

**NISTS 2023**

# BE A CONNECTOR FOR TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS

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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).

## *Research Spotlight*

### **2781 - Students, Faculty, and Staff Views on Transfer: Text Analysis of 34 Focus Groups and 35,000 Surveys**

Credits and Degree Pathways, Matriculation Trends and Issues

In 2019 and 2020, we surveyed 31,500 undergraduate students at The City University of New York and held sixteen focus groups on the topic of transfer. We analyzed text responses using a mixed methods approach including quantitative text analysis and qualitative coding. The results showed differences in word usage, sentiment, topics discussed, and perspectives based on students' academic and transfer histories. Issues related to credit transfer were among top concerns.

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# Students, Faculty, and Staff Views on Transfer: Text Analysis of 34 Focus Groups and 35,000 Surveys

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

NISTS 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

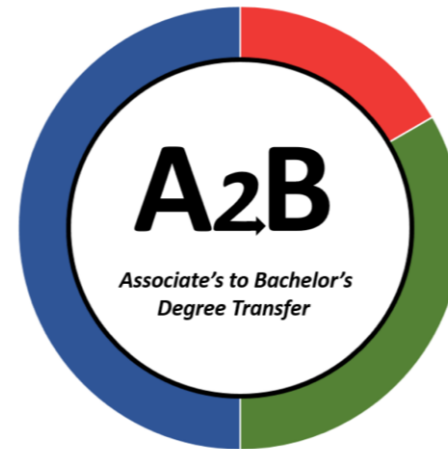
# Acknowledgments

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## Additional Researchers

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# Purposes of TOP Research

- Where are the major leaks in the pipeline?
- What variables are associated with those leaks?
- What are the possible *malleable factors* (aspects of the higher education environment that can be modified) that can decrease the leaks and increase the output of this pipeline?
- What specific interventions might address the leaks?

# Background

# Who Transfers from a Community College (Associate's Degree Program) to a Bachelor's Degree Program?

- 33% of undergraduates (7 million students) were enrolled in public community colleges in the 2020-21 academic year.
- Among students who completed bachelor's degrees in 2015-16, 49% had enrolled a community college during the previous 10 years (6% had only attended as high school dual enrollment students).
- Almost 40% of all first-time students transfer institutions within six years of college enrollment. 45% of them change institutions two or more times.

# Community College Students & Transfer

- On average, students at community colleges (in associate's programs), in comparison to students in bachelor's programs, are:
  - More likely to be from underrepresented groups,
  - Have fewer financial resources, and are
  - More likely to be the first in their families to attend college.
- Community colleges students themselves often face greater challenges than four-year college originating students
- Transfer to bachelor's degree programs is itself a considerable challenge. Beyond applying and getting accepted, many aspects of being a transfer student make it harder to succeed and graduate.
  - Credit transfer
  - Registration

## Transfer at CUNY

- CUNY is an urban, public university system with 25 colleges/campuses: 10 offering associate's degrees (7 community colleges, 3 comprehensive colleges), 14 offering bachelor's degrees.
- 220,000 matriculated undergraduates
- About 20,000 students transfer from one CUNY college to another each year
- Over 50% of bachelor's-degree recipients are transfers



# Why can transfer be difficult?

- Credit transfer
  - Requires review of credits by faculty
  - Or preexisting articulation agreements between college departments
  - Sometimes credit transfer is determined after enrollment and paying fees at transfer college
- Courses transferred affects which coursework a student may need
- Late notification and deprioritization of transfer students during registration leads to classes being already full and then an inability to register for necessary coursework, with less desirable courses being available
- Additional coursework and delays in getting into required courses can result in additional semesters, which add to cost and can deplete students' financial aid.
- Transfer students also face adjustment to new campus environment, and often greater demands at home.

# Poll

- What type of role do you have in relation to transfer students?
  - Advising
  - Teaching
  - Administrative
  - Other
- How much do you interact with transfer student populations?
  - Rarely or never
  - Sometimes
  - Often

# Student Survey: Methodology

# The Study

- Survey of 31,500 students
  - Survey of 4,000 faculty
  - Student focus groups
  - Faculty and staff focus groups
- 
- Students, Staff and Faculty have direct—and varied—experience with college transfer systems and procedures
  - Their views may be particularly informative for any effort at better understanding the challenges faced by transfer students including any deficiencies in the student transfer system

# Open-Ended Survey Items

- Student Survey
  - “What advice would you give future students who want to transfer? Write in.”
  - “What part of the transfer process would you recommend be changed? Write in.”
- Faculty survey:
  - “In your opinion, what are the most important actions that **associate's-degree-granting** colleges can take to improve transfer outcomes for prospective vertical transfer students to bachelor's-degree programs?”
  - “In your opinion, what are the most important actions that **bachelor's-degree-granting** colleges can take to improve transfer outcomes for vertical transfer students in bachelor's-degree programs?”

# Student Survey

In February-March 2020, the survey was sent to each full-time and part-time CUNY student, inviting them to participate

Emails sent to a total of 188,037 students.

31,511 responded (16.8% response rate).

- Distinction based on transfer history:
  - Associate's degree students
  - Associate's to Bachelor's students
  - Bachelor's students

# Faculty Survey

In Fall, 2021, surveyed faculty experiences with, and views on, transfer

Survey sent to 17,381 full- and part-time faculty in CUNY's 20 undergraduate institutions.

3,871 responded (22% response rate).

- Distinction based on types of students serving:
  - Associate's degree students
  - Bachelor's degree students

# Student Focus Groups

- 16 focus groups interviewing 88 Students from 6 CUNY colleges: 3 senior colleges and 3 community colleges.
- Examples of Interviewer Questions:
  - When should a student transfer?
  - How many credits do students need to transfer?
  - Where can students get information on transfer?
- Content was coded in three layers
  - 1: Barrier, facilitator, recommendation
  - 2: 61 Topics of discussion (Information availability, advisement, course reference/registration)
  - 3: 10 Time points along transfer process timeline



# Faculty & Staff Focus Groups

- 18 focus groups interviewing 104 Advising, Enrollment, and Faculty from 6 CUNY colleges: 3 senior colleges and 3 community colleges.
- Examples of Interviewer Questions:
  - When do students first hear about transfer?
  - How do students first select their degree program and choose to change between them.
  - What barriers are students facing?
- Content was coded in three layers
  - Discussion of a barrier, facilitator, or recommendation.
  - That an excerpt includes reference to or characteristics of any of 29 malleable factors.
  - That an excerpt references any of 6 time points in the vertical transfer process

# Quantitative Text Analysis

- R: Free open-source statistical software ([www.r-project.org](http://www.r-project.org))
- Rstudio ([www.posit.co](http://www.posit.co))
- ‘quanteda’ package (<https://quanteda.io>)
  - Processing text data, counting terms used
- ‘stm’ package ([www.structuraltopicmodel.com](http://www.structuraltopicmodel.com))
  - Topic modeling
- ‘syuzhet’ package for sentiment analysis

