Research Spotlight

2361 - What's COVID Got To Do With Students' Transfer Trajectories?

Credits and Degree Pathways, Transition Programs and Services

Drawing from the experiences of nearly 8,000 transfer-motivated community college students during the COVID-19 pandemic, this session will share the effects the pandemic has had on students' transfer trajectories and experiences. In addition, reflections from transfer professionals will spotlight some of the practices they implemented to support their transfer students during the pandemic.

Darla Cooper, Executive Director
Katie Brohawn, Director of Research, Evaluation, and Development

The RP Group for California Community Colleges
What's COVID Got To Do With Students’ Transfer Trajectories?

Dr. Darla Cooper, Executive Director
Dr. Katie Brohawn, Director of Research, Evaluation, & Development
Research made possible with generous funding from:

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The RP Group

www.rpgroup.org

**Mission:** As the representative organization for Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness (IRPE) professionals in the California Community Colleges (CCC) system, the RP Group strengthens the ability of CCC to discover and undertake high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and success for all students.

**Services:** Research, evaluation, planning, professional development, and technical assistance—designed and conducted by CCC practitioners

**Organization:** 501(c)3 with roots as membership organization
Through the Gate
An Overview
Through the Gate: Phase 1

Mapped California’s transfer landscape, identifying a continuum of milestones for the student transfer journey and quantifying how many students were “near” or “at” the transfer gate.
Through the Gate: Phase 1

- More than half exit without credentials
- Math is a barrier
- Time is the enemy
- Once African Americans reach key milestones, they are most likely to transfer…but too few get this far
- Latinx students more likely to be At or Near the Gate than to have transferred
Through the Gate: Phase 2

Developed a framework for building students’ transfer capacity, highlighting four issues community college students grapple with as they work toward their goal of a bachelor’s degree.
Students say finances are the biggest hurdle to transfer

Students are juggling numerous and often competing school, work, and family responsibilities

Students are missing accurate, timely information about pursuing a baccalaureate throughout their transfer journey—from both community colleges and universities

Students say the absence of social support negatively impacts their transfer decision-making and compromises their capacity for pursuing a bachelor’s degree
The Current Study...
Long-Term Questions

- How will the pandemic impact the educational trajectories of transfer-motivated students?
- What new or different supports will they need to attain their academic goals?
Immediate Questions

• How were students’ transfer plans affected by the pandemic?
• What issues did students who were close to transfer face during the pandemic?
Immediate Questions

● What did students know about changes in the CCC and university segments designed to support their transfer journey, and how did they leverage these changes?

● How are the four factors from the Transfer Capacity-Building Framework currently impacting students’ transfer experience?
Research Overview

Study participants:
- 7,894 high-leverage students
- 67 CCC (58%)

Study activities:
- Statewide survey
- 2 focus groups with students:
  - experiencing transfer success
  - with impacted transfer plans
2 out of 5 students’ transfer plans were impacted by the pandemic

- Highest among non-binary, Native American, and Native Hawaiian
- Even among students who had been accepted for transfer, nearly one in 10 had either deferred or decided not to go
2 out of 5 students found it harder to access counselors/advisors during the pandemic

• In focus groups, students noted concern that they won’t be prepared for the rigor of university-level work given the leniency of the present year

• Especially true of majors involving a lot of hands-on coursework
More than two-thirds of students not aware of changes to CCC, UC, and CSU transfer requirements

• Even among those who did know of these changes, fewer than one in five indicated that the changes improved their transfer experience

• Nice to know they exist as a safety net even if they don’t use
The challenge of each of the four factors is substantially higher than before the pandemic, most notably University Affordability.
Changes in the factors impacting students’ transfer capacity varied among different student groups

**University Affordability**

University Affordability remains especially challenging for Latinx, Middle Eastern, female, nonbinary, first-generation, and older (50+) students.
The uncertainty as to how next year will be is what is causing the most stress, I am currently working at a warehouse to afford food and pay bills but I work graveyard shift, not knowing if school will be back in person really stresses me out because I am unsure on whether to find a new job that will fit my future schedule or keep the one I have at the moment.
Hispanic/Latina/o/x students are most likely to indicate the challenge of University Affordability.
The challenge of School-Life Balance rose substantially during the pandemic.

If everything will be closed my son will not be able to go to school, I will not be able to work and it will affect deeply my financial situation. Also, I will have problems studying because my son (who wants my attention all day long) will be always around me, and I will have to teach him myself when in fact I am not a teacher and don’t know how to teach.
Students ages 26-49 continue to see an increase in the challenge of School-Life Balance
The challenge of Pathway Navigation rose during the pandemic, but is now trending back downwards.

