

Transfer Peer Mentors: Not So Secret Agents – Video Transcript

Pro Staff Introductions and General Info:

Tiffani Baldwin: Hi! Thank you for joining our presentation: "Transfer Peer Mentors: Not So Secret Agents". I'm Dr. Tiffani Baldwin and I have helped create and develop the Transfer Student Success program at MSU Denver over the last five years. I am excited to have the Transfer Peer Mentor Supervisor, Megan Dempsey, joining me, and we will soon have our Lead Transfer Peer Mentors join us on the call so that they can share their experiences with you as peer mentors. First, I'm going to have Megan introduce herself and we want to give you just a little bit of general information about Metropolitan State University of Denver and its student population and transfer population just to give you some context and help situate it. First, I'll have Megan introduce herself.

Megan Dempsey: Hi everyone, my name is Megan Cuddihee Dempsey. You can call me Megan, and my pronouns are she/her/hers. I supervise the Transfer Peer Mentors, or, as you'll hear us commonly refer to them as TPMs, and I've been in this position for roughly two years.

Tiffani Baldwin: Thank you! We're going to share a PowerPoint with you that has just a few slides that gives you some general information about Metropolitan State University of Denver and our student population as well as our transfer population. So as you can see in this slide, you can see our beautiful campus amidst the backdrop of the beautiful Rocky Mountains. We are on a tri-institutional campus in downtown Denver. That's the Broncos stadium you see there in the background also. So we are just in downtown Denver, we have two other institutions on our campus as well. We are a modified open access institution as well as a land grant institution. We are also very proud to educate a lot of Colorado's workforce. I think it's about 96% of our students come from Colorado. And a vast majority of them, once they graduate, go back into the workforce in Colorado to work. So that's something we're really proud of. Also, we are part of the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference and we have NCAA Division II teams at MSU Denver. Very importantly for this presentation, I do want to mention that the Colorado Community College System has ranked us the number one transfer institution for, I believe, over ten years at this point, which is very exciting!

Ok. So to tell you a little bit about our population, these numbers are from Fall 2020, we had 17,743 undergraduates. Keep in mind that's during a pandemic. Our typical enrollment is somewhere between 19,000 and 20,000. We are very proud: we have a very diverse student body. Almost half of our students are students of color, and a little more than half are female, with a little less than half being male. We have the two charts down here just to show you how our population kind of breaks down, we have about 33% Hispanic, 7%—these percentages are rounded up, by the way—7% African-American, 5% bi- or multi-racial, 4% Asian, and the 1% is American Indian or Alaska Native. On the other side of the screen, you'll see we have about 80% of our student population works, either part-time or full-time. We have about—I think it's 28% are Pell Eligible, over half are first generation, and, very importantly, over half of our student population are transfer students.

So our transfer student population, to give you a little bit of information about that: the average age of our transfer students is 27. Really, the demographics mirror the demographics of the general population. We—almost half of our transfer students are first-generation. So in the general population, more than half are; transfer population, it's almost half. And we have students coming to us from all over the state, the country, and really the world. They come to us from two-year schools, four-year schools... So we really have students coming to us from different... from different institutions and across

the world. And then our retention rates. I included transfer— our transfer retention rate for new transfer students is right about 61%. For continuing students, it's about 70% and it averages out to 65[%]. I put transfer and continuing because once our transfer students have been here for their first year, they then get marked as a continuing student.

And now Megan is going to share a little bit about the specific Transfer Peer Mentor population.

Megan Dempsey: Thank you, Tiffani. So just to let you know about our Transfer Peer Mentors, and also the questions they'll be answering later on today, in this presentation, we surveyed our current Transfer Peer Mentors. Currently we have a team of nine. Seven of them responded. And so as our students are answering questions that we're about to do here in a second, they're going to be talking about their personal experiences and also what the survey responses said so that you know a little bit about both sides of our team; our leadership team and then our TPMs.

As far as our Transfer Peer Mentor population, we've had 23 different Transfer Peer Mentors so far in our two years of this program, specifically, the Transfer Peer Mentor program. And what we're seeing across the board is that the race and ethnicity of our transfer population is reflected in the race and ethnicity of our Transfer Peer Mentors, which is something we're very proud of here. It is also on par with the first gen. representation our team is, as well as the Pell Eligible representation of the general population. Our team does have a slightly higher GPA than our case loads, which is something that we're proud of. Of the general body, our tea—our Transfer Peer Mentors have a higher GPA. And then there's also a range of degree programs, anything from Mechanical Engineering to Art. We have at all really represented on our team. And then over half of our team has retained to graduation already. And that's something we're extremely proud of as well. Two of our Transfer Peer Mentors, who you'll meet in a second, actually just graduated in December. So that's something that we're—we're just immense—immensely proud of them and of our program as well. So, speaking so much of them, I'm going to go ahead and introduce you to our Lead TPMs, starting with Alysha!

