involvement, support, and community.

UC partners with the Umoja Community Education Foundation, a community college-affiliated program serving African American students to increase the number of participants who transfer to a UC campus. The UC-Umoja Diversity Pipeline Partnership provides Umoja community college students with a transfer academic plan, workshops on preparing for UC, advising to keep them on a UC transfer trajectory, and social and cultural support when they transition to a UC campus.

UC resources for transfer students are not limited to the above examples. The University continues to work on building community and engaging transfer students in activities that support their path to graduation.

### **The importance of early research opportunities**

Early research opportunities help prepare students for lifelong learning and expose them to critical thinking experiences. Engaging in research outside the classroom connects students to faculty and hands-on experiences, which are believed to encourage them to pursue advanced degrees. For transfer students, participation in research opportunities provides them with a well-rounded university experience and facilitates academic connections with faculty. Research opportunities are available to undergraduate students across the UC system. For instance, at UC Santa Barbara, transfer students can benefit from hands-on research experience, research mentoring opportunities, and research awards specifically for transfer students. Similarly, UC Berkeley offers a summer program (called Transfer-to-Excellence Research Experiences) that enables California Community College students to engage in research at the Berkeley campus with the goal of ultimately transferring to Berkeley to complete their degree and further research.

For some transfer students, it can be difficult to identify research opportunities or connect with faculty to pursue research. Often, transfer students do not live on campus and have a limited timeline to identify and participate in these undergraduate research opportunities. Many of our campuses anticipate this additional barrier and proactively provide information to guide transfer students to these opportunities. For example, the UCLA Transfer Student Center publishes a Transfer Research Timeline which outlines a basic plan of action for transfer students who are interested in getting involved in research while they are at UCLA. The timeline not only provides a general timetable, but also offers tips and suggestions on how to identify research positions and become involved in research partnerships across campus.

### **Data on the undergraduate student experience**

While UC transfer students meet or exceed the persistence and graduation rates of freshmen, ongoing assessment can ensure strong outcomes. The University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) is a biennial study conducted at all nine undergraduate campuses. The results provide valuable insights into student perceptions and behavior, and they offer an understanding of how students experience both academic and co-curricular activities. Overall, impressions that UC transfer students and freshmen have of their college experience do not differ drastically. Nonetheless, national studies have confirmed that students who are academically and socially engaged are more likely to persist and graduate.

The most recent survey, from 2020, shows an academically engaged transfer population. Eighty-four percent of transfer respondents contributed at least occasionally to a class discussion. Compared with their freshman counterparts, transfer respondents were more likely to engage with their professors. Sixty-four percent of transfers who responded to the UCUES survey communicated with the instructor outside of class about issues and concepts from a course, compared to 57 percent of responding freshmen.

Eighty-one percent of both transfer students and freshmen were at least somewhat satisfied with their academic experience, with a larger percentage (three percent more) of transfer respondents indicating they were very satisfied.

UCUES does show a relative lack of social and civic engagement among transfer students. Only 45 percent of transfer respondents were involved in a student organization, compared with 69 percent of freshman respondents. However, the overwhelming majority of transfer students who participated in a student club or organization found the skills they developed there to be very important or essential.

Participation in community service was also small, with only one-fifth of transfer respondents participating on campus and less than 40 percent participating off campus. In contrast, nearly one-third of freshman respondents participated in community service on campus and more than 43 percent participated off campus. Of those who did participate, more than 85 percent indicated community service was a valuable part of their university experience, and 90 percent said they were inspired to continue community-focused activities after graduation.

Transfer students at UC often have different responsibilities, priorities, and concerns than do students who enter as freshmen: working part- or full-time to support themselves and/or a family, raising children, fulfilling military obligations, high sensitivity around the cost of education, or fear of loan indebtedness. For instance, drawing on the UCUES data, 34 percent of transfer student respondents worried “very often” about debt and financial circumstances, compared with only 24 percent of freshman respondents. These factors may have influenced the level of social and civic engagement of transfers, yet 67 percent of transfers in UCUES are at least somewhat satisfied with their overall social experience, albeit a relative eight percentage points less than freshmen.

Increasing the number of transfer students who successfully enroll in and graduate from UC campuses is a top priority for the University. While the University engages in several initiatives and offers a variety of resources and supports to facilitate increased transfer, there are still opportunities to enhance these efforts to further address transfer student success at UC.

**KEY TO ACRONYMS**

AAP	Academic Advancement Program
CCC	California Community Colleges
CCCP	California Community College Partnership
EOP	Educational Opportunity Program
UCUES	University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey