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**Sponsored Session**

**Evolving the Application to Expand Transfer Student Access and Equity**

Diversity and Inclusion, Special Populations

The Common Application, a not-for-profit organization of over 900 member institutions, worked with members, students, policy experts, and reviewed research to explore the effect application questions, structure, and function ultimately has on submission. Hear how the application is evolving to increase access and equity, and how this impacts transfer students.

*Batanya Gipson, Program Director, Transfer and Community College*

*Ariana Ortega, Product Manager*

*Sinthuja Nagalingam, Project Manager*

Common Application
Evolving the application to expand transfer student access & equity

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February 24, 2021 4:15–5 pm ET
Agenda

- Moving forward with our mission
- Removing application barriers
- Common Transfer Guarantee
- Q&A
Who do we have in the audience?
Moving forward with our mission
Common App is a nonprofit membership organization committed to the pursuit of access, equity, and integrity in the college admission process.
Welcoming to all who are mission-aligned

Growth in membership 1975–2020

commonapp.org/explore
Member colleges

900+

Member colleges

Public vs. private status

- 21.2% Public
- 72.4% Private
- 6.4% International

68.5% of member colleges accept Common App for transfer

61
International colleges

83
Minority serving institutions

497 Private
103 Public
25 International
# Common App reach

## 2019–2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-year applications submitted</td>
<td>5.6M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique first-year applicants</td>
<td>1M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-year accounts created</td>
<td>2.3M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer applications submitted</td>
<td>207K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique transfer applicants</td>
<td>100K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer accounts created</td>
<td>345K</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We’re forging a direct, unambiguous path to a viable future for all students.
Student trends

5.6M
Applications submitted

1.1M
Unique applicants

Top 5 student home states:
- NY
- CA
- NJ
- FL
- IL

Top 5 international student home countries:
- China
- India
- Canada
- Korea
- Pakistan

First-year vs. transfer:
- 91.4% First-year
- 8.6% Transfer

- 15.1% Hispanic/Latino
- 10.9% Black or African American
- 9.3% Asian
- 9.2% Nonresident alien
- 5.8% Two or more races
- 1.74% Unknown
- 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native
- 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

47.7% White
Grants and funding

We are managing $6M in multi-year grants from 9 major foundations

These grants are helping us advance our access agenda, covering:

- student and family engagement
- college coaching
- evidence-based interventions
- scholarship solutions
- community college pathways
- data and research
# Changing student landscape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current undergraduates</th>
<th>Student mobility</th>
<th>Transfer students are more likely to…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26% Traditional students</td>
<td>37% College students who transfer at least once</td>
<td>• Work full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74% Remaining applicants, including military veterans and adult learners</td>
<td>45% College students who transfer more than once</td>
<td>• Have dependents other than a spouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Be a single parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Have no high school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Have taken more than a gap year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Attend part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Be financially independent from parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2011–12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study
The expectations gap

- **41%** of undergraduates attend community college.
- **80%** indicate a desire to transfer to attain a bachelor’s degree.
- **1/3** actually transfer.
- **14%** accomplish their goal of getting a bachelor’s degree.

If we care about access and equity, we need to focus on pathways from institutions

- **Low-income students** are 2.4x more likely to start at a community college compared to students from the highest income.

- **Hispanic students** are 1.6x more likely and **Black students** are 1.3x more likely to start at a community college compared to white students.

- Applicants using our transfer application are 2x more likely to be **first-generation** compared to first-year applicants.

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As we strive to become the trusted source for all students to access, afford, and attain a postsecondary education, we must deliver an experience that provides the appropriate path and guidance to help the modern student on their educational journey.
Removing application barriers
Opportunity for the application to reflect the diversity of its students and members
Six focus areas

- Citizenship
- Gender expression
- School discipline
- Military history
- Family *
- Religious preference *

* Applicable to the first-year application only

[link](commonapp.org/evolvingtheapp)
Fall 2020 member survey

Objectives

- Provide a baseline understanding of which data within 6 high priority clusters is most necessary for admissions and enrollment.
- Inform communication and appropriate change management for “Evolving the application.”

