Educational Partner/Sponsor Session

2871 - Equity-Driven Practices for Transfer Student Success: Evidence from the National Study of Transfer Student Initiatives

Diversity and Inclusion, Transition Programs and Supports

Supporting transfer students requires an understanding of equity and its associated implications for student success. This session will feature data from the National Study of Transfer Student Initiatives, a mixed methods project that gathered information about institutional priorities and practices related to transfer planning, services, and initiatives. We will share evidence of how transfer professionals work to sustain a transfer receptive culture on their campuses and strategies participants can use to make equity-driven change.

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Equity-Driven Practices for Transfer Student Success: Evidence from the National Study of Transfer Student Initiatives

Catherine Hartman and Jeffrey Mayo

National Resource Center for

The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

National Institute for The Study of Transfer Students

Portland, OR | February 23, 2023

Agenda

1. Overview of transfer and transitions and the transfer receptive culture framework

2. Presentation of findings from NSTSI

3. Discussion of practices, trends, and innovations among transfer student initiatives and how these work to support a transfer receptive culture

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Why Attend to Transfer?

- Transfer students constitute a growing and significant proportion of undergraduate students in U.S. postsecondary education

- Transfer rate for fall 2011 student cohort: 38%
  - Among students who started at a four-year institution: 38.5%
  - Among students who started at a community or technical college: 37.1%
    - The primary transfer destination for these students was a four-year institution (Shapiro et al., 2018)

- Many students aspire to transfer, but few actually do so (Jenkins & Fink, 2016)

Transfer Transitions

- Bureaucratic issues at play

- Transfer students face:
  - Issues associated with transfer and applicability of credits
  - Forging social and academic connections
  - Navigating campus culture
  - Maintaining motivation and focus toward academic goals

NSTSI Objectives

- How do transfer personnel at two-year and four-year institutions support transfer and transfer-intending students?
  - To determine what academic and social support services institutions offer to transfer and transfer-intending students
  - To understand the most prevalent and salient transfer-specific issues institutional agents and students faced
  - To explore the role that transfer programs play in students' transitions
  - To understand the ways in which institutions do or do not promote a transfer receptive culture (Jain et al., 2011)

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Transfer Receptive Culture

- ## Transfer receptive culture (Jain et al., 2011):

  - Shared commitment among transfer sending and transfer receiving institutions to students and accept their role and responsibility to promote transfer student success

  - "Central to the concept of a transfer receptive culture…is the belief that students will be successful **because** they are transfer students. This is in opposition to the belief that they are successful **despite** being a transfer student" (Jain et al., 2011).

Jain, D., Herrera, A., Bernal, S., & Solorzano, D. (2011). Critical race theory and the transfer function: Introducing a transfer receptive culture. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 35*(3), 252-256. 10.1080/10668926.2011.526525

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National Study of Transfer Student Initiatives (NSTSI)

- Institution-/program-level survey distributed in fall 2021. It included:

- An online survey
  - General info about institutional attention to transfer and transfer-intending students
  - Extended modules on academic advising, orientation, and college student/transfer student success courses

- Interviews with transfer professionals
  - Interviews with transfer personnel conducted in Spring 2022
  - Interviewed 30 transfer professionals at two- and four-year institutions across the U.S. and its territories

National Study of Transfer Student Initiatives (NSTSI)

- A multi methods study that included:
  - An online survey (distributed in September 2021)
    - General info about institutional attention to transfer
      - Extended modules on academic advising, orientation, and college student/transfer student success courses
  - Interviews with transfer professionals (conducted in spring 2022):
    - 27 participants from 19 states and one U.S. territory:
      - 7 participants from two-year institutions
      - 20 from four-year schools:
        - » 8 private four-year institutions
        - » 2 private for-profit institutions
        - » 10 public four-year institutions
          - Included 3 HSIs

Interviews

- Sought to understand:
  - Cross-functional and –institutional relationships that support transfer
  - How participants saw their institution prioritizing transfer
  - Institutional culture around transfer
  - Transfer student transitions into or out of the institution
  - Advising-related issues around transfer (organizational and student challenges) and changes planned or underway
  - How transfer supports are embedded into developmental education courses (supported by SStF)
  - How transfer services promote and center equity

Analysis

- Cleaned quantitative data and generated descriptive statistics
- Coded transcripts in Dedoose using hybrid method (Miles & Huberman, 1994)
  - First, deductive codes were derived using the framework
  - Then created subcategories inductively, including in vivo codes
- Wrote memos during coding and met to discuss emerging findings
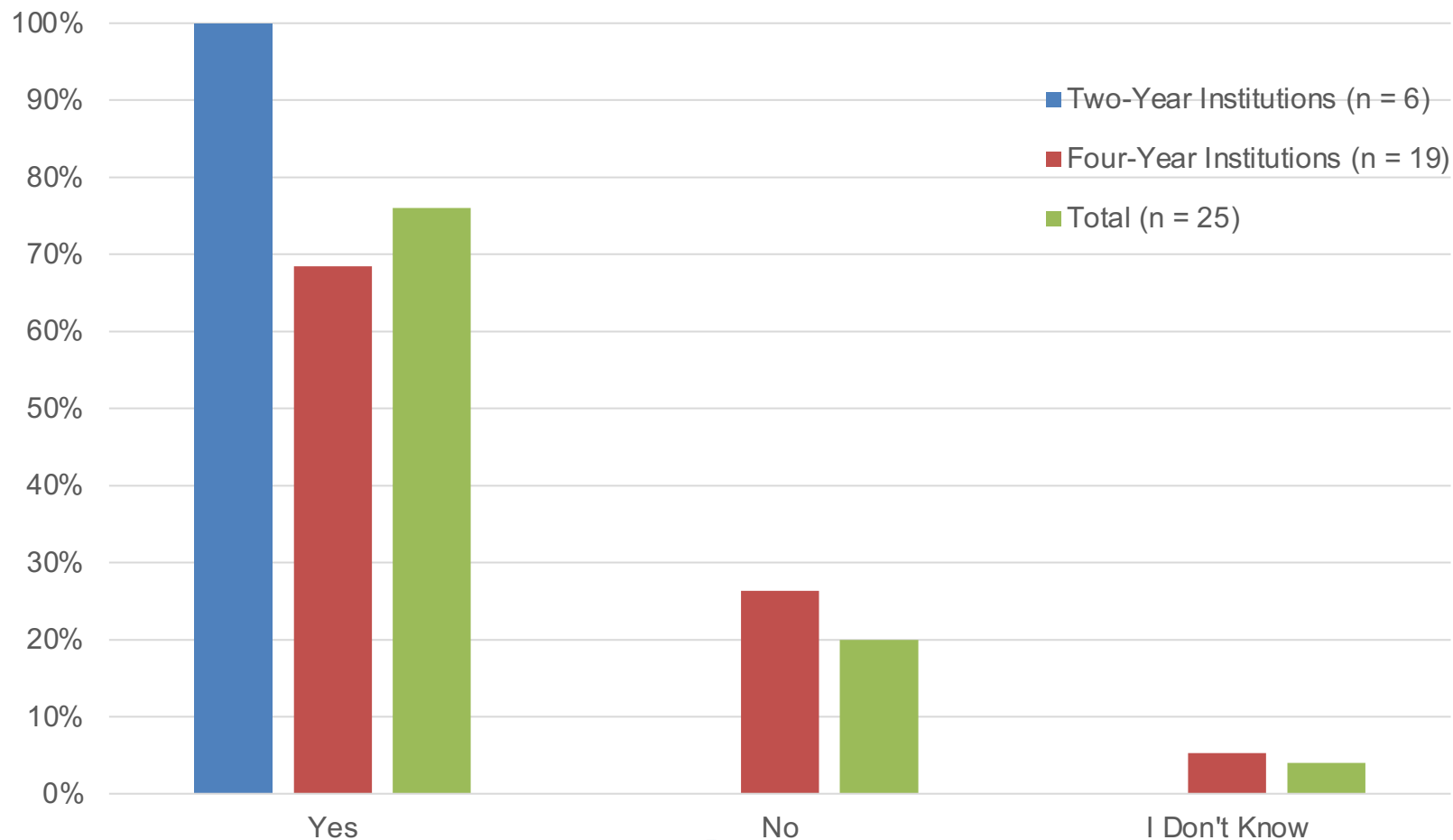
Findings

1. Institutional descriptions of transfer role
2. Equity and transfer
3. Barriers to establishing transfer commitment

Institutional Descriptions of Transfer Role

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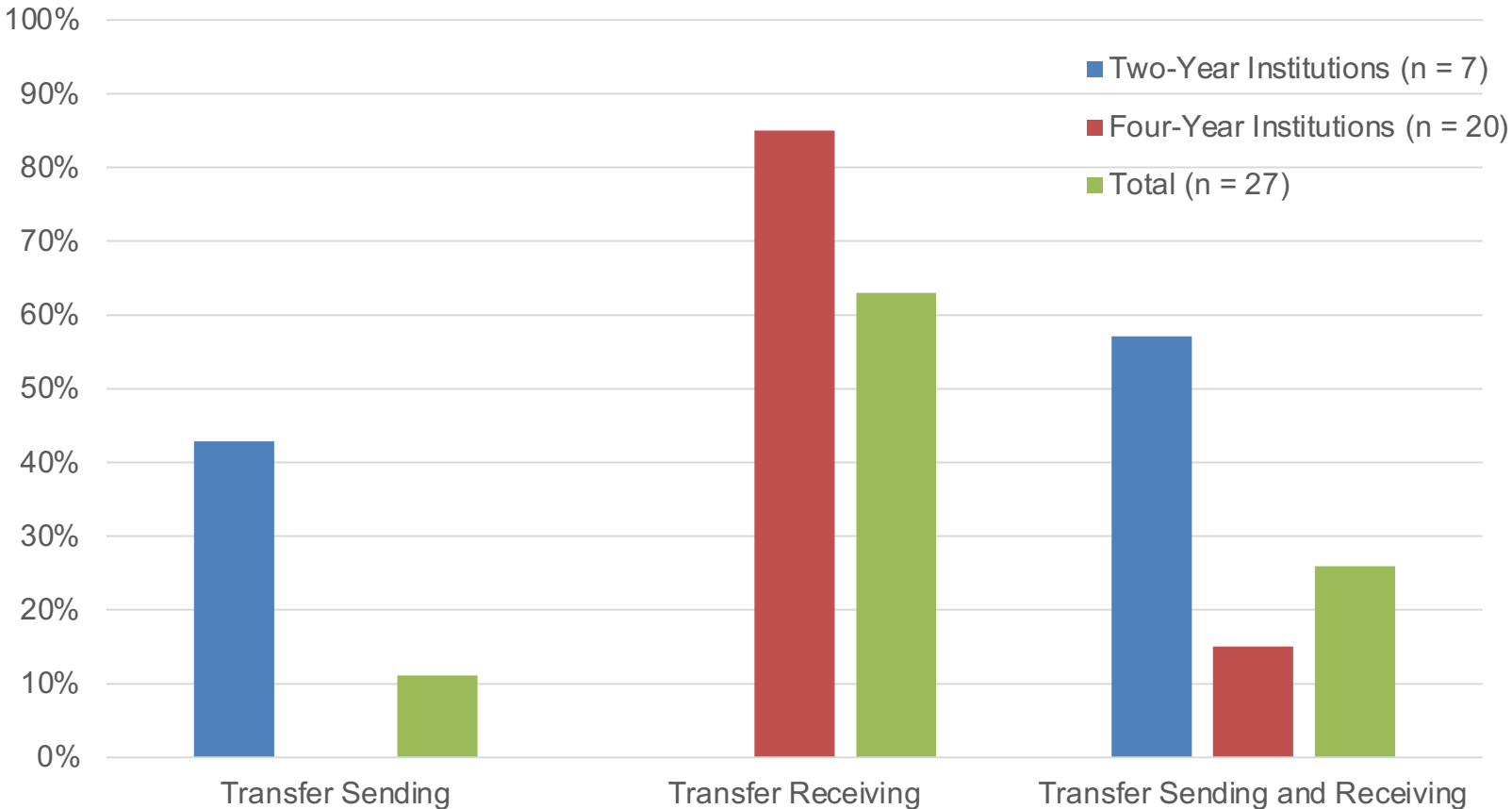
Transfer in Institutional Strategic Plans

Institutional Attention to Transfer

- "Honestly, I think it's the result of **declining enrollment** that caused [our new transfer support program]."
  - Participant at a private four-year university
- "It's a lot of rebuilding of relationships there because I think it's been neglected. I say neglected not that no one was paying attention, but like many large institutions, **a lot of what we do is often decentralized**."
  - Participant at a public four-year university

Institutional Attention to Transfer

- "We're admitting 4,500 freshman a year as opposed to about 1,600 transfer students a year--2,000 transfer students a year. So, a lot of the attention and strategic plan and initiatives are focused primarily on that first-year student population. But any initiative related to just continuing student incorporates transfer students. If you look at our strategic plan, for example, you're not necessarily going to see anything targeting transfer students in particular. **It's implied in a lot of those initiatives, but it's not necessarily stated clearly."**
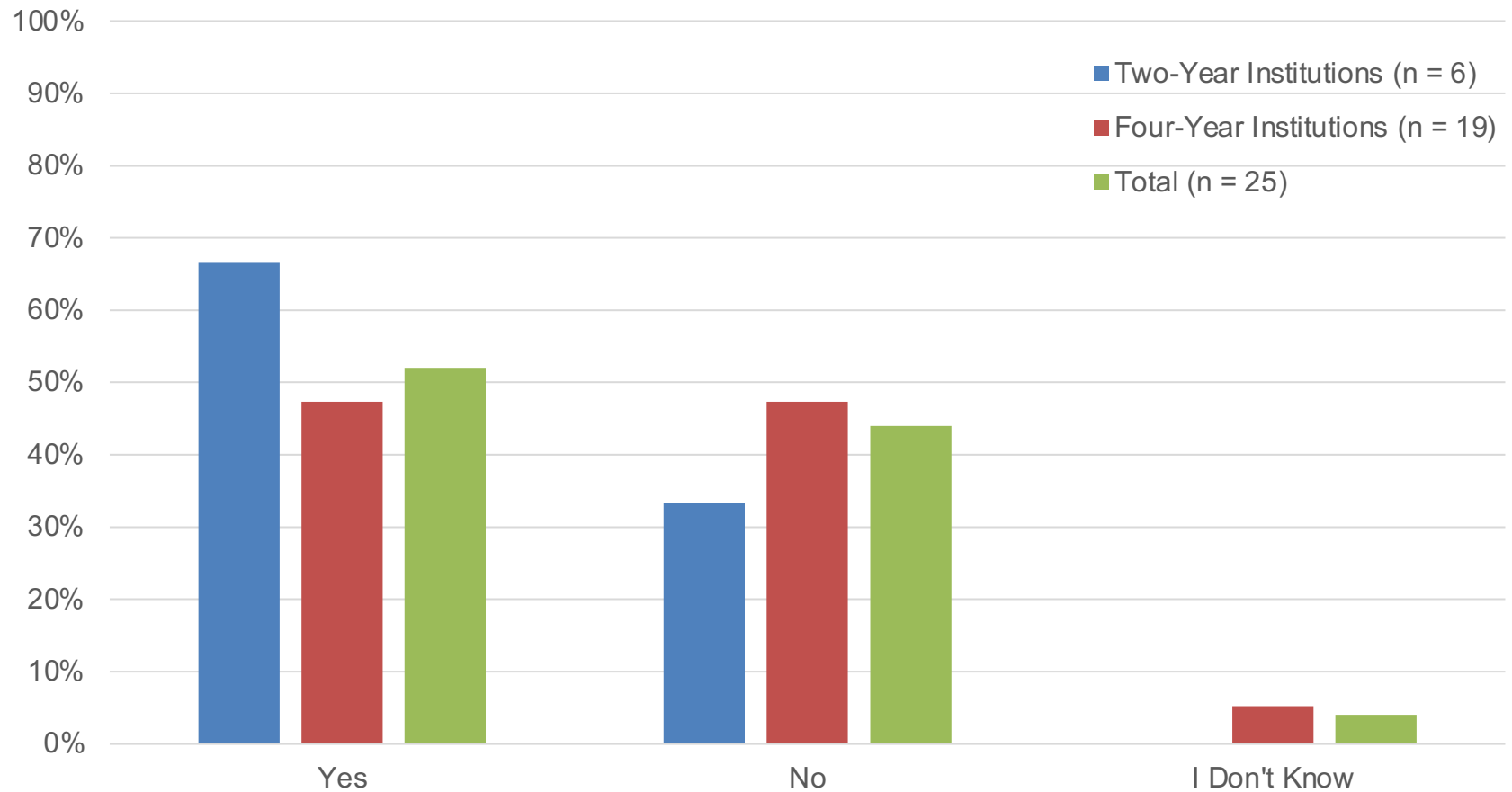 - Participant at a public four-year university

Mission and Function: Institutional Descriptions

- What does it mean to be a transfer sending institution?
  - Transfer receiving?
  - Both receiving and sending?
- How do perceptions about the transfer function (mis)align with the institution's focus?

Equity and Transfer

Awareness of Transfer

"Transfer students are not a homogeneous population...when you disaggregate the data, you find there are different sub-groups, so one must consider tailoring resource support to different student needs...it is not one-size fits all."

– Participant at a four-year institution

"We tend to find our transfer students…because they've now lived the college experience, they've had that transitional time and understand time management...They tend to be really focused on graduating. We know that they're going to finish off their degree program, which you can't always say about a first-year student."

– Participant at a four-year institution

Barriers Associated with Establishing Commitment to Transfer

"We face challenges recruiting faculty to work on cross-institutional and state-level work related to course development and curricular pathways due to constraints on faculty's time and efforts."

– Participant at a four-year institution

"We would like to offer these programs but have stopped and started several times. In some cases, it has been due to limited resources and in others it has stopped due to a shift in priorities."

– Participant at a four-year institution

Transfer Culture

COVID, enrollment, and transfer:

"I don't think we have prioritized transfer as much as we possibly could. Part of it is just because of the external and internal factors. We need to dedicate more resources into getting folks to come into our institution to stabilize our financials. Those are some of the things that we are doing."

– Participant at a four-year institution

Building buy-in:

"[The belt is for] those faculty members that are going above and beyond. We're going to end up awarding them, and they will be able to have the belt for that year. The cool thing is we're going to be able to put their names on the particular shields, as well."

– Participant at a community college

Shifting Responsibilities

- "We often say, 'Well, we have all these resources, [students are] just not accessing it." [laughs] Why? **I don't think we can expect our students to know a thousand different resources, but they can know a person who knows the thousand resources.** I think that's part of what we're trying to do is connecting with students in advance to say, 'Hey, I'm a person you know,' Trying to build trust and connection so they know that they can come to a person when they have an issue. They don't have to even know who to ask or how to ask but to just be able to have that open door or open Zoom box or whatever to be able to ask so we can get them connected.
    - Participant at a public four-year university

Institutional Responses During COVID

- "Right after the pandemic began, as many colleges did, with student help, I should say, we had a very involved group of students who, I think, assisted the college with looking at where we've come from and where we are and where we need to go. We hired a staff person that was dedicated to diversity, inclusion, and equity, and created a very, very rich list of [laughs] initiatives and plans, short term and long term. **What happened in all of that is we did create, of course, like many colleges, several different groups, committees that are dedicated to really different areas, such as sustainability and inclusion and equity.**"
    - Participant at a private art school

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Unequal Institutional Treatment

- "I'd say the equity pieces that I've seen come from maybe the various groups within the transfer population. Students from historically underrepresented and marginalized populations have good advocacy just for them in many forms on campus. **As a transfer student, I think that just adds a layer of challenges to having equitable integration and access in all the things on campus because it's harder to find it unless--It's not institutionalized as like, 'Here's all this information for you.'** I feel like I've been scrambling to make those connections so students can find their ways to fit in on campus. I think that the transfer students, in general, continue to be a group that is brushed aside on campus and not prioritized."
  - Participant at a private four-year institution

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Intentionality in Support

- "What's really important about [our division], this organization, is that we are serving many of the populations of students who are underrepresented and non-traditional…It made sense to create this organization and this collaboration of programs, **in this way, and in that way really addressing the unique needs and experiences of these communities so that they feel like there's a space for them and they can meet other students who are also coming from similar experiences**…I think now there's much more intentionality about supporting the unique identity and the intersectionality of these populations of students."