# Quantitative Text Analysis

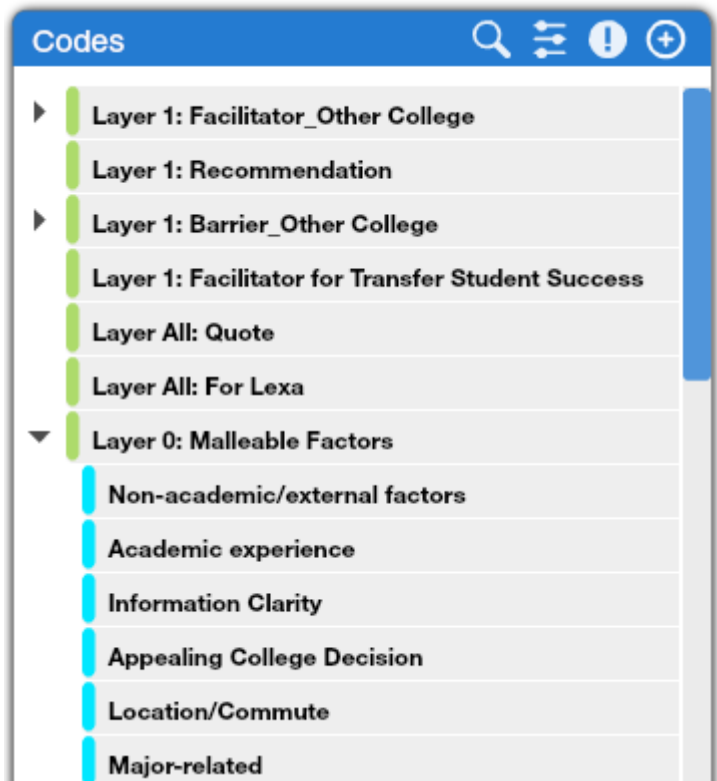
- Read in text data: “Make sure all your courses transfer.”
- Stem words and remove punctuation: “Make sure all your course transfer”
- Tokenize the data: “make\_sure” “course” “transfer”
  - Remove punctuation, numbers, stop words (“the”, “a”, “and”)
  - Single words and frequently occurring bigrams (“make\_sure”)
- Convert to document-feature matrix
  - One row per quote, columns with counts of each word’s use

	make_sure	student	college	course	transfer
Quote1:	1	0	0	1	1
- With this, you can visualize frequencies, create word clouds, carry out sentiment analysis and topic modeling



# Qualitative Analysis

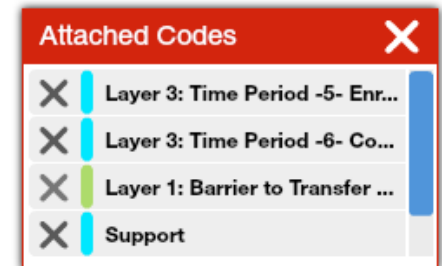
- Dedoose software



- Read in excerpts to code
- Create coding layers
- Assign codes to excerpts

Created By Sabbeyqu Created On 06/28/2021

They fully facilitate the whole pathway for you to obtain your associate's degree. And over here it's almost like "You're on your own, Buddy."



- Summary statistics and visualizations can be generated

# Student Survey: Results

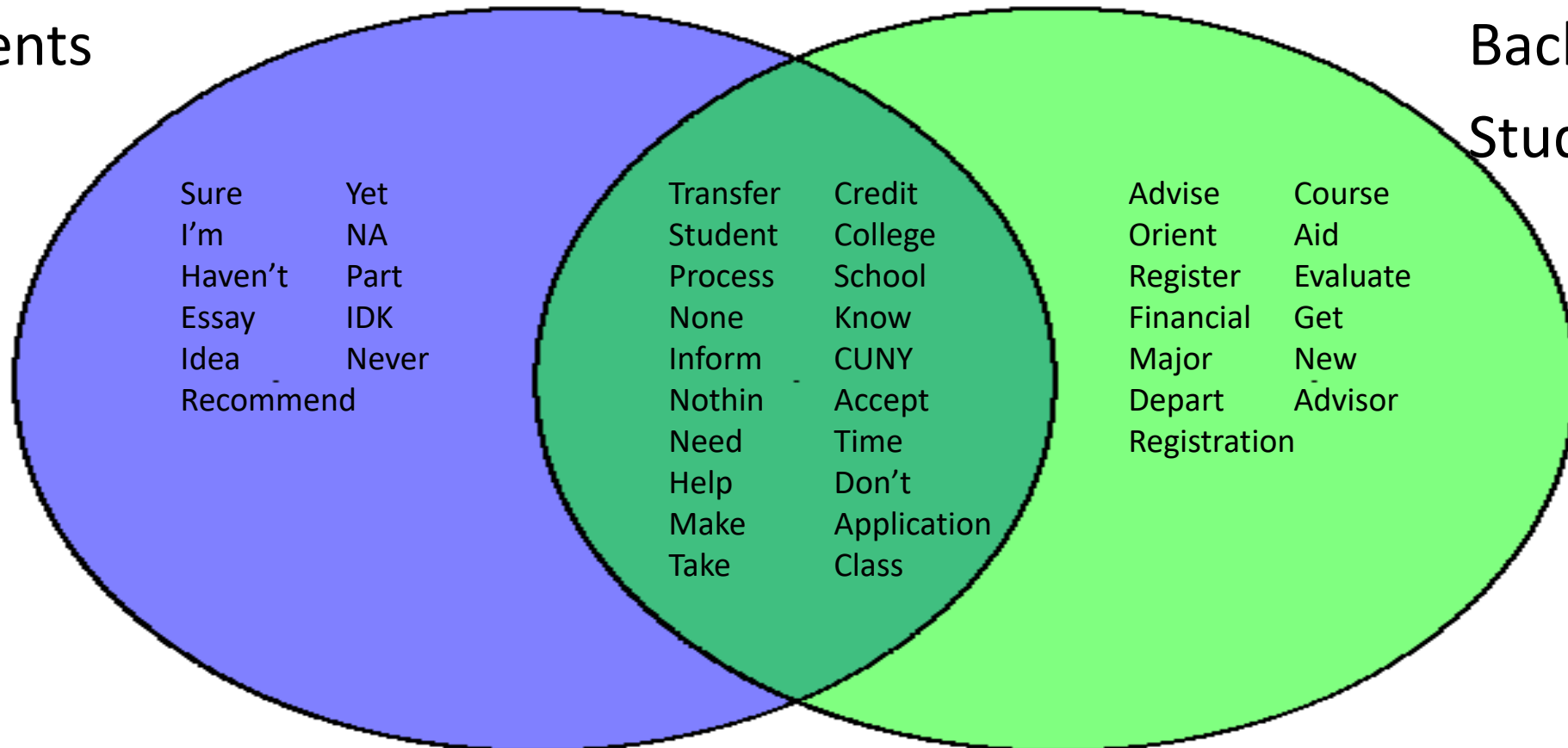
# Student Survey

- What advice would you give future students who want to transfer?  
Write in.
- What part of the transfer process would you recommend be changed?  
Write in.

