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Jennifer's Conference Takeaways

National Transfer Student Ambassador Jennifer Hernandez from the University of Illinois at Chicago reflects on her experience as a TSA attending the NISTS 2019 annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia, February 13-15, 2019.



What were your original thoughts on transfer professionals/initiatives, and how did they change with your conference exposure?

Hearing from staff members who genuinely want to improve the experience of transfers reminded me of all the staff and faculty who helped me through my transfer journey. So many people I met are the point person for transfer, lacking the resources and support to do their jobs to their job the way they want to. I was reminded that a college is only a sum of its parts, and those parts include personnel.

The overarching theme of the conference was, "Working Together to Simplify Transfer." What were some ways you learned that could simplify transfer?

As an English major, I probably shouldn't have been so surprised that rhetoric was a hot topic in the room. The way administrators often address new students as if we are all first-years, the lack of perceived space for transfers in first-year student events, first-year-oriented questions copied and pasted onto transfer college applications… These are all simple communication issues, not resource issues. Especially when a student is first scoping out a college, setting the tone is so important.



What did you learn from the other Transfer Student Ambassadors?

After leaving my community college, I have found it difficult to let in UIC (my receiving institution) as part of my identity, but the other TSAs expressed so much love and affection for their institutions. When Taylor wasn't exactly met with a welcome wagon, she decided to push for change and to run for student government. Bianca stuck around to work at Baylor, and Jay advertises his campus town like it's some kind of resort. Coming back to UIC, I decided to get in touch with the professors I hadn't seen in a while, and I bought a little spirit wear, trying my UIC identity on for size. To my surprise, it feels right.



What was your biggest takeaway?

In Dr. Tia Brown McNair's keynote speech, I liked how easily she flipped the script: If a college expects a student to become college-ready, colleges should also become student-ready. While many colleges are ready to accept a traditional college student whose only obligation is to the university, our socio-economic environment changes, and students fit this mold less and less. The structure of a college is difficult to parse apart when you spend your days inside of it, but researchers have stepped outside of day-to-day practice to observe, and I genuinely appreciate those efforts. This week felt like an intellectual retreat, and I immersed myself in the positive energy and bright ideas in each and every room.

What are you going to do next in regard to transfer based on something you learned at the conference?

I'm doing research at UIC on how university policies and procedures impact transfer students and their interactions with staff members. The NISTS conference made me incredibly interested in the staff side, and I changed the ratio of my interviews to include equal numbers of students and staff. I realized that if I really want to know why transfer students experience their receiving institutions in a particular way, I would need to zoom in on the university, the behind-the-scenes, and look for patterns that might help explain what's going on. So far, these interviews have been incredibly helpful, both to my research and to me as a transfer. I see the spirit of NISTS living in my campus, and that makes me happy.



#NISTS2019 #transferstudentambassadors #studentadvocacy