

# The System Transfer Experience

Findings and Recommendations from a Qualitative Study

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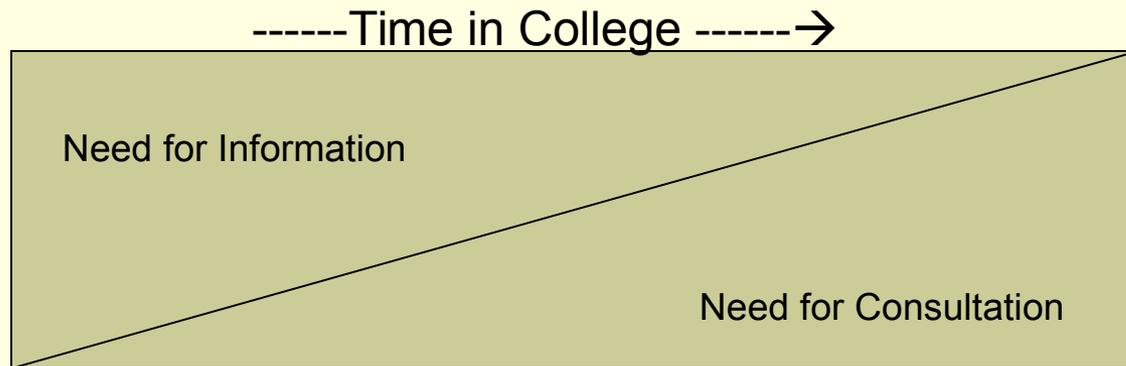
# Purpose of Presentation

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- Overview of the University of South Carolina (USC) System
- Report on findings of a qualitative study of students transferring from the USC system campuses to the flagship campus in Columbia.
  
- Best Practices
- Current Practices
- Further Study

# Applicability of this Study to All Who Work With Transfers

- Students' information/advice needs as they progress through college



Adapted from (Crockett, Noel-Levitz

2007)

Our Premise: This “needs progression” is a challenge for transfer students

# USC System Info of Interest

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- Eight campus system
- “Flagship Campus” – USC Columbia
- Three “Senior” baccalaureate institutions
- Four, “Regional” primarily two-year institutions

# USC System Info of Interest (Continued)

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## Fall 2008

- The USC System enrolled 41,518 students (headcount)
- USC Columbia has 19,765 undergraduate & 6,218 graduate students
- USC Senior campus undergraduate enrollments:
  - Aiken-3,078
  - Beaufort-1,502
  - Upstate-4,999
- USC Regional campus enrollments:
  - Lancaster-1,666
  - Salkehatchie-965
  - Sumter-1,235
  - Union-367

# Migration

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- Fall 2007- 380 students moved from the Regional and Senior Campuses to USC Columbia
- This migration represents 58% of movement within the state to all SC public baccalaureate institutions
- An additional 211 moved to the Columbia campus Spring 2008

# Why the Interest?

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- The System Affairs Office in Columbia is responsible for providing transition services to these “change of campus” students.

# Quantitative Research

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- 2003 cohort - 436 Senior & Regional campus students migrated to USC Columbia
- First semester GPA at the Columbia campus was 2.58
- Five academic years later, 57% had graduated, 8% were still enrolled and 35% had left without a degree
- Total transfers (system and external) in 2003 cohort = 1676. Five academic years later, 54% had graduated, 9% were still enrolled and 37% had left without a degree

# Qualitative Study

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- Why did we pursue?
  - Numbers were only part of the story – desired a “rich, thick description” (Merriam, 1988)
  - Desire for continuous improvement
  - Feeling of responsibility to USC “family”
  - Stakeholder scrutiny

# Qualitative Study

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- How did we accomplish?
  - Networking/campus contacts
  - Graduate student class project
  - Doctoral student dissertation topic
  - Focus groups & individual interviews using structural interview format (Appendix A)

# Qualitative Study

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- Who did we talk to?
  - Thirteen students out of potential pool of 444 changing campuses to Columbia for either Spring 2006 or Fall 2006

# Profile

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**Gender/Race:** Eight Females/ 4 African American  
Five Males/ 1 African American

**Age:** Five were 19, two each were 20,21, and 22, one was 29

**Campuses Represented:** Aiken-5

Beaufort-7

Lancaster-4

Salkehatchie-1

Sumter-1

Union-0

Upstate-1

See Appendix B for performance data.