# What part of the transfer process would you recommend be changed?

Associate's  
Students

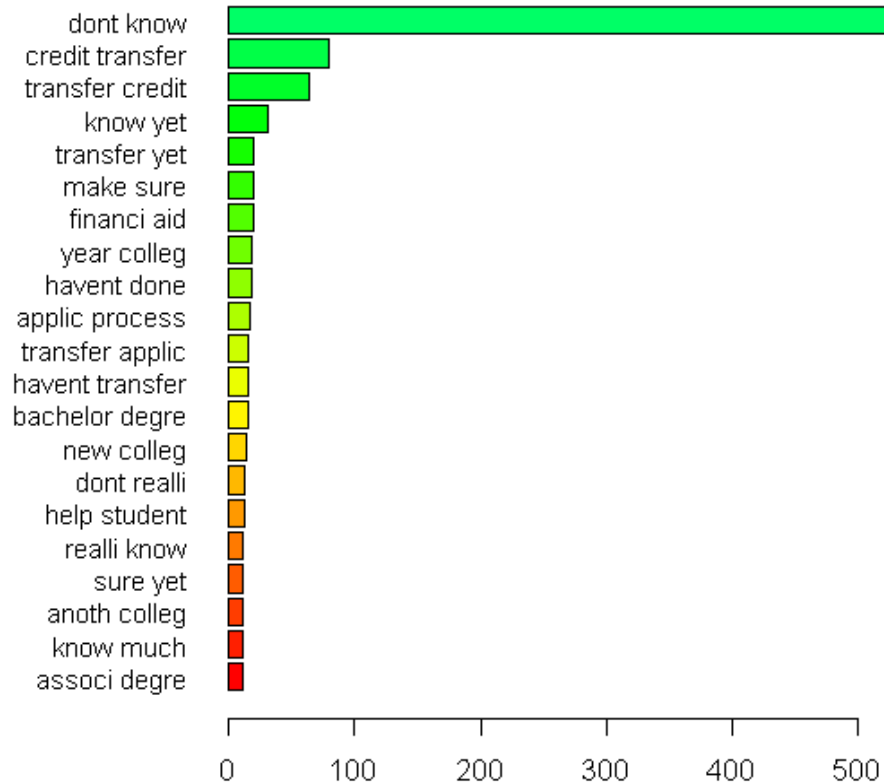
Associate's to  
Bachelor's  
Students





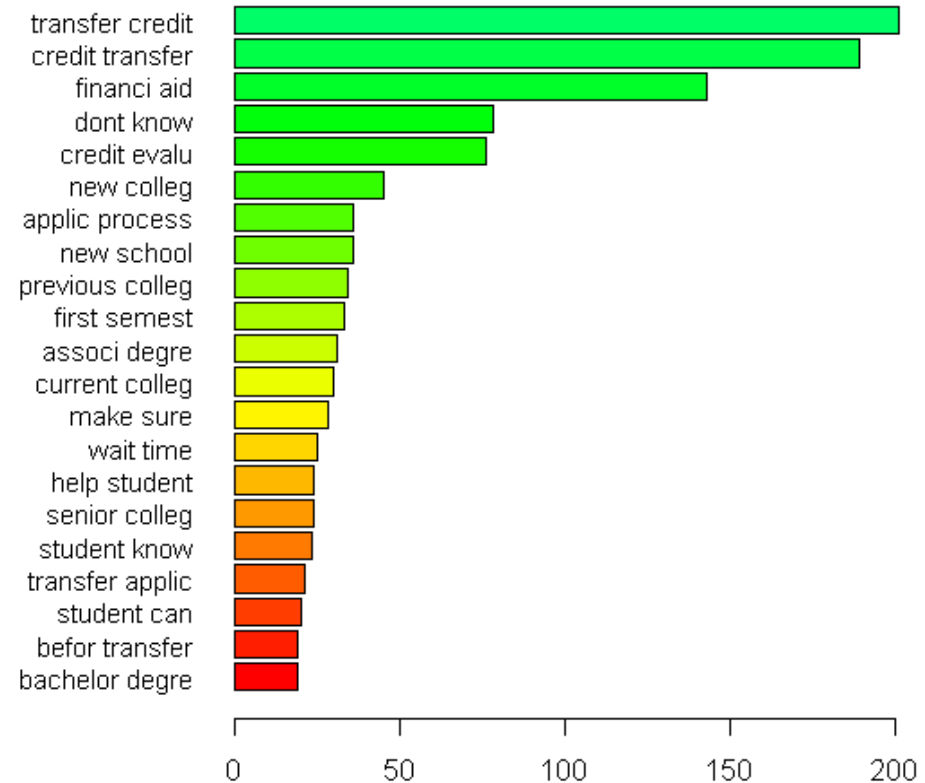
# What part of the transfer process would you recommend be changed?

Associate's degree students with no prior enrollment



n = 2945

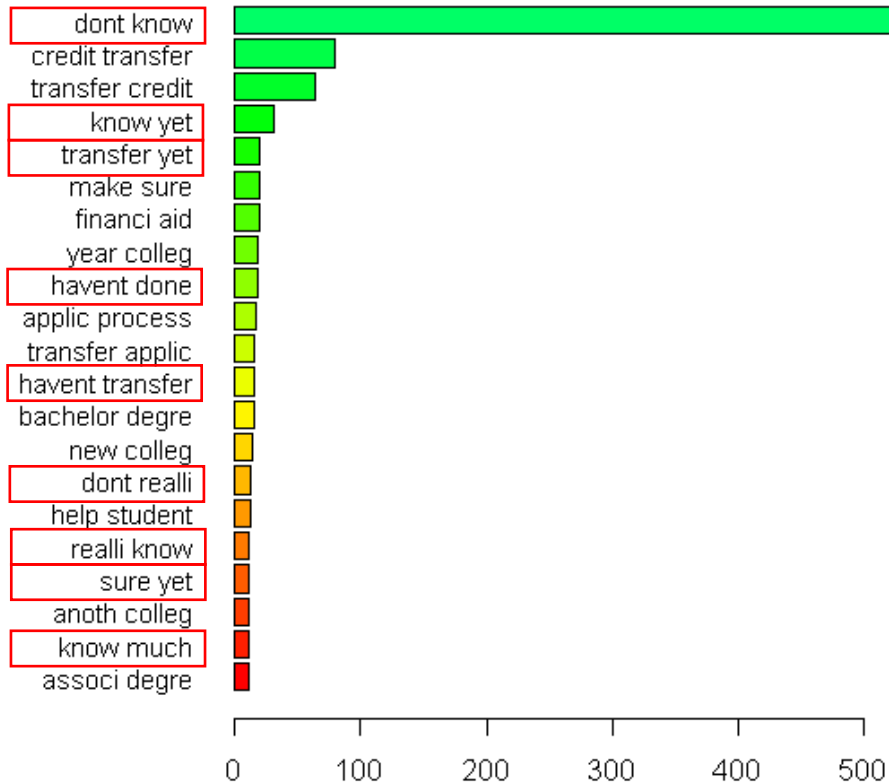
Bachelor's degree students with prior Associate's enrollment



n = 3773

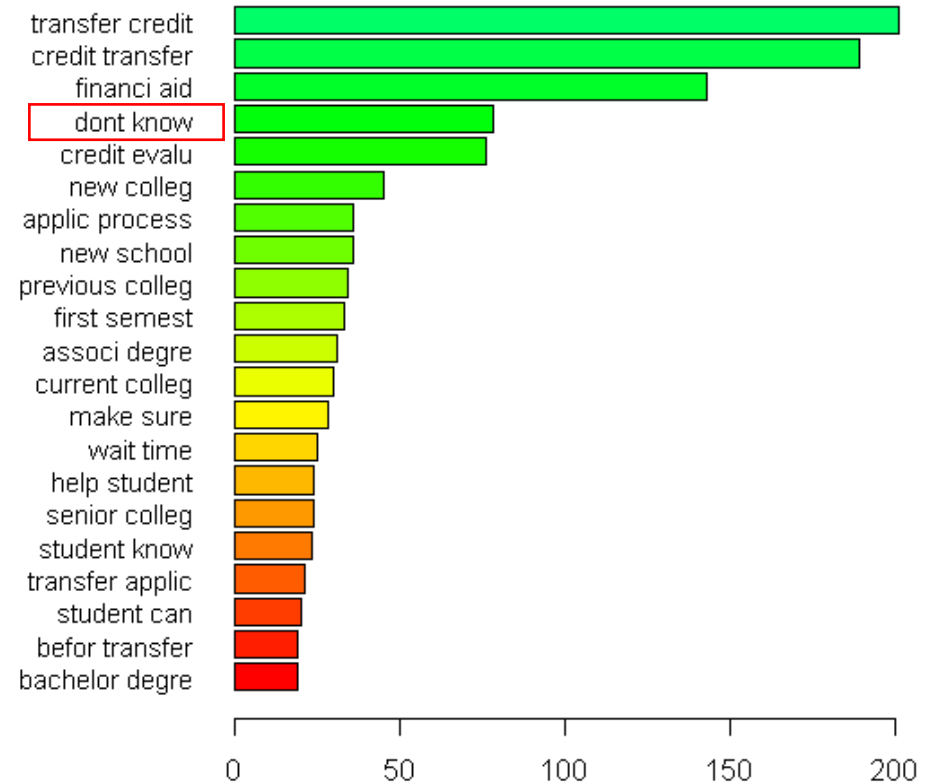
# What part of the transfer process would you recommend be changed?

