

Office of the President

TO MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE:

DISCUSSION ITEM

For Meeting of November 18, 2020

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT TRANSFER EXPERIENCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This discussion will focus on select experiences of students who are first-generation, low-income, and/or from underrepresented groups who transferred to the University of California from a California community college.

The goal of this item is to inform discussion of how the University might marshal additional support that can bolster its existing efforts to address the unique challenges confronting transfer students at UC.

UC students will discuss their experiences, including areas of progress and support, ongoing issues, and recommendations for campus and systemwide best practices.

BACKGROUND

The UC system serves a large and growing population of students working to be part of the first generation in their families to earn a four-year university degree. In fall 2019, there were nearly 10,000 first-generation undergraduates systemwide, who transferred to a University of California campus from a California community college.

UC's first-generation students reflect greater ethnic diversity and come from homes with a lower median income than their undergraduate peers. Compared to non-first generation students, first generation UC undergraduates are more likely to come from historically underrepresented groups, come from households where English was not the first or primary language spoken, be transfer students, and receive Pell Grants – the federal aid programs for families with incomes of roughly \$50,000 or less.

First-generation students comprise 51 percent of UC's transfer student population, indicating that first-generation students find success in accessing UC through community college pathways. Removing barriers for students is critical to their academic success. Students who are first generation, low-income, from underrepresented groups, are former

foster youth, or who are system impacted are more likely to experience housing and food insecurity and confront financial challenges. 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

With about a third of new students entering via the transfer pathway, and this number growing each year, it is increasingly important that UC welcomes and engages 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 the 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 to introduce students to campus culture, structure, policies and procedures.

UC campuses have transfer support centers that provides 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 specifically targeted to transfer students that seek to enhance their UC experience as well.

For instance, UC Santa Barbara offers opportunities for transfer students to engage in research projects by providing students with research awards, research experience and research mentoring opportunities. Similarly, UC Berkeley offers a summer program specifically for California community college students to engage in research at the Berkeley campus with the goal of ultimately transferring to UC Berkeley to complete their degree and continue their research.

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.

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's commitment to these students is evident in dedicated centers and/or staff or faculty coordinators for 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 campuses have formal programs with professional staff while others incorporate services into larger centers, such as Non-Traditional Student Centers or the Office 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.

For instance, UC Riverside has a number of programs specifically for student parents and their children to integrate them into the Riverside community. UCR'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 UCR campus that includes discussion topics, sharing of experiences, and involving children in campus-wide activities.

First-generation, low-income, and students 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 of color to support their cultural, professional, and personal growth. Some examples include Chicana/Latina, First-to-Go, and Path (Pan-African theme hall).

UC is not limited to the above examples of campus services, and continues to work on building community and engaging transfer students in activities that support their development and path to graduation.

First-generation transfer students from all backgrounds find success at UC. Nearly nine in ten (88.1 percent) UC first-generation transfers graduate within four years (cohort that transferred to UC in 2015). This is a significantly higher rate than the national four-year graduation rate for all transfer students at public institutions (about 53 percent for the cohort starting in 2009). First-generation transfer students also report higher completion rates than their first-generation freshman classmates, with 90 percent of first-generation transfer students and 81 percent of first-generation freshmen graduating within six years.

While first generation transfer students of all backgrounds have higher graduation rates at UC than at other 4-year institutions, a small, but persistent gap of about 1.5 percentage points exists in the graduation rates of UC non-first generation transfer students compared to UC first generation transfer students. Multiple factors can be attributed to this gap, including issues of

affordability, having to support their families, military obligations, and so forth. Among first generation transfer students who are also from an underrepresented racial minority group, graduation rates are slightly lower (85.8 percent), indicating that being both first generation and a racial minority student comes with additional barriers.

Data on the undergraduate student experience

While UC transfer students meet or exceed the persistence and graduation rates of freshmen, there is much work to be done, and ongoing assessment is important. 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 enable a better understanding of how students experience both academic and co-curricular activities. Impressions overall of transfer students and freshmen are not drastically different at UC. Nonetheless, national studies have confirmed that those students who are academically and socially engaged are more likely to persist and graduate.

The most recent survey, from 2018, shows an academically engaged transfer population. Eighty-five percent of transfer respondents contributed at least occasionally to a class discussion. Compared to their freshman counterparts, transfer respondents were less likely to skip class and much more likely to get to know their professors. In fact, 72 percent of transfers who responded to the UCUES survey knew at least one professor well enough to ask for a letter of recommendation, compared to 62 percent of freshmen who responded. Seventy-nine percent of both transfer students and freshmen were at least somewhat satisfied with their academic experience, with a larger percentage (four 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 42 percent of transfer respondents were involved in a student organization, compared to 66 percent of freshman respondents. Yet, the overwhelming majority of transfer students who participated in a student club or organization found the skills they developed 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. Of those who did participate, however, more than 75 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.

It bears noting that 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, 31 percent of transfer student respondents worried “very often” about paying for college and incurring debt, compared to only 23 percent of freshman respondents. These factors may have influenced the level of social and civic engagement of transfers, yet 65 percent of transfers in UCUES are at least somewhat satisfied with their overall social experience, albeit a relative

six percentage points less than freshmen.

Key to Acronyms

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