  – Participant at a public four-year university

Pause and Reflect

- Does your institution have specific goals associated with equity and transfer?
    - If so, what are these?
    - If not, what goals would you create?

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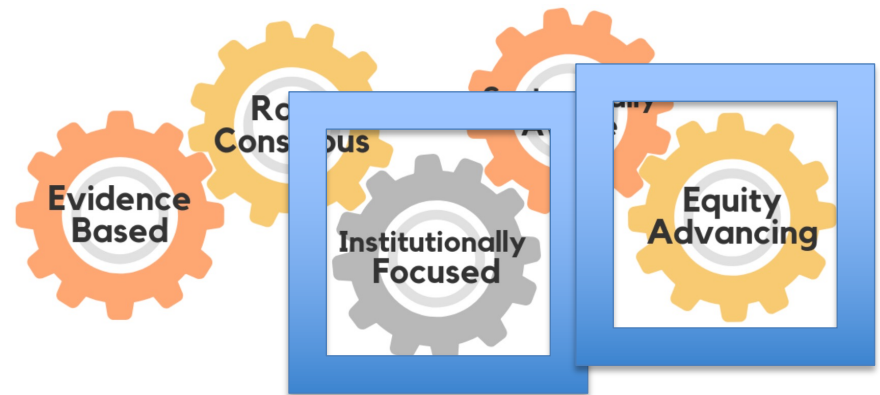# Implications for Practice:
Know Your Transfer Students and Transfer Experience

- Questions to consider
  - Who are your transfer students?
    - Demographics
    - Engagement across campus
    - Post-transfer success measures – first-semester GPA, retention, graduation, time/credits to graduation
  - What services and initiatives do they want and need?
  - What are their experiences navigating the transfer pipeline?
  - What are students' perceptions of existing transfer initiatives?

- Role of institutional reporting
- Data you can collect, analyze

Evidence Based

Institutionally Focused

Equity Advancing

Implications for Practice:
## Transfer is a Campus-wide Responsibility

- Academic affairs
  - Admissions
  - Academic advisors
  - Success program coordinators
  - Undergraduate research

- Student affairs
  - Orientation
  - Housing
  - Career services

- DEI division

- Executive leadership

Implications for Practice:
Weave Equity into Transfer Work, and Transfer into Equity Work

- Does transfer student programming address systemic inequalities faced by transfer students and their intersecting identities?

- Does DEI programming account for the enrollment patterns and experiences of transfer students?
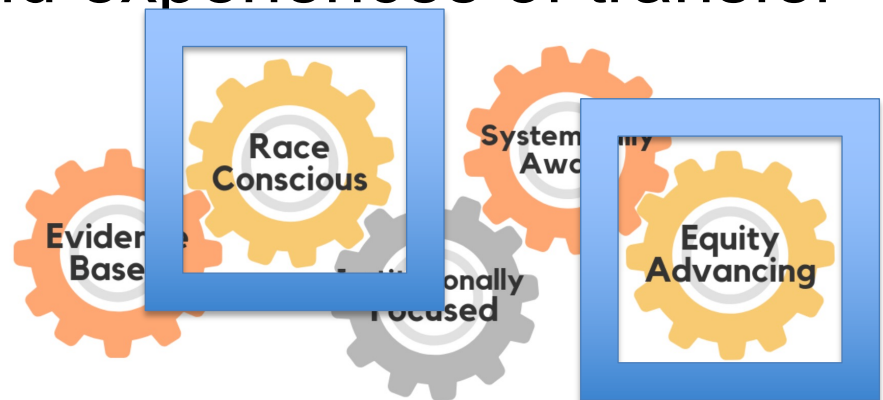
Questions?

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Thank you!

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