

**Title**

Transfer Students in their Senior Year: Learning from their Experiences

**Topic**

Senior-Year Experience, Transfer Students

**Session Abstract**

This study examines how the experiences of college seniors vary based on transfer student status and what we can learn from transfer students who successfully transition and graduate from a four-year institution. Using data from the 2015 College Senior Survey (CSS), the findings will shed light on how the undergraduate experience varies for transfer and non-transfer students, highlighting the areas in which the transfer students are particularly successful. The session will include a discussion of what we can learn from graduating seniors who successfully navigated the transition in order to improve the experience of all transfer students.

**Evidence of Assessment**

Data for this study come from the 2015 College Senior Survey (CSS), an exit survey for graduating seniors and part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). Originally designed as a follow-up to the CIRP Freshman Survey (TFS), the CSS can also serve as a stand-alone instrument collecting information on a wide range of college outcomes and post-college goals and plans, including academic achievement and engagement, student-faculty interaction, cognitive and affective development, student goals and values, satisfaction with the college experience, degree aspirations and post-college plans. Institutions use CSS to evaluate college impact, learn about students' curricular and extracurricular experiences, and assess specific undergraduate programs.

As the 2015 CSS data are not yet available, preliminary analyses were conducted on the 2014 data set, including just over 12,300 students from 75 institutions. Nearly 20 percent (approximately 2,400 students) of this sample indicated that they transferred from either a 2-year or 4-year institution.

Mean scores on CSS Constructs (created prior to this study using Item Response Theory), including Sense of Belonging, Pluralistic Orientation, and Social Agency, were compared using independent samples t-tests. Frequencies and crosstabs for individual items were also utilized to compare students' experiences on topics such as faculty-student interaction, civic engagement, classroom experiences, and post-graduate plans.

**Detailed Summary**

The presentation will begin with a brief discussion of the background of the study and survey instrument. The preliminary findings from the 2014 College Senior Survey include just over 12,300 students from 75 institutions. Nearly 20 percent of this sample (approximately 2,400 students) indicated that they transferred into their current 4-year institution from a 2-year or a different 4-year institution.

Transfer students are more sensitive to cost. Transfer students reported that they borrowed an average of \$26,241 for college expenses (median = \$15,000), while non-transfer students borrowed \$3,300 less on average (mean = \$22,868; median = \$8,000). Nearly half (49.3%) of transfer students contributed money to help support their family, compared to less than one-third (30.8%) of non-transfer students. Over the past year, transfer students had less financial support from family resources (35.3% reporting \$6,000 or more) compared to non-transfer students (55.3% reporting \$6,000 or more) and aid which does not have to be repaid (45.8% vs. 62% reporting \$6,000 or more, respectively).

Data from both the constructs and individual items will be compared for both transfer and non-transfer students, highlighting both strengths and areas for growth for the transfer population. For example, transfer students scored higher on the Social Agency and Civic Awareness constructs than their non-transfer peers, but lower on the Leadership and Civic Engagement constructs. Transfer students were slightly less satisfied overall and showed significantly lower scores on the Sense of Belonging construct. Finally, transfer students demonstrated higher scores on the Pluralistic Orientation construct and fewer Negative Cross-Race Interaction experiences. It

is clear that transfer students have social and civic interests, but it is possible that their lower levels of engagement are a function of time. Perhaps campuses can leverage the areas in which transfer students are particularly strong. For example, incorporating a service learning component into an upper division class that counts for their major or a capstone experience would foster transfer student engagement.

While transfer students were more likely to have taken a women's studies course (32.6% compared to 27.0%) and an ethnic studies course (54.7% compared to 51.2%), they were less likely to have attended a racial/cultural awareness workshop (34.5% compared to 43.1%) than their non-transfer peers. This follows other findings that transfer students, while engaged in the classroom, may be less engaged in campus activities. Again, institutions may better serve transfer students by incorporating service or other engagement experiences into the curriculum.

### **Implications for Institutional Improvement or Advancement**

Research on transfer students often focuses on the point of transfer and the transition into the new institution. While this time period is very important, research also needs to focus on students who have successfully transitioned into a 4-year (or a different 4-year) institution. Comparing the experiences of transfer and non-transfer students right before they graduate can shed light on the entire college experience, highlighting areas in which transfer students have been particularly successful.

Data collected at college completion can be combined with previous survey data or institutional data to add another level of analysis to the complex transfer process. Further, focusing on areas in which transfer students succeed can help redefine how we study the transfer experience, rather than focusing solely on aspects of the college experience in which transfer students lag behind their non-transfer peers. Students are increasingly mobile, whether through part-time enrollment, enrollment at multiple institutions, online education, or transfer programs. Collecting and analyzing data at multiple critical time points of this transition can have a lasting effect on how we study and serve our students.