I was admitted to (a UC) for the Fall of 2020 but (the UC) withdrew my admission on the day of class registration saying I had to complete one more subject. I was communicating with them and had informed them because of COVID, office visits were not allowed, phones were off, and could not get a counselor to help me register for the class. I could not take that class. I had explained this scenario to (the UC) and they were okay until the day I needed to register for my classes they had me withdrew my application. My dream was crushed into million pieces...
First generations students are more likely to indicate the challenge of Pathway Navigation than Non-First-Generation students.
The challenge of accessing a Support Network rose during the pandemic, but is now trending back downwards.

It has become harder to find support from friends and family to keep going. It seems more reasonable to stop trying to go back to school to pursue my interests and to find reasonable full-time work instead. Especially with myself and everyone having struggled with the pandemic, there is little support for doing something like school when working is so important right now.
Students ages 50+ are most likely to indicate the challenge of accessing a Support Network

Changes in the Challenge of Access to Support Network by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Before Pandemic</th>
<th>During Pandemic</th>
<th>Upcoming Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 18-25 (n=3,369)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 26-49 (n=2,183)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 50+ (n=242)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now What?

- Get students back on their transfer path
- Increase access to transfer resources
- Track learning outcomes
- Maintain student access to and awareness of relaxed transfer requirements
- Provide holistic and integrated transfer support across students’ community college journey
There is no precedence for this type of ordeal that we are going through so no one has the authority nor answers on how life will continue or go back to 'normal' after this and because of it, every day will be a continuous unknown and could possibly be another hindrance to progression.

-Student Survey Participant
Students Speak: Understanding the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Their Transfer Journeys

Research made possible by generous funding from:

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Be a Transfer Advocate: How Student Support Professionals Can Help Students Address University Affordability Concerns

Students participating in the RP Group’s Through the Gate transfer study (Forty Gates) have found that over 75% of transfer students have had to make important sacrifices to their financial situation. They have had to work more, take lower paying jobs, or go farther out of state to pay for their education. This has led to increased financial stress and anxiety for these students.

The RP Group’s Through the Gate research initiative focuses on identifying ways to increase transfer student retention and persistence through a series of projects and initiatives designed to support transfer students throughout their academic journey. In this article, we will explore some of the key findings from our research and provide recommendations for how transfer support professionals can help students address financial affordability concerns.

Student Support Professionals (SSPs) play a critical role in helping students navigate the challenges of transferring to a new university. SSPs can help students understand the true cost of university and can provide strategies to reduce expenses outside of tuition. This article will help SSPs understand how to work with students to address financial affordability concerns.

Community Colleges

• Articulate that all student support professionals — not just financial aid representatives — have a role to play in addressing student financial concerns, and provide professional development to help practitioners know where to direct students for needed information and resources.

• Focus students’ efforts on the basics. Differences between the cost of community college and university, including tuition, fees, and other associated expenses.

• Help students access and use resources such as college-based tax calculators, the California Student Aid Commission’s Student Financial Aid Budget (https://californiastudentaidbudget.fcalifornia.gov/gateway/opencms/index.jsp), and the U.S Department of Education's College Affordability and Transparency Center (https://大学生affordableandtransparencycenter.org/)

• Inform students about financial aid options when they are relevant in their journey, e.g., as they approach the transfer goal and how they are similar or different at the community college and four-year institution.

Through the Gate: Transfer Students on Path during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

In a survey of California Community College students exploring the impact of COVID-19 on their transfer journey (see sidebar), the RP Group identified several areas where students felt less supported with the transfer support and communicated they were not receiving during the pandemic.

To better understand what these community colleges were doing to effectively meet transfer students’ needs during this period of disruption, we conducted focus group interviews with 19 of these institutions. These conversations revealed:

• New challenges impacting students’ transfer success resulting from COVID-19

  - Adapting to keep students on their transfer path during remote instruction

  - Considerations for improving transition student outcomes on the pandemic timeline

This brief summarizes these interview insights, offering transfer practitioners and higher education leaders actionable strategies to support student transition and completion during these turbulent times.

1. Inset reference to technical brief
2. The RP Group is interested in transferring students at Berkeley City College, Cuesta College, College of San Mateo, Merritt College, and Santa Rosa College. While all of these public institutions, we did not directly rely on the top ten institutions cited highly by students as we wanted to ensure diversity in size and location.
Q & A
Thank You!

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