Student-Staff Introductions:

Alysha Rowzee: Hi, y'all! I wish we could all be together at NISTS this year, but I'm happy to be helping presenting. My name is Alysha Rowzee, my pronouns are she/her/hers. I just graduated with my Bachelor of Arts in Theater with a Minor in Studio Art from MSU Denver this December, and I am a Transfer Peer Mentor and the Student Events Coordinator for Transfer Peer Mentoring.

Gemma Chacon: Hello! My name is Gemma Chacon. I also use she/her/her pronouns, and I am a Lead Transfer Peer Mentor, finishing my Bachelor's in Psychology.

Kaden Van Hegewald: Hey everyone, my name is Kaden Van Hegewald. My pronouns are they/them/theirs and he/him/his, and just like Alysha, I graduated last semester with a degree in Applied Mathematics with a Minor in Financial Services. I'm also a Lead Transfer Peer Mentor.

Interview Portion:

Megan Dempsey: Thank you all for introducing yourselves. So we are going to get into the interview portion of our presentation. And again, these are the questions that were asked in the survey to our current Transfer Peer Mentors. So, just as a friendly reminder, our staff will be giving information based

on their personal experience and then also reflective of the survey results. So I will start with Alysha. Your first question—it's two-parter. So, it is: "Why did you choose Transfer Peer Mentoring out of all the campus jobs?" and "What motivated or helped you to motivate—" or, "—helped motivate your decision to join Transfer Peer Mentoring?"

Alysha Rowzee: Thanks for the question, Megan. So I joined Transfer Peer Mentoring because at my previous institution, I had a similar position at that school and a Transfer Peer Mentor helped me, and so I wanted to pay that forward. And though I didn't see those exact responses from our team, the "pay it forward"...portion does kind of show itself in the results of that survey because people who had frustrating transfer experiences wanted to alleviate those frustrations, the struggles, the confusion for other transfer students. We also saw students on our team who had a really wonderful experience in part because of our team, and they really wanted to share that and do that for other students.

As far as the motivation goes, same thing as I said before: that paying it forward, the helping students, helping students like you, those transfer students. But a really big answer, and I think that this will show itself in future answers as well, is the community, and that's the campus community and also the Transfer Peer Mentoring community. Student-staff mentioned that it felt like a family, that they felt supported so that they could support others, and just that they felt welcome and part of something while being a Transfer Peer Mentor, so that had a strong motivation.

Megan Dempsey: Thank you, Alysha.

Tiffani Baldwin: Okay, I'm going to ask the next question. Gemma, I am going to ask you: "How does being a TPM or a Transfer Peer Mentor impact you as a student?"

Gemma Chacon: Thank you for that question, Tiffani. So as a student and as a common theme that was found from the rest of my colleagues, the resources available at MSU Denver was one of the biggest things that was part of the response for this question. Learning about the resources that are available has helped me, personally, take advantage of those resources, but also be able to share those resources with others students. Therefore, that's part of the biggest impact that has been, as a Transfer Peer Mentor, that we have received as Transfer Peer Mentors.

Tiffani Baldwin: Thank you. Awesome.

Megan Dempsey: And so, Gemma, just piggybacking off of that a little bit, you spoke about your experience as a student, but how does it impact you being a TPM/as an employee?

Gemma Chacon: Thank you. Again, it was very common to find this answer within myself and the rest of my peer mentors. The professionalism that we have been able to develop from our experiences working with students, the engaging with not only students, but also professors and other members of other school organizations or programs at MSU Denver has been helpful just to build our professional... life and just experience overall.

Tiffani Baldwin: Thank you. Alysha, the next question is for you. As the Events Coordinator, we wanted to ask you: "What was your favorite moment or event as a TPM?" and what did some of the other TPMs say?

Alysha Rowzee: So, starting in 2019, we participated in the—our first annual Transfer Student Week—National Transfer Student Week, and we had a lot of events that were really fun to plan and engage with. We had another member of our team mention that they really liked being a part of Transfer Week. Specifically, my favorite event within that was our Study Abroad Fair because we didn't have extremely large attendance, but I got to see students who never thought that that was going to be in the cards for them. They never thought they would be able to study abroad because they transferred, get one-on-one connection with the Study Abroad office, get their questions answered, get to eat some food. And so it's just very fulfilling to see those meaningful connections happening.

For other students, we also saw Karaoke Night, which we're really excited to get back going once things are less virtual. We also saw that helping sort Transfer Student Cards for graduating transfer students was really meaningful for students to get to celebrate the barriers transfer students had overcome to graduate. We also add a few more general responses about more feelings rather than specific events. Once again, connection was a big theme, connecting with our staff and with students, and also just helping to problem-solve with students was another highlight for many of our staff.