Associate's degree students with no prior enrollment



n = 2945

Bachelor's degree students with prior Associate's enrollment

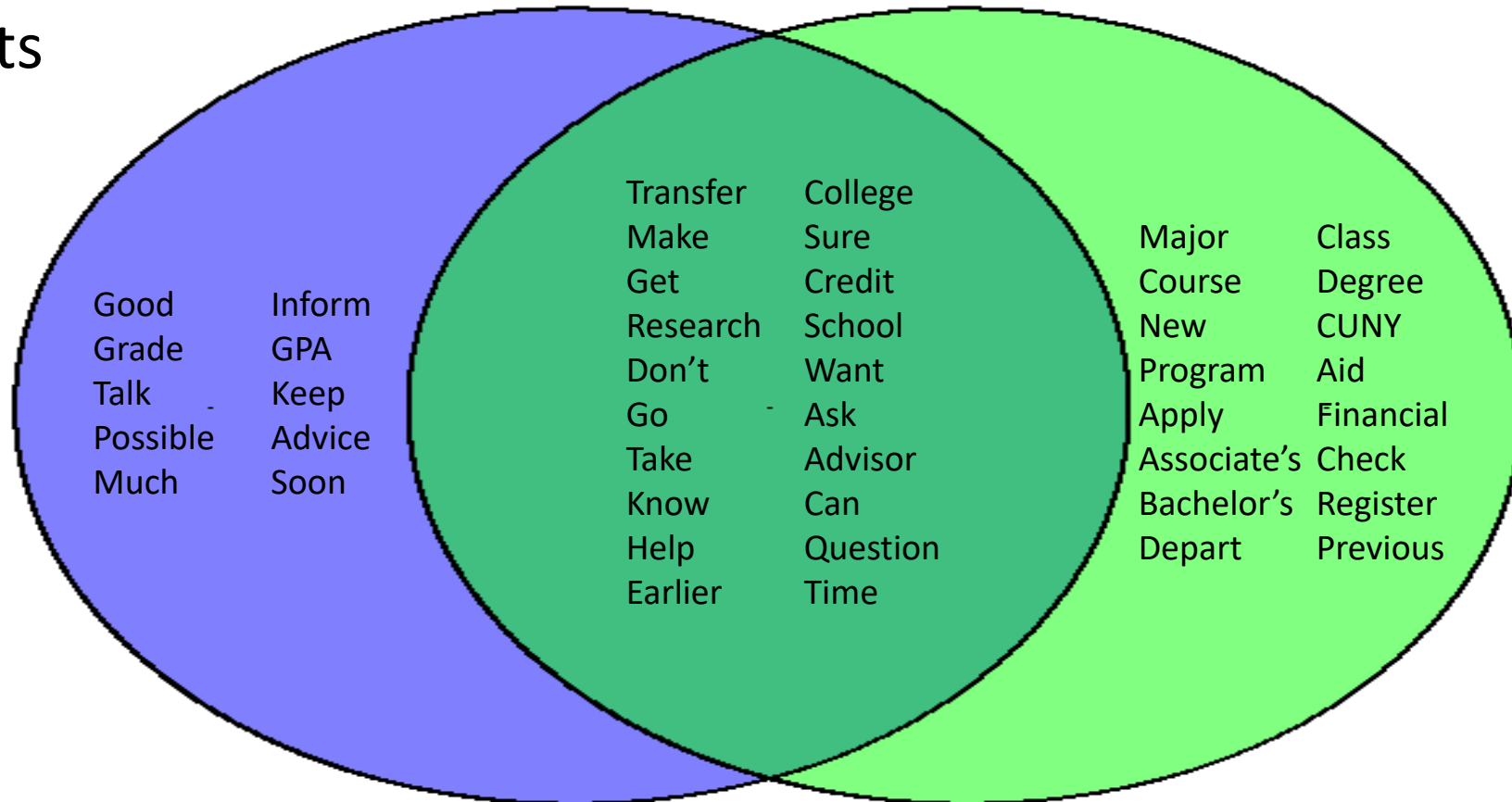


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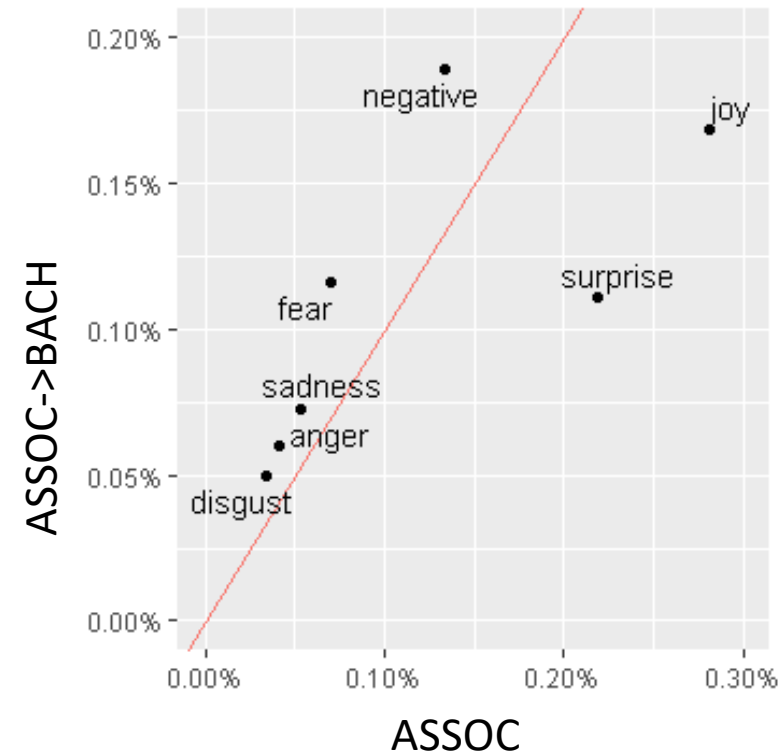
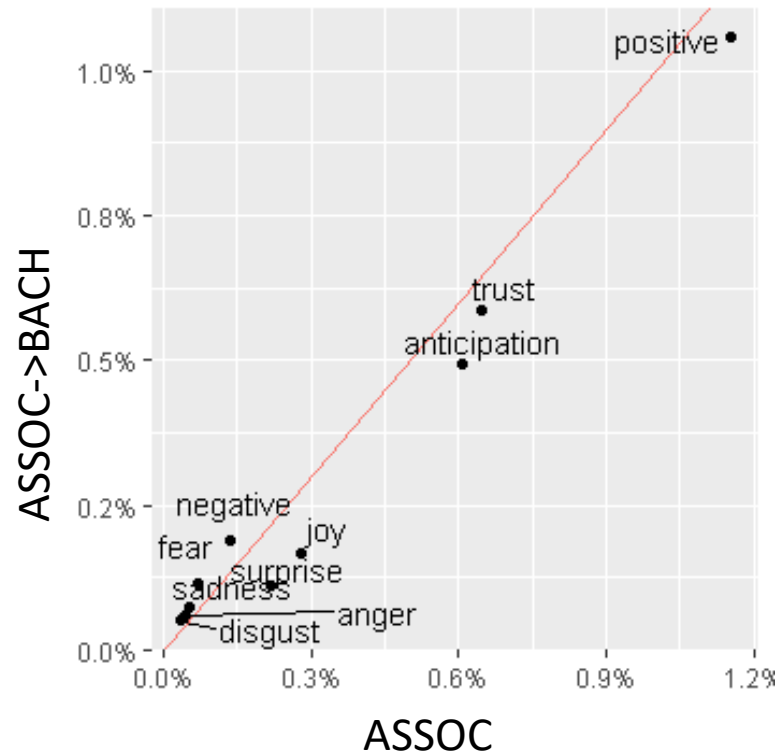
# What advice would you give future students who want to transfer?

