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## Our University: Transfer Students

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## Our University: Transfer Students

Sixth in a series of who our students are and how they perform.

Quality transfer students can bring positive characteristics to the university, not the least of which is a willingness to work. Avril Thorne, Professor of Psychology at U.C. Santa Cruz made this observation:

If I could only choose one student next year, and randomly, it would be a transfer student. They are seriously not kidding around.

I have previously reflected on the price/value of community colleges for many students. Depending on whose count you accept, there are nearly seven million students enrolled in community colleges right now. Many plan to transfer to senior institutions although only 30% do, according to the U.S. Education Department.

Foundations see the value in helping students through the community college transfer process. The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Transfer Initiative provides support for students to move from community colleges to some selective four-year institutions such as Amherst, Bucknell, Berkeley, North Carolina, and Michigan, to name a few.

Institutions interested in casting a broad net and creating a campus reflective of the populations they serve should look carefully at community colleges. The majority of Hispanic and African American students enrolled today are enrolled at community colleges. Encouraging and supporting them through an intelligent transfer process will yield a more diverse group of university students.

Community college students make up a significant share of learners accessing Pell Grants, two million in 2005, and the numbers continue to grow. The cost of attending community colleges is about 30% that of attending university, so students who start at a community college, leave with less debt per class.

The age of those attending community colleges and universities is increasing. The shifting economy and the need for retraining are driving students into community colleges so that, 33% of the students are over 30, and a significant number may pursue continued university studies, especially as the economy remains soft in many career fields.

I told a nontraditional student recently, "There is not a better time to be out of the workforce and in the classroom."

Attentive universities will see these trends and being responsive will increase their enrollment of good students. Community college students who transfer have higher

graduation and retention rates than those of freshmen who enter four-year institutions directly, so return on investment is high. It's good business, but that is not the point: It is the right way to serve many people who will benefit personally and professionally from the experience of attaining a baccalaureate degree. In addition, communities and the nation are better served.

The University of California offered admission to 19,607 community college transfer students in 2009, a number that continues to increase annually. The average acceptance rate for all students in 2008 at the University of California was 74.40%, but for community colleges it was 82.40%.

I would argue that everything above is good news - providing opportunity and service to students is always good. Now, here are the challenges.

In the state of California, and it is a fairly good predictor of national trends in higher education only 40% of the community college students who seek four-year degrees are successful, according to the *Mercury News*. There are many reasons why, but the senior institutions that figure out how to overcome the challenges will be beneficiaries of dedicated, hardworking students who will increase diversity, retention, and graduation rates.

The community colleges nationwide are overflowing with students. Low costs, unemployment and other factors have created a flood of students. Full courses delay student ability to meet transfer needs. As university tuition and fees continue to increase, many students will quit at the community college level for lack of funds. In some locations the transfer processes are confusing. Some states are responding. For example, the Illinois Articulation Initiative makes the process of transfer between participating institutions nearly seamless.

Innovative and persistent universities that desire to serve transfer students more effectively can do so, but they must focus diligently on a wide range of students need, and appreciate the complexities that these students must address.