**Title**

Using Distance Learning Techniques to Advise and Support First-Year Students

**Topic**

Advising (Career and Academic)

**Session Abstract**

Innovative design incorporates online instruction pedagogy to advise and support first-year students. William & Mary has designed two student centered courses, Tribe Studies and College Studies, intended to assist freshmen and transfer students' as they transition into college. When designing a course for first-year students taking a college online course for the first time, we sought to include many opportunities for interaction in the classroom. Now in its third year, the first-year advising course has overcome many obstacles and challenges faced when offering a mandatory summer course to new students through electronic delivery.

**Summary of Relevant Literature**

Literature documents positive impacts of first-year programs on student success, increased faculty collaboration and innovation. Institutions that incorporate First-Year Experience projects demonstrate higher levels of student satisfaction with institution, improved curricular integration, increased student utilization of campus resources, and meaningful interaction between students and faculty. (National Resource Center, 2006). Kuh (2008) notes best programs emphasize essential learning outcomes such as critical thinking, communication, information literacy, and collaboration.

Researchers recommend instructors use various approaches, such as incorporating technology and distance learning techniques, to enhance student attainment of essential learning outcomes (AAC&U, 2007; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005). Courses designed to incorporate a variety of innovative, instructional approaches have significant cognitive impact on students and increase potential for academic success (AAC&U, 2007; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005).

Tinto (1975) observes a student's ability to integrate into an institution on academic and social levels is correlated with retention. Academic advising is effective for students to feel connected to campus and someone cares (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, 2005). Adult learners find satisfaction if they feel connected to other students and staff (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Advisors understand the importance of relationship building from the earliest point of student contact with the institution (Bland, 2003). Strategies used in distance education have many applications for enhancing relationships essential for increased satisfaction when beginning a college experience (Gunawarden & Zittle, 1997; Mu & Gnywali, 2003; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000; Krause, 2006). Research identifies strategies for distance advising success and argues distance advising is similar to traditional advising (Varney, 2009).

**Detailed Summary**

Innovative design incorporates online instruction pedagogy to advise and support first-year students. William & Mary has designed two student centered courses, Tribe Studies and College Studies, to support the entire entering class of freshmen and transfer students' as they transition into college. When designing a course for freshmen taking a college online course for the first time, we sought to include many opportunities for interaction in the classroom. Now in its third year, the first-year advising course has overcome many obstacles and challenges faced when offering a summer course to new students through electronic delivery.

This session demonstrates collaborative course design focused on student-centered learning and essential learning outcomes associated with development of college academic strategies, peer support, and life-long skills including problem-solving, inquiry, integration of learning, and communication. Assessment of learning and sense of community is embedded in course design. A large and successful peer advising program provides support to professional advisors and students.

The presentation shares ideas for designing a first-year advising experience that utilizes collaboration between academic and student affairs units across campus to promote student engagement, interaction and collaboration between students and staff. Discover how distance learning techniques enhance various methods for delivering academic advising services and skills that transfer into the traditional classroom. Participants will explore how to incorporate AAC&Us essential learning outcomes; discover how to establish and administrate a “no cost” program for peer advisors who advise new students in a “virtual and totally electronic environment to help all students build a network of peer support; and review a variety of assessment tools. Join this session and share ideas and possibilities for implementing a similar first-year online academic advising course at your institution.

### **Implications/Applicability for Practice**

Thoughtful course design can lead to academic achievement by providing enhanced affiliation with faculty and peers through social interactions made either face-to-face or in an online environment (Gunawarden & Zittle, 1997; Mu & Gnywali, 2003; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000; Krause, 2006). Tribe Studies and College Studies is an innovative first-year summer course designed to address the needs of undeclared students and presents a unique opportunity to contribute to the literature through pedagogy and assessment. Desire to meet the needs for delivering advising services, academic requirements, and changes in the college curriculum increase demand for access to advisors. Institutional retention goals and student requests for increased contact with advisors coupled with fiscal challenges led to creative incorporation of distance learning techniques and online instruction. Developers worked on the premise that technology coupled with extensive collaboration among professionals across campus would support the ultimate goal of delivering quality education (Ragan, 2000). Future research could focus on the impact of how incorporating distance learning techniques may create an intricate and complex interaction between neural, cognitive, motivational, affective, and social processes so learning could occur (Azevendo, 2002).

Recently, researchers are recommending that instructors use variety approaches, such as incorporating technology and distance learning techniques, to enhance student attainment of essential learning outcomes (AAC&U, 2007; Pascarella, E.t. & Terenzini, P.T., 2005). FYE programs intentionally designed to incorporate a variety of innovative, instructional approaches have significant cognitive impact on students and increase potential for academic success (AAC&U, 2007; Pascarella, E.t. & Terenzini, P.T., 2005). Incorporating distance learning technique with academic advising services and peer support has the potential to provide data for online initiatives to promote student engagement in education across campus.