Megan Dempsey: Thank you, Alysha. Kade, this question is for you... (if I can find it) (There we go.) "What helps you maintain your motivation for helping students?"

Kaden Van Hegewald: Yeah, this is a great question and something that I feel a lot of people might ask about, especially being student employees, helping other students. Between my own responses and my colleagues, a lot of us find that it's really, really, gratifying helping other students and just being able to, you know, help in general. Kind of across the board, that was response of just—I, you know, we all really love helping others. And also across the board, I would say that it's gratifying to see the impact that we have made helping other students. Where you can see... you can either see in work they've done throughout the semester or something like that, or they come back to you and say: "This was really, really, helpful, this is really impactful. It has made my experience so much better."

That's kind of across the board... responses. I also, personally, find it rewarding to help, which a lot of my colleagues also said as well. But some other things that we saw come in in terms of responses to this question is being motivated by seeing each other's passion for helping others. Having received support from the team has been a big motivator for a couple of folks. And also, as Alysha mentioned a little bit earlier, having that sense of community has been a huge motivation. So, both the kind of transfer-student-in-general community and also TPM community played into this.

Tiffani Baldwin: Great. Thank you so much, Kade. Okay, Gemma! I am going to ask you: "How—how did your transfer experience influence how you mentor new incoming transfer students?"

Gemma Chacon: Of course! Personally, my transfer experience was... it wasn't bad, but, of course, there were many things that I did not know I needed to do, and it was very eye-opening, just to the things that I needed to learn. Therefore, it was always helpful just to have somebody who was able to assist me on the questions I had. That is what I want to pay forward to our transfer students, making sure that they have somebody available to answer all the questions. In addition to being able to go through that experience or being able to experience that, it has allowed me to truly identify and understand others students positions and what they go through. Sometimes how frustrating it—frustrating it can be to just get everything going for the beginning of their semesters. So it has helped me just to pretty much understand what every other student is going through and be able to offer that support.

From the responses from my other colleagues, there was little bit of some experiences were a little bit rougher than others. Some others didn't have such a lot of things that they felt that they needed to—they needed help with. However, there is a common theme of being able to use our own experience as transfer student peer mentors to have a better connection in more relations or be able to create those relationships with students that are transferring to MSU Denver. That's how we have—or, our experience as Transfer Peer Mentors have influenced how we work with students.

Tiffani Baldwin: Thank you.

Megan Dempsey: Thank you, Gemma. Kade, this one is for you as well: "What have you learned about your rela—yourself and about your style of leadership through being a TPM?" Let me ask that again. Kaden: "What have you learned about yourself and about your style of leadership through being a TPM?"

Kaden Van Hegewald: Yeah. Thank you for the question. So personally, I... honestly since I've joined MSU, but especially since becoming a TPM and working with this team, I've really blossomed as a person. And I've become both a better team player and a better leader. And something that I've learned truly about my sense of leadership or my leadership style, if you will, is that I have kind of a mix of hands-on and hands-off, and what I mean by that is what I find is I really enjoy teaching the skills that others, especially my colleagues, need in order to be successful and be able to do their jobs, and then kind of take a step back and allow those skills to develop and allow...basically my mentees beneath me, as I'm teaching these skills to really work on that, develop their own sense of style within those skills, and then provide guidance where needed. So it's been really kind of fun to see myself blossom that way.

I'm going to take a little bit of time here because my colleagues' responses from the survey are kind of across the board here. Some of the first things I want to mention, one of my colleagues said that they thought that they were—er, learned about themselves, that they were kind of an easy-going and entertaining leader, and that they have learned to push through any personal anxiety when maybe interacting with... maybe among the team or with students and that they've learned to put on... Or, not put on, but they've learned to be lively positive even if they are feeling anxious. Another colleague said that they found that they have a comforting way of speaking with others and that they use their experiences to be more relatable with our students and to be a safe space for them to be able to discuss basically whatever they need to. A couple of colleagues mentioned that they work well in groups—or that they learned that they work well in groups, with one respondent—in—with one of my colleagues saying that they have gotten better at seeing the potential in others and that they really enjoy giving positive feedback.

Kind of—kind of across the board: again, everyone helps— everyone enjoys helping students and that satisfaction of helping. And this colleague said that they're still learning about their leadership style, which they have a lot of time with us, so we're hoping to continue to develop leadership skills that way. And kind of in that same vein, someone else said that leadership is a skill that they feel can be improved through constructive feedback, which - absolutely! And then the last thing that I... when we were all looking through the survey responses, and something that's kind of wild to us was one of my colleagues said that they never thought of themselves as a leader *until* they joined our team! And they have since been able to use creative problem-solving and mediation skills as part of their leadership. So, yeah, this was a really, really, interesting question to look at.