Questions

For each item in the 6 high priority clusters:

- Is this information necessary for an admission decision?
- Is this information necessary for enrollment?
- Would you add this question to your member screen if not in the common questions?
- Do you have another way (outside Common App) to obtain this information?

Responses

- 262 individual responses
- 208 members
Key takeaways

For **Religion** and **Military Discipline**, scores indicate that these sections can be revised or removed to be more inclusive *with minimal impact on admissions*.

Responses indicate that neither **Sex** nor **Gender** is necessary for admissions, but that many members need information re: Sex for enrollment.

Scores for **Family** indicate that **no individual item is needed for admissions**,* but multiple items related to parent information are needed for enrollment. Sibling information reflected low necessity across all items.

**School Discipline** scores indicate that members depend less on **Disciplinary History from Counselor** than Disciplinary History from Student.

**Citizenship** scores showed variance among individual items in the category, with **most items being necessary only for enrollment**.

*Item refers to an individual question (i.e. Parent Email) within a category (i.e. Family)
Citizenship
Citizenship member feedback

We shared the working group mock-up for revised first-year questions with members for their feedback from December 2–15.

22 Members provided feedback

Themes from member feedback

Only included if more than one member provided the same feedback.

**Geography and Nationality**

- **Citizenship question:**
  - 11 members asked to keep U.S. refugee or asylee, U.S. dual citizen, and U.S. permanent resident as unique choice values
  - 2 members did not want to create an “explicit” undocumented choice value

- **Birth country:**
  - 6 members asked to make birth country required
  - 2 members asked to add birth city as a question for international students

- **Green card and Alien Registration Number**
  - 3 members asked to keep green card upload for U.S. permanent residents

**Family**

- **Parent address:**
  - 3 members asked to keep parent address
Citizenship student feedback

We tested working prototypes for the Geography and Nationality section and reviewed Family changes and in-line help through student user tests.

Themes from user tests

Only included if more than one student provided the same feedback.

Geography and Nationality

- 7 out of 8 students preferred seeing all universal questions upfront
- Citizenship question:
  - Using the title “U.S. Domestic or Residing” confused students
  - All undocumented students preferred having an explicit choice value to “Other (non-U.S.)”
- The question, “If you intend to apply for a new or different U.S. Visa, please indicate that visa type,” confused international students

Family

- Parent occupation:
  - Students had difficulty identifying their parent’s occupation in the options provided

In-line help

- All undocumented/ DACA students responded favorably to the in-line help

International and undocumented/DACA students provided feedback
Planned citizenship question revisions

**Geography and Nationality**

- Show all universal questions upfront
- Separate Citizenship Status response options, “U.S. citizen or U.S. national, U.S. dual citizen, U.S. refugee or asylee, Citizen of non-U.S. country”
- Add Citizenship Status option, “DACA, undocumented, Deferred Enforced Departure, Temporary Protected Status”
- Remove the Alien Registration Number question
- Keep the green card upload as optional
- Only require the Date of Birth, switch Country, City, and State to optional

**Family**

- Parent
  - No changes
Gender expression
Approximately 40% of gender question responses do not provide usable data

19% of students misunderstood the gender question.

Another 19% of students gave a response that only appeared in the data once.

There were 42,091 responses that are categorizable.

Data: Common Application 2019–2020
Note: Includes only those applicants who answered the sex & gender questions.
There is significant anxiety around how we use and share this information

Sample responses:

“I identify as transgender. (Ftm) but, for personal reasons will *not* be sharing that with my family.”

