

MONEY MATTERS

Understanding the Value of Transfers

It's more important than ever for colleges and universities to pay attention to transfers—and for two- and four-year schools to work together.

By Kathy Kurz, James Scannell, and Samantha Veeder

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, enrollments at community colleges are growing rapidly. According to 2004 data (the most recent) from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), almost 40 percent of all students enrolled in higher education institutions are enrolled at two-year institutions. There are many reasons for this growth, but two are most significant.

First, community colleges have evolved from their roots in meeting local training and retraining needs to today serving a more traditional college age population. Some community colleges are even adding residence halls to enable them to serve a broader geographic base.

Second, these institutions provide a cost-effective alternative for the first two years of a four-year education. This can be particularly attractive to students wishing to keep debt low. As a result, enrollments are growing in programs designed to be transferable. Other programs take students through all four years of school. The second largest institution in the country, **Miami Dade College** (formerly Miami Dade Community College) began offering Bachelor of Science degrees in 2003.

Some four-year institutions are seeing the growth in community college enrollments as a threat, viewing two-year institutions as competitors. We would argue, however, that it would be far more productive for two- and four-year institutions to work as partners, ensuring that the transition from a two-year institution to a four-year institution is as seamless as possible for students.



On average, the typical transfer generates more net tuition revenue than the average freshman.

FIRST-CLASS ENROLLMENT, SECOND-CLASS TREATMENT

Recruited actively and served well, transfers can become an important and particularly attractive enrollment stream at four-year institutions. Why? For one, they predominately take upper-division classes, which are more likely to be underenrolled than entry-level, general education courses. And on average, the typical transfer generates more net tuition revenue than the average freshman. This happens in part because transfers have access to more loan resources than freshmen. In addition, because transfers are typically considering fewer alternatives, they often are not as price sensitive as freshmen.

Transfers also often bring a focus, maturity, and different perspective to the

classroom that can enrich discussion. In addition, those entering as upperclassmen frequently place less demand on campus housing. Finally, they have a proven track record of academic accomplishments at the postsecondary level.

Despite these advantages, some four-year institutions of higher ed treat transfers as second-class citizens. For example, some IHEs will only provide evaluations of transfer credit after the student is admitted, and the turnaround time on these evaluations can often stretch into weeks or even months because of institutional policies requiring faculty review or because of other processing backlogs.

In addition, although most institutions carefully cultivate relationships with guidance counselors and even teachers at key feeder high schools, those same institutions may spend little or no time building bridges with community college counselors and faculty.

Transfers are also shut out of housing and courses at some higher ed institutions because they typically apply in late spring or early summer after housing assignments and preregistration for fall are complete. And frequently transfers are an afterthought when it comes to orientation programming, timely academic advisement, and registration for first- ▶

Kathy Kurz and Jim Scannell are partners in the enrollment management consulting firm Scannell & Kurz. Samantha Veeder, formerly the director of Financial Aid at Hobart and William Smith Colleges (N.Y.), is the firm's senior consultant. They can be reached via their website, www.scannellkurz.com.

MONEY MATTERS

semester courses as well as availability of academic scholarships.

VALUE RESPECTED

In contrast, institutions aware of the value of transfers develop clear articulation agreements with key feeder two-year schools and communicate those agreements to prospective transfers via the web and other vehicles before they even apply. They offer special orientation, academic advisement, and registration sessions for transfers, reserve space in housing and courses, and have specific scholarship resources set aside.

At **Iowa State University**, for example, under the Admissions Partnership Program (www.admissions.iastate.edu/partnership), students receive mentoring and guidance from both ISU and the community college they attend from the time they are accepted into the program. They are guaranteed acceptance into the university's bachelor's program as long as all program requirements are met. They also have opportunities to live in ISU housing, have access to career and other resources, and receive student pricing for athletic and other events before they are actually enrolled at ISU. Early orientation and registration at ISU are also available to program participants.

The Admissions Partnership Program has the additional advantage of building relationships between the advisors at participating community colleges and academic advisors at ISU. As Mark Harding, director of Enrollment Services, notes, "We just held an advisors forum on our campus for **Des Moines Area Community College** advisors and Iowa State advisors to review our progress, discuss issues, etc. It was well attended and a very positive experience for all involved."

Chris Belle-Isle, Career Center director at **Monroe Community College** (N.Y.), points out that keeping articulation agreements up to date requires resources from both two-year and four-year institutions: "It can't be the 17th thing on the assistant dean's plate." At MCC, the Career Center, with a staff of 11.5 professionals and support personnel, sends significant proposed curricular changes (new courses, new

programs, program changes, etc.) to the institution's four-year partners to make sure the new curriculum will be transferable. This is a critical process, given that two-thirds of all MCC students are planning to immediately go on to complete a four-year degree.

In addition, the Career Center team works with students to identify optimal course sets given their transfer goals, as well as to help those students in terminal degrees pursue their career goals, which may also include transfer.

Monroe Community College helps students identify optimal course sets given their transfer goals.

Although the Career Center facilitates the process, much of the communication is between faculty at MCC and at partner four-year institutions. For example, under a grant from the Jack Kent Cook Foundation, faculty at **Cornell** and **Amherst College** (Mass.) are working with MCC faculty to identify and work with students from low- to moderate-income backgrounds to prepare them to transfer from MCC to these highly selective four-year institutions.

Many states are mandating articulation agreements between two-year and four-year state-supported institutions. In California, for example, the **University of California** system and **The California State University** system have agreed to accept the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC), a set of courses that prospective transfer students attending California community colleges may complete to satisfy the lower division general education requirements.

Some private institutions in California, including **Saint Mary's College of California**, have now agreed to accept all or part of IGETC as well. As Michael Beseda, vice provost for Enrollment at Saint Mary's, explains, "Since most California students are looking at UC or CSU campuses, accepting IGETC enhances the possibility that

SMC will be within the mix of schools transfer students consider. IGETC also works well with the 20-plus articulation agreements that we have with California community colleges."

TRANSFER STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Some institutions that have been less than enthusiastic about transfer enrollments believe that, unless they have a student for the full four years, they cannot achieve the outcomes they desire for their students. This voice is most often heard from faculty.

To address this concern, research should be conducted to better understand what differences may exist between graduates who began as freshmen and those who transferred from two-year schools. For example, do the two populations have different cumulative GPAs at graduation? Do they have different success in acceptance to graduate school or in careers? Do they have different alumni giving participation rates? It is important to quantify these matters in order to confirm hypotheses or dispel false beliefs.

Data about the achievements of transfer students should also be shared with community college partners so they know about their former students' successes. Similarly, it's important to share information about how four-year campuses, particularly private institutions, are making their costs affordable to transfer students.

At four-year institutions that are serious about serving transfers, transfers can represent as much as 30 percent of new student enrollments. For many four-year institutions today, transfers are needed in significant numbers to meet overall enrollment goals, given the mobility of student populations. The rest need transfers for educational reasons.

In order to serve their students well, community colleges need to prepare them for the next step in their journey—which more and more frequently now involves continued education. Collaboration and cooperation between two- and four-year schools is no longer a luxury (if it ever was). It is a necessity. **U**