Tiffani Baldwin: That's wonderful. Thank you so much. That's great to know. We're going to switch gears just a touch. We've gotten a lot of really great, wonderful, positive feedback. We also wanted to know what we could improve on as a team. So the first one of those two questions is for Alysha. Alysha: "What can we improve on or do better as a team?"

Alysha Rowzee: So this is kind of a two-part answer and the first part is that I feel like I have been given such a wonderful opportunity being a part of this team in professional development and growing as a leader. I have had an opportunity to attend a NISTS conference in the past, I got—I've worked on marketing materials as well as event coordination. I've got to learn about accessibility in workshops, and those are just to name a few things. And my biggest idea, and I saw this in one of my other peer mentors, as well, in their response, is that we feel we've been given so much, but we want to see that wealth *shared* throughout the rest of the team. And we want everybody to kind of be able to look forward in their life and figure out what they need from this team and grow and have that seat at the table that some of us have felt we have had, but want everybody to have that opportunity. So that was definitely a really big part of that answer.

And something else that we thought we could improve on as a team is engaging students. We all love working with students, but we across the board don't see the kind of attendance we would like to see, and so as much as we feel like we are a community and a family, we kind of want to start really bringing in students to that TPM community that we built so strongly. And then the final thing that I saw in a few different answers is that communication is a struggle. And, I mean, that can be a struggle on any team as large as ours, and especially in the situations we've been in, we shared an office with a much larger team which can prohibit and cause interesting communication issues. Now we have moved virtual, which presents its own set of hurdles. And so, just what I saw through several answers are that we all love communicating with each other, we just wish that there were some clearer paths for that. So that basically covers that set of answers.

Tiffani Baldwin: Thank you.

Megan Dempsey: Yeah, thank you, Alysha. Kaden: "What can be improved to make your experience [slight audio delay] as a TPM better?" And then there's an additional portion of: "What can be improved to make our students' experiences better?"

Kaden Van Hegewald: Yeah, and this is an interesting question because it's kind of that dichotomy. So personally, a lot of my experiences are—Alysha already covered. I'm another Lead Transfer Peer Mentor who also went to NISTS last year. And I have benefited from a slew of professional development opportunities. And kind of going into that, something that I would say.... A lot of the answers for this question as well are honestly reflected, a lot of the same themes have been reflected from Alysha's answers. Maybe with a slight twist. Where say, same ideas of more professional development opportunities and more training opportunities to improve the TPM experience. And with an additional suggestion of training to really support our undocumented students.

From here, a couple of other themes, same vein of improving the TPM experience, but also kind of bridging the gap into improving the—our transfer student experience is communication as well. There's—obviously now with us being virtual, it's a new set of hurdles, just as Alysha mentioned, of making sure that we are clear and concise across the board, both with each other and with our students. And that's something that I think we're all looking forward to working on and improving there. And same theme of, you know, we're not seeing the attendance we would quite like for events that we've

been hosting and so that's something kind of across the board, and reflecting Alysha here, is... just looking for ways of changing or improving our events so that way our students can be more actively engaged with us and the material. And then something that I think just is worth mentioning is... another common theme of, at least for TPMs, actually quite a few people said that there wasn't really much they could think of to improve *their* experience, which hopefully means we're doing a really good job. Obviously, there's always room for improvement, as we mentioned earlier, but just wanted to mention that that was actually a common theme.

Megan Dempsey: Thank you, Kaden, and thank all of y'all.

Tiffani Baldwin: Yes, that is wonderful to hear, of course, but yes, I also agree there's always room for improvement, especially when we're learning how to do work in a virtual environment and a whole different way than we've ever done it before, as I'm sure all of our audience can relate to. So thank you all so much for your participation in this. Does—does anyone have any last thoughts that they want to share? Any last thoughts you want to be sure you— you let our audience know about the Transfer Peer Mentor program at MSU Denver? No? Okay. Well, on behalf of all of us, let me say thank you so much for joining us today. We hope that you enjoyed hearing from the Lead Transfer Peer Mentors themselves and hearing about some of their experiences and some of the challenges and opportunities that they've experienced being on our team and working with students.

We will have a... or, we do have a written pamphlet for you with some...just kind of basic program information that we did not include in this. We really wanted to highlight the student voice, and so we have a separate pamphlet with written information. Mine and Megan's contact information is on it. Please feel free to reach out to us with any questions at all. And again, thank you for joining us for this session. We hope you got a lot out of it and enjoyed it as much as we have. Thank you!