“I am a transgender woman. *My family does not know about this, please do not share it.*”

“I recently identified myself as a lesbian, however I *keep that a secret from my family.*”

“I identify as female, but *don't tell my family* thanks”

“I am questioning my gender identity. *My family can't know,* but I lean towards the male spectrum.”
Members need this information most often for reporting requirements, followed by housing.
Planned sex and gender question revisions

**Gender Question**
- Revise the question label to simply read as “Gender”
- Allow multi-select options, with the ability to “add another gender”
- Provide open text field labeled “My gender”, shown if “add another” is selected, for students to share in their own words

**Sex**
- Change the question presentation from “Sex” to “Legal Sex” to reduce student confusion
Military history
The first-year veteran non-submission rate was 1.6x the rate for all students.

Data: Common Application 2019-2020

Note: Includes only those applicants who answered the military history questions.
Transfer submission rates remain consistent for veterans who do not indicate Honorable Discharge

Submission Rate: Military Discharge (Transfer)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discharge Type</th>
<th>Non-submitters</th>
<th>Submitters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honorable discharge</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other than honorable discharge</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data: Common Application 2019-2020
Note: Includes only those applicants who answered the military history questions.
However, of the 299 first-year applicants who skip the military discharge question, 81% do not submit
Planned military history question revisions

**Military changes**
- Removing the Military discharge question
- Improved workflow
- Connecting students to resources

**Extended Profile**
- Adding a status question
- Show/hide of military questions and documents per response
School discipline
The disparate impact of school discipline on students of color — and Black students in particular — is well supported in the research.

Suspension rates for Black students are higher and have been growing faster than other groups (Losen et al., 2015).

An analysis of Arkansas data found students of color more likely to receive exclusionary discipline even when controlling for nature of referral (Anderson and Ritter, 2017).

Sources: Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap? (Losen et al.); Disparate Use of Exclusionary Discipline (Anderson and Ritter)
Applicants who disclose school discipline are less likely to submit their application.

Likelihood of submitting application based on answer to school discipline question

- **No to school discipline question**
  - Submitted: 85%
  - Did not submit: 15%

- **Yes to school discipline question**
  - Submitted: 74%
  - Did not submit: 26%

Total # of applicants:
- 1,142,813
- 31,551

Note: Excludes applicants who did not answer the school discipline question.
Planned school discipline question revisions

School discipline changes

- Remove from common portion of application
- Remove from school counselor form
Common Transfer Guarantee
In spring 2020, Common App worked with a team from Berkeley to answer the following questions:

- What are the 1–2 most impactful opportunities for the Common App to engage with community colleges?
- What are the 1–2 most effective interventions to ensure that students are supported to navigate the process to their local community college when they start Common App accounts but do not apply to 4-year universities?
The team conducted research into the needs of community colleges and students

- **600+** Number of surveys completed across 4Y college administrators, community college administrators, 4Y college students, and community college students testing key assumptions behind opportunities to service community colleges and their students

- **80+** Number of interviews conducted across Common App stakeholders', students, and community college experts to understand CA's strengths and challenges, the current landscape of community colleges, and the nature of student experiences

- **10+** Number of secondary data sources we researched and evaluated (including NCES, ACCT, & IPEDS) to comprehend community colleges trends, pain points, and potential opportunities

- **13** Number of potential opportunities to serve community colleges and their students identified and tested in Phase 1 analysis across revenue potential, operational feasibility, and social impact

- **2** Number of potential opportunities from Phase 1 identified as high potential and advanced to Phase 2 for additional due diligence
Guaranteed admissions is beneficial for both colleges and students

Many colleges offer automatic or **guaranteed admissions** to students who meet certain academic requirements. Some guarantee admissions focus on local or state-wide community colleges.

**Colleges**

- Clearly communicate transfer-friendly atmosphere to potential students
- Establishes relationship with community college
- Every year, more members are drafting guaranteed admission policies

**Students**

- Reduces anxiety and concerns in the admissions process
- Helps students narrow down their options to clear set of colleges
- Helps identify colleges with transfer-friendly atmospheres
On our website, we will be adding guaranteed admission policies

Guaranteed admission website: transfer.lmu.edu/howtotransfer/prepare/specialprograms/transferguarantee/
Where do we go next?

ideas.commonapp.org
Q&A
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