Associate's  
Students

Associate's to  
Bachelor's  
Students



# Comparing sentiment in students advice to future transfer students



- All differences are statistically significant at  $p < .001$  using t-tests; fear, negative, positive are significant at  $p < .001$  using ks-tests

# Faculty Survey

- “In your opinion, what are the most important actions that **associate's-degree-granting** colleges can take to improve transfer outcomes for prospective vertical transfer students to bachelor's-degree programs?”
- “In your opinion, what are the most important actions that **bachelor's-degree-granting** colleges can take to improve transfer outcomes for vertical transfer students in bachelor's-degree programs?”

# Topic Modeling

- Using topic modeling, we identified clusters of responses with differences in terminological use patterns.
- This enabled us to describe common response categories
- Then we visualized the proportion of responses fitting into each category across types of respondents (Assoc. or Bach. Faculty), and the subject of the response (Assoc. or Bach. colleges)

# Topic Modeling

## **Topic 1: Aid & Support**

- Provide robust financial aid and scholarship opportunities
- Funding more robust advising from both faculty and dedicated advisors
- Provide proper information and emotional support

## **Topic 2: Skills & Learning**

- Strengthen instruction in core skills of writing critical thinking research including library skills and math
- teach basic learning skill better reading writing quantitative including some basic stats
- Concentrate on Basic Skills Writing Reading and Quantitative skills

## **Topic 3: Program Alignment**

- Align the associate degree curricula to the bachelor s degree program
- Articulation agreements and dual joint agreements
- Building fostering bridges between the 2 and 4 year institutions facilitating better articulating agreement cross institutions

# Topic Modeling

## **Topic 4: Course Registration**

- Prioritize their class registration even if status is pending Knowing the potential course path is vital
- More night classes hybrid online classes I have noticed that vertical transfer students are much more likely to be working full time These classes will provide them the flexibility needed to fit their schedule and get the courses they need in a timely fashion.
- Spend time looking at their work to fit them in at the right level placement

## **Topic 5: Credit Transfer**

- Review transfer of credit process before student transfers
- Communicate early about transfer deadlines and what can transfer
- Be forthright about credits that will transfer and those that will not Clear state which credits can be transferred

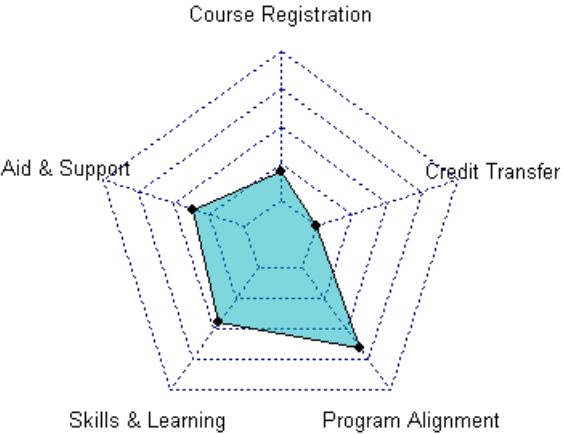
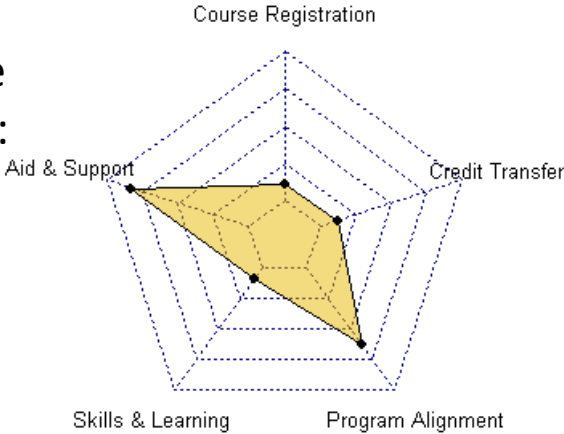


# Topic Modeling

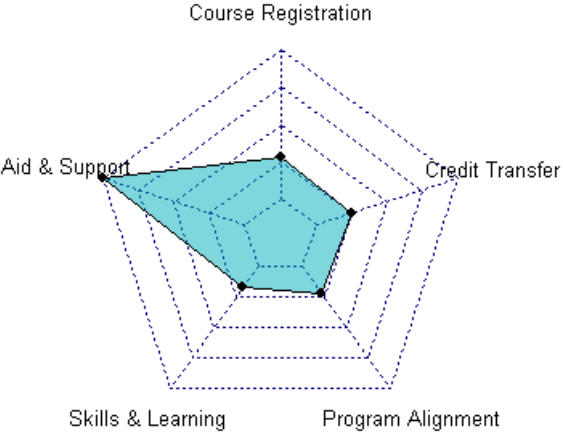
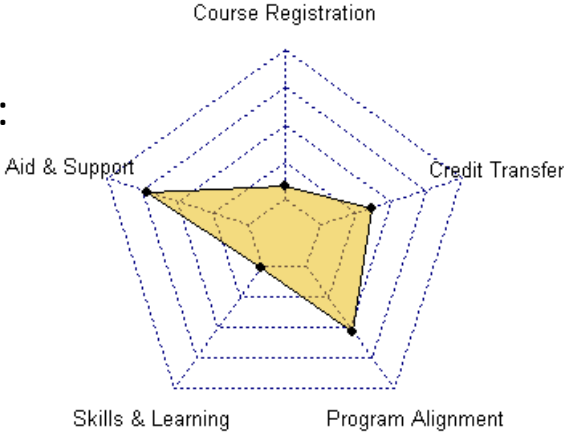
Associate's Faculty Respondents:

Bachelor's Faculty Respondents:

Associate's College Suggested Actions:



Bachelor's College Suggested Actions:

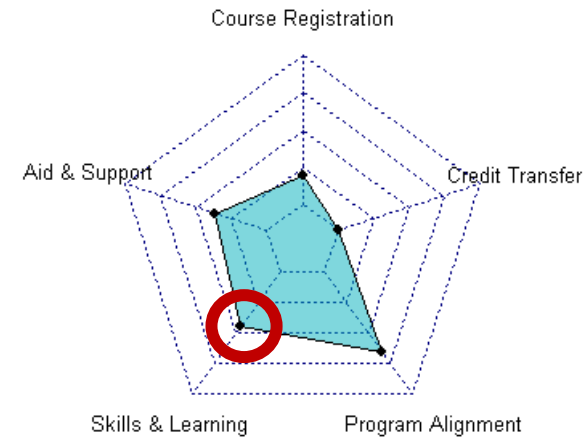
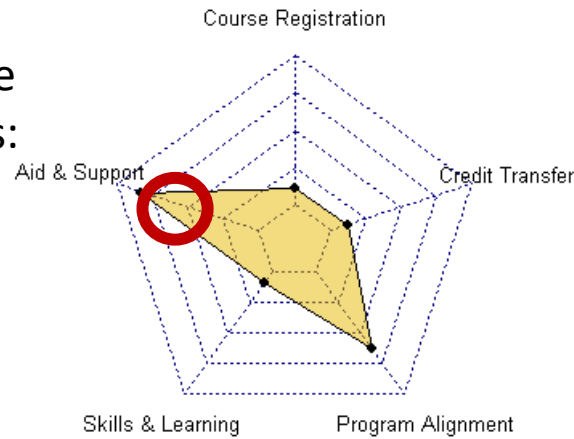


# Topic Modeling

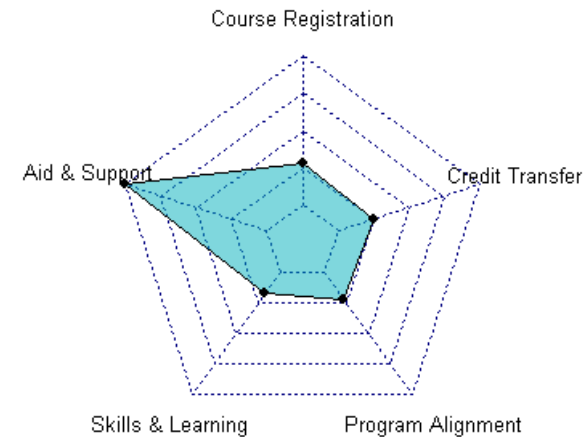
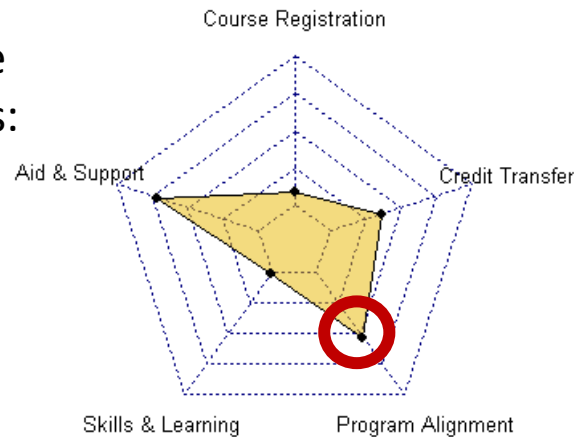
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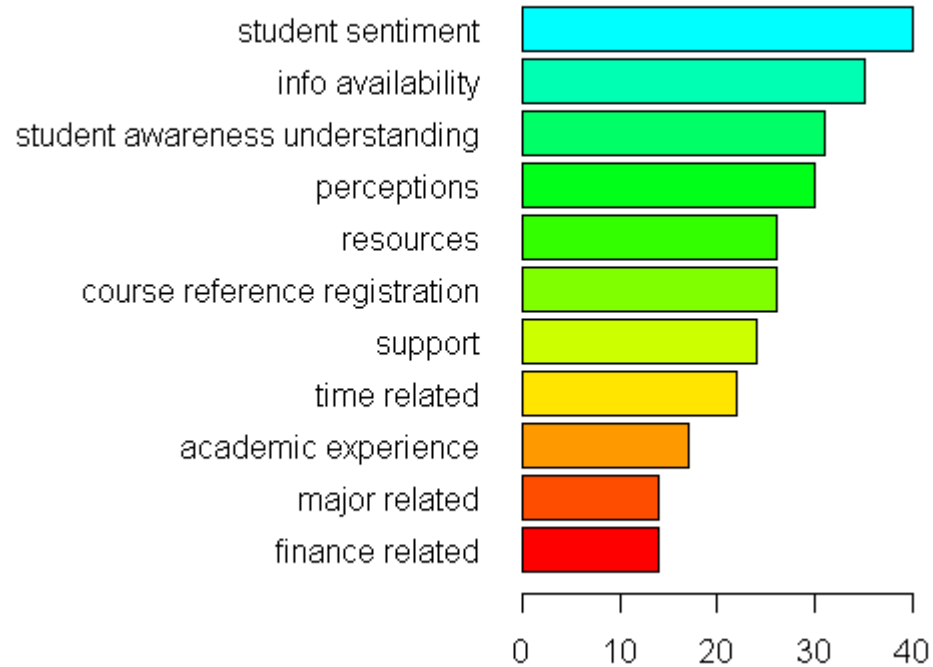


# Focus Groups: Co-occurrent Discussion of Topics and Barriers or Facilitators

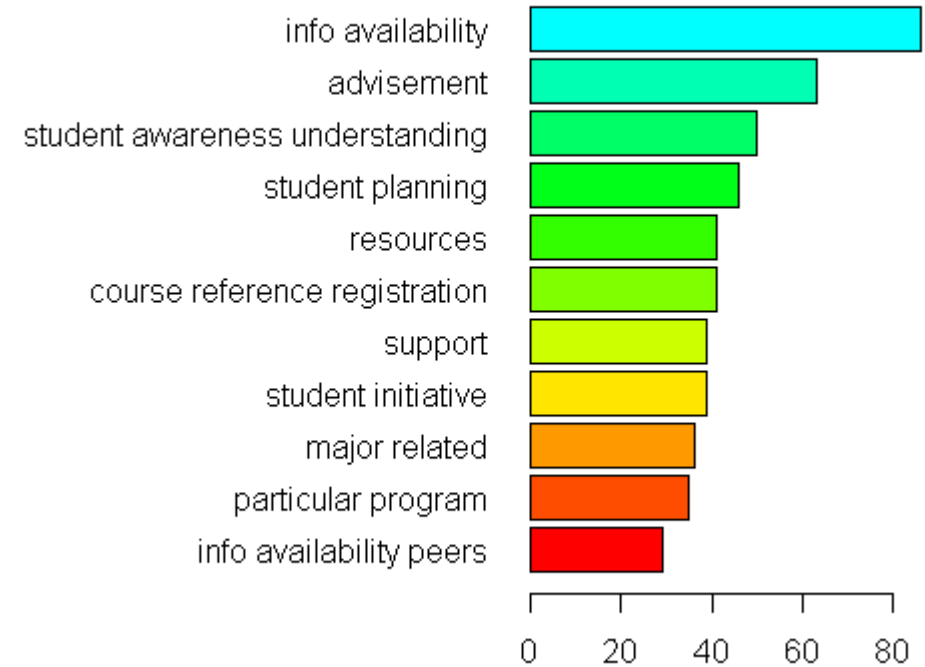
- Students:
  - Comparing community college students, recent transfers to senior colleges, and continuing transfer students
- Staff & Faculty:
  - Comparisons between faculty, advising staff and enrollment staff

