

**NISTS 2023**

# BE A CONNECTOR FOR TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS

Virtual • February 1-3 | Portland, OR • February 22-24

The following presentation was given at the 21st Annual Conference for the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students. Please cite responsibly and direct questions to the original presenter(s).

*Educational Poster*

## **2813 - Questions & Community: Enhancing Transfer Student Programs to Meet Transfer Students Where They Are**

Partnerships and Collaboration, Transition Programs and Supports

A small office at a large public institution sought to develop creative solutions to two common transfer student challenges: staying on track for graduation and finding a sense of belonging as a transfer student. This poster outlines how one department's programming evolved to give new transfer students streamlined opportunities to ask questions and create community. This poster will provide programming examples that conference attendees can seek to implement at their own institutions.

**Mackenzie White**, *Senior Coordinator for Student Transitions*  
University of Georgia

# Questions & Community

Enhancing Transfer Student Programs to Meet Transfer Students Where They Are  
Mackenzie White, University of Georgia

## Key Transition Points



### Progression to Graduation

- Some students may struggle to understand how credits will transfer to their new institution.
- Students may take longer to complete their degree especially if previous credits don't transfer (Xu et al., 2018)
- Students may not be as familiar with their new institution's graduation requirements.
- For students whose first choice major is considered high-demand and requires a separate application, not being accepted into the major may lead to lower levels of persistence.



### Navigating a New Campus

- Students may know "how to college" but they are still in a new environment. As a result, they may experience culture shock as they adjust to their new campus' culture.
- Locating off-campus housing can be especially challenging for transfer students who don't know where to start looking.
- Way-finding around campus can also be intimidating for new transfer students especially for campuses as big as UGA. Understanding the bus and parking system are significant issues for our institution.



### Social Well-Being

- Many transfer students describe the desire to make friends on their new campus and find their new niche/community (Townsend, 2008).
- Significant involvement is correlated with a positive transition (Astin, 1984).

## Dawg Camp Connect

### About Dawg Camp

Dawg Camp is a nationally renowned extended orientation program designed to assist students with their transition into the University of Georgia.

### About Dawg Camp Connect

Dawg Camp Connect is a dynamic program built specifically for transfer students to help them adjust to their new university home. Participants have opportunities to connect with UGA, connect with Athens, connect with valuable campus resources, and most importantly, connect with one another in a meaningful way in order to enhance their networks on campus and their transition into the Bulldog family.

### A Space for Questions & Community

Dawg Camp Connect provides our newest transfer students the opportunity to not only connect with one another but with campus resources in a small group setting. This is a unique and valuable opportunity given the size of the University of Georgia. This past summer, Dawg Camp Connect joined forces with academic affairs to give campers the opportunity to learn more about the academic environment at UGA and receive individualized guided support in navigating their DegreeWorks, the platform that tracks students progress toward their degrees. The small group environment promoted active participation in these activities as well as high engagement levels as students were surrounded by peers who had similar worries about their academic transition. We observed that campers would have benefited from spending even more time with our academic partners as conversation remained strong until campers transitioned into their next camp activity.



2

Counselors

15

Campers

## Transfer Student Welcome

### Background

Transfer Student Welcome is a drop-in style event held at the beginning of both fall and spring semesters. This event gives students the opportunity to enjoy free food, meet fellow transfers, and interact with various Schools, Colleges, and campus resources within the University of Georgia. In previous years, this event was held in a small section of the grand hall in our student center. In the back of the room, there was a miniature resource fair that featured various Schools, Colleges, and campus resources while the front of the room featured large tables for students to enjoy food and chat with their peers. This event gave students the opportunity to build community with others and ask questions about academic programs and resources on campus.

### Creating a New Space for Questions & Community

For Fall 2022, our office sought to elevate the Transfer Student Welcome experience. In reconceptualizing the student experience at the event, we wanted to give transfer students the opportunity to move beyond a surface-level conversation about campus resources by planting seeds for long-term relationships with staff members who support their well-being and success. Thus, we shifted away from the resource fair format and toward a new format that allowed students to engage in deeper conversation with staff members. Campus partners were invited to not only share information about their academic programs and resources with students but also get to know the students as individuals over afternoon snacks. We observed that students began forming stronger connections with staff members and felt more empowered to reach out to them if they needed support.

74

Student Attendees  
at the Fall 2022 Transfer  
Student Welcome

148

Student Attendees  
at the Spring 2023  
New Student Welcome



The experiences and connections created during my short time at Dawg Camp are something I wouldn't trade for the world.

- Dawg Camp Connect Camper

I never experienced a program so accommodating to each person's needs. It showed me how the University of Georgia cared for their transfer students and that we are seen among the thousands of other students.

- Dawg Camp Connect Camper



"I was very worried about the "sitting down" at tables format for the first little bit of this year's welcome event... Once we broke the ice with a few students and others overheard us actually engaging and answering legitimate questions.... we had a rotation of students that kept our tables full for the remainder of the event! I want to thank you all for the hard work and extra creativity you all put into this amazing event. This was my favorite so far!!"

- Transfer Student Welcome Campus Partner

"Thank you for including us today. This was such a wonderful and interactive experience, and I'm grateful that the program is growing (literally 2x more students than the last Dawg Camp Connect panel I was on - in 2019)."

- Dawg Camp Connect Academic Partner



What Transfer Student Welcome Attendees had to say...

"I enjoyed how open and ready the hosts were to helping me transition to this new school."

"I liked how personable it felt and how we were made to feel like we belong here at UGA."

"I liked being able to meet people with a similar story and situation as myself, which was something I was really worried about when first coming to UGA."

"I liked how welcoming everyone was and how excited current students and employees were about welcoming us to the school."