# Community College Students

## Barriers

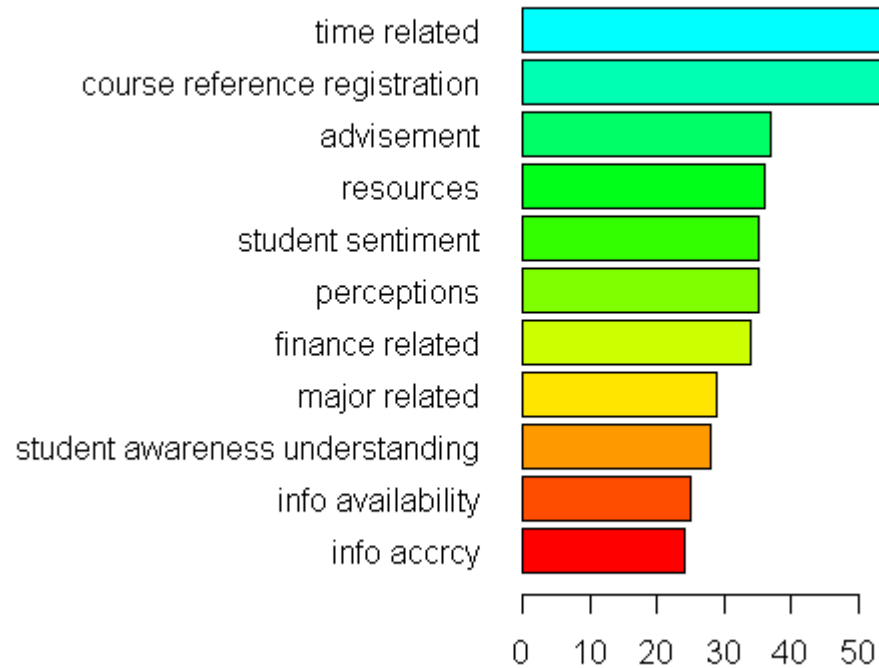


## Facilitators

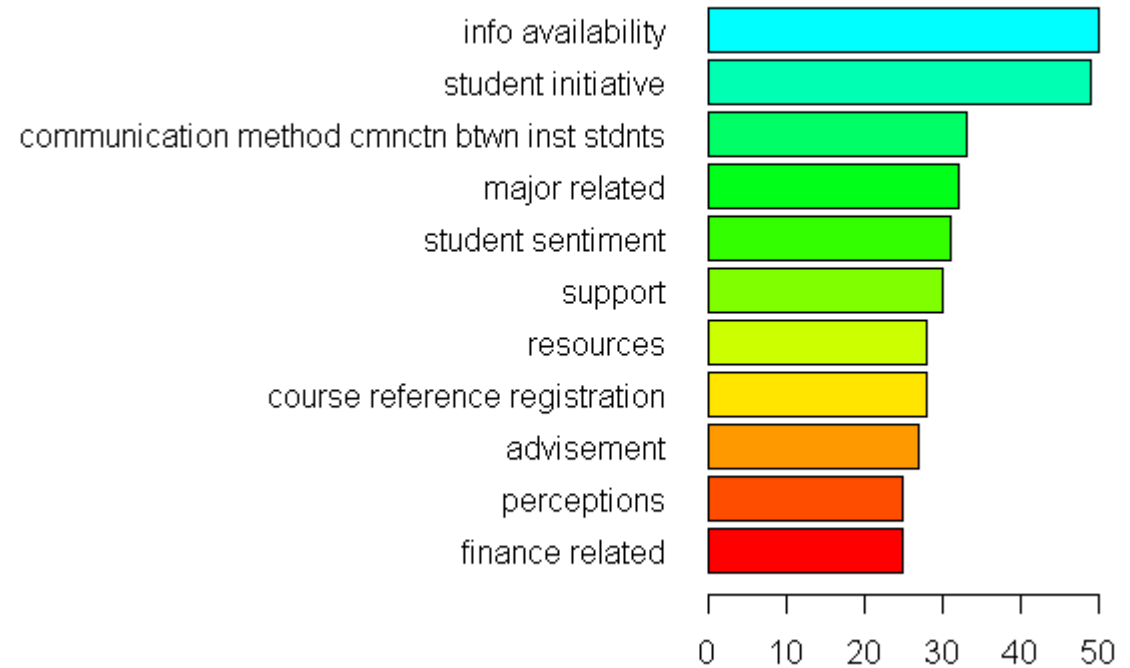


# Senior College – New Transfers

## Barriers

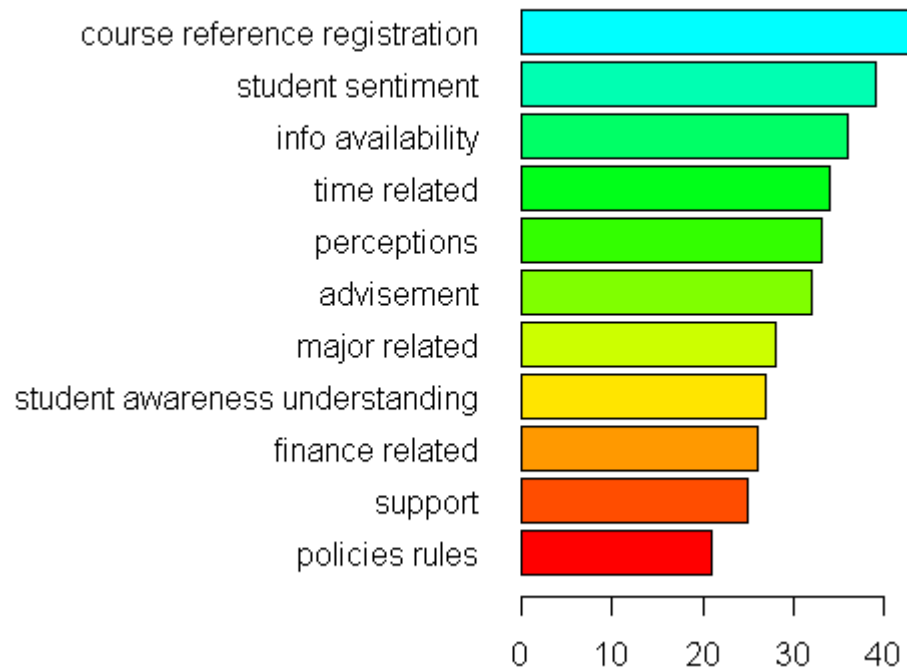


## Facilitators

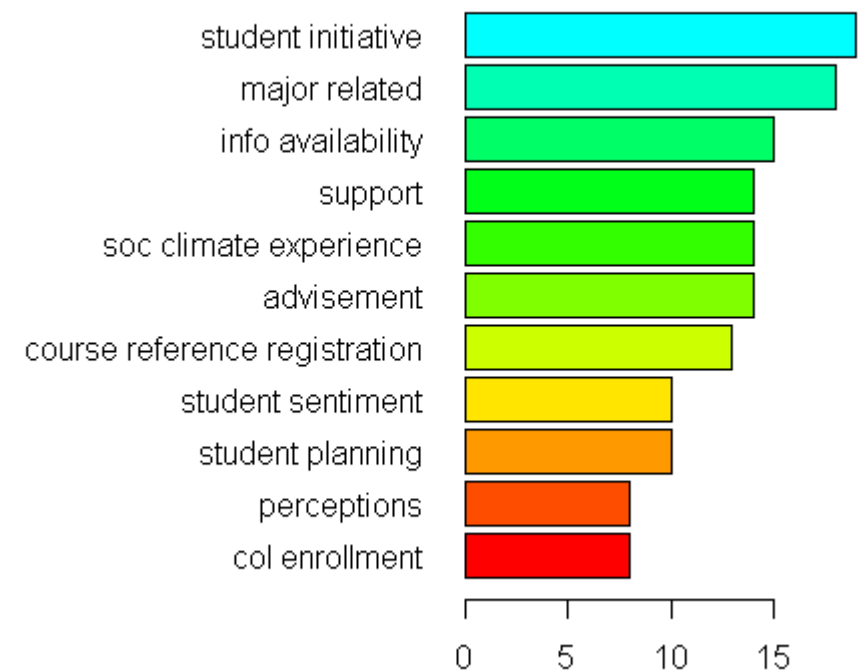


# Senior College – Continuing Transfers

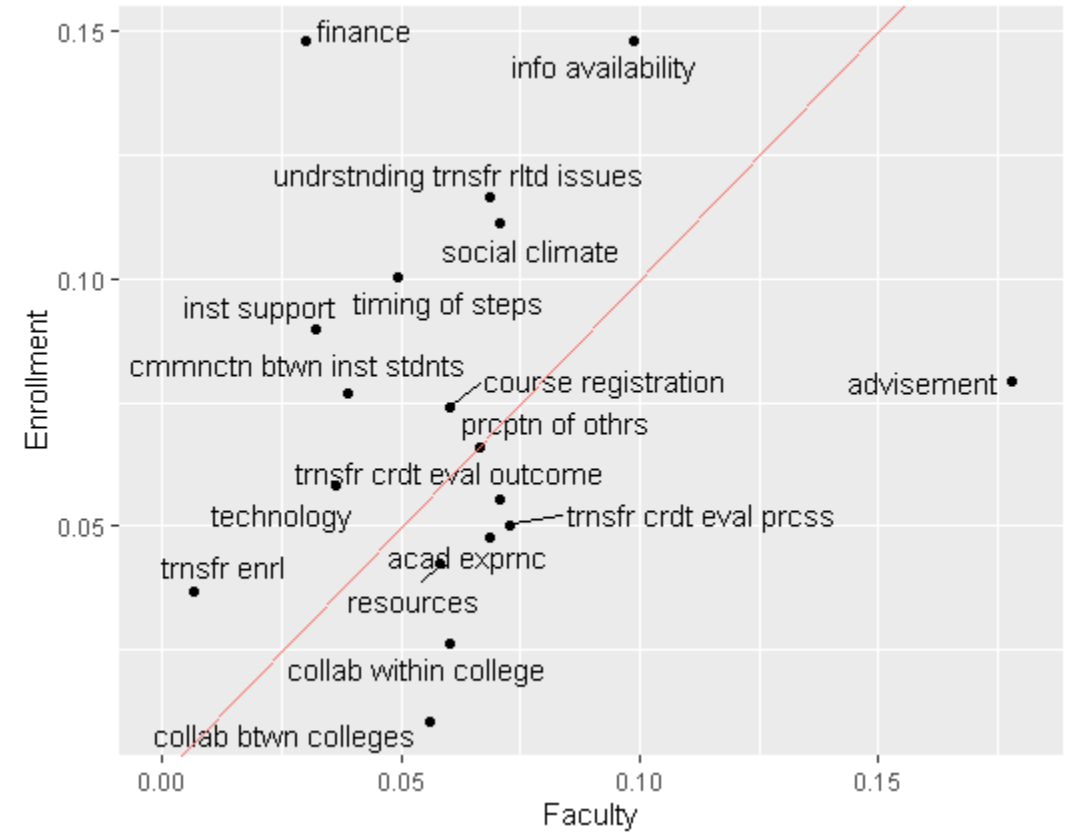
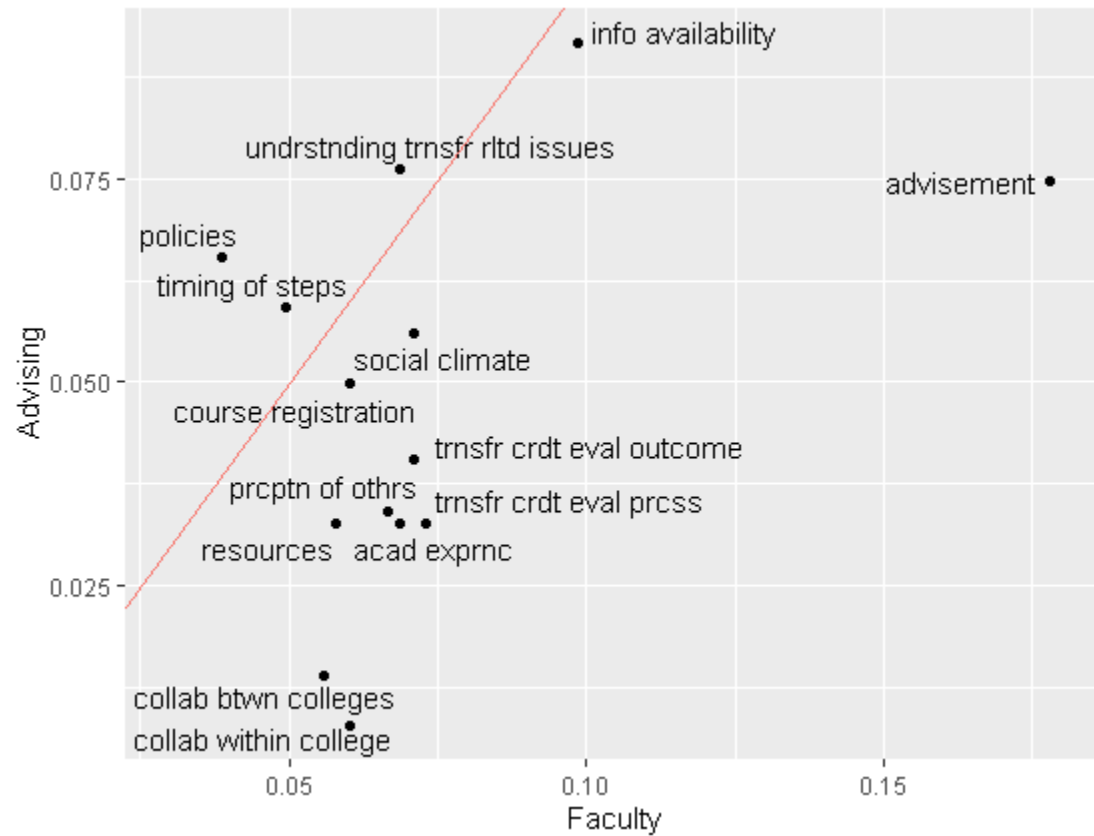
## Barriers



## Facilitators



# Staff & faculty focus groups -- Barriers



# Conclusions



# Conclusions

- Associate's degree students often have limited understanding of transfer before going through the process and they are aware of their limited knowledge
- Students who have completed transfer voice less positive sentiments about the transfer process and emphasize credit transfer, registration, information access and initiative.
- Staff view issues related to transfer somewhat differently based on their institution type and their role in relation to students
  - Associate's degree student faculty advocate curriculum alignment and student support
  - Bachelor's faculty recognize the need for student support but also discuss academic preparation
  - Enrollment staff emphasize information and procedural elements and financial support
  - Advising staff may have a wider view on transfer and so prevalence of particular topics may be less pronounced

# Takeaways

- Preparing students for transfer, through information and advising, and facilitating transfer, through transfer-friendly policy, continue to be necessary to improving outcomes.
  - Information sessions and campaigns
  - Greater transfer advising
    - Resources
    - Training/informing staff and faculty about transfer
    - Connecting future transfer students with students who have transferred
  - University policies and university system policies to facilitate transfer
    - Credit transfer
    - Student course registration
    - Curriculum
  - Articulation agreements between departments

# Discussion

- Do these results fit with your perspectives on transfer students' experiences and challenges? Why or why not?
- Considering student, faculty and staff viewpoints, what else could be done to improve transfer students' outcomes?



# Thank you!



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A2B (Associate's to Bachelor's) website:

<https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/oira/policy/a2b/>