# Student Voices

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- Should I stay or should I go?
  - Reasons to attend system campus:
    - Small campus environment
    - Get grade point average up
    - “Far enough to be close, but far enough to be away.”
    - Did not get into the “main” campus
    - Financial-cheaper to attend system school and live at home

# Student Voices

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- Should I stay or should I go?
  - Reasons to change campus:
    - Not able to complete degree at current campus
    - Planned to change to a main campus from beginning
    - Looking for a bigger campus/city

# Student Voices

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- Expectations of courses
  - Warned that they would be treated “just like a number.”
  - “I’m glad I was at [my regional campus] because it did teach me in the smaller setting. [It] built my confidence.”

# Student Voices

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- Actuality

- “Always willing to take questions. Always willing to answer. Always wanting you to come to office hours. Even during class or before class, just coming up and talking to them. After class just staying awhile and talking to them. They don’t mind that. And I haven’t had a professor that’s told me, ‘No, I don’t have time for you to be asking me questions now’.”

# Student Voices

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- Actuality

- “Can’t ask questions during lecture because then the professor can’t finish lecture. Professors encourage you to use office hours, but you either have class conflicts or they aren’t there.”

# Student Voices

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- Expectations of Involvement
  - Expected more opportunity to be involved
- Actuality
  - If they were active at their regional campus, they were active at the main campus.
  - Planned to be involved at a later time.

# Student Voices

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- The process of changing campuses
  - “I would say to people that are trying to move here that the change-of-campus form is really important. I had a lot of friends who did not turn theirs in on time and while I had a letter saying I was accepted here, they didn’t even know if USC had gotten theirs.”
  - “I had to refill out the papers. It started when I was thinking about being in education with math and the paperwork was sent to the education department.”

# Student Voices

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- The process of changing campuses
  - “I had to do a lot of this stuff on my own. Like getting my transfer sheet, getting everything sent, filled out, going to different people around the campus.”
  - “Also, I talked to the staff. And then I did some on my own by just going to the website and tearing the website apart.”
  - “I learned more from the website than I did from my advisor.”

# Student Voices

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- Advice from these students
  - Focus on study skills
  - Figure out parking
  - Establish good relationship with advisor, faculty, and staff
  - Know your major
  - Get your paperwork in early
  - Consider the financial aspect
  - Expect change!

# Best Practices

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- Special web pages
- Student mentors
- Transfer orientation programs
- Transfer student ombudsperson  
(NACADA monograph Kerr, King, & Grites, 2004)

# Current Practices

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- Welcome Letter
- Transition Guide (Appendix C)
- Transfer Mentoring
- Gamecock Connection
- Campus Presentations
- System Office advocacy/“legwork”

# Current Research

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- Quantitative - more comparison group data generation
- Qualitative - “next wave” focus group/ individual interviews
  - Add to existing findings
  - Added emphasis on use of technology and social network

# Future Activities

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- Transition Guide will be web-based and interactive
- Communication enhancements - getting information to system students earlier

Questions/ Comments/ Ideas

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**Thank You!**

# Contact Information

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# Appendix A

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- **Focus Group Questions for System Change of Campus Students**

- 1. Why did you choose to enroll at your previous USC campus?
- 2. Why did you decide to change campuses to the Columbia campus?
- 3. What were some of your expectations concerning coming to USC Columbia and how have they been met or unmet?
- 4. What were the major differences in your experiences at your previous campus and the experiences you've had here at USC Columbia?
  - Probe 1 – Positive
  - Probe 2 – Negative
- 5. Are you involved at this campus?
  - Probes – working, organizations, activities
- 6. If you could give advice to students considering changing campuses to USC Columbia, what would that advice be?
  - Probe – Would you do it again?
- 7. What did your previous campus provide in the way of information or guidance related to your change of campus?
  - Probe – if student answers “not much,” - How did you prepare for the change?
- 8. What did USC Columbia provide in the way of information or guidance related to your change of campus?
  - Probe – same as 7 above
- 9. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experience?

# Appendix B (transfer GPA/ after one academic year at Columbia)

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2.33/2.78

2.90/3.18

3.46/2.53

3.05/3.19

2.68/2.94

3.40/3.15

3.37/3.12

3.95/3.93

2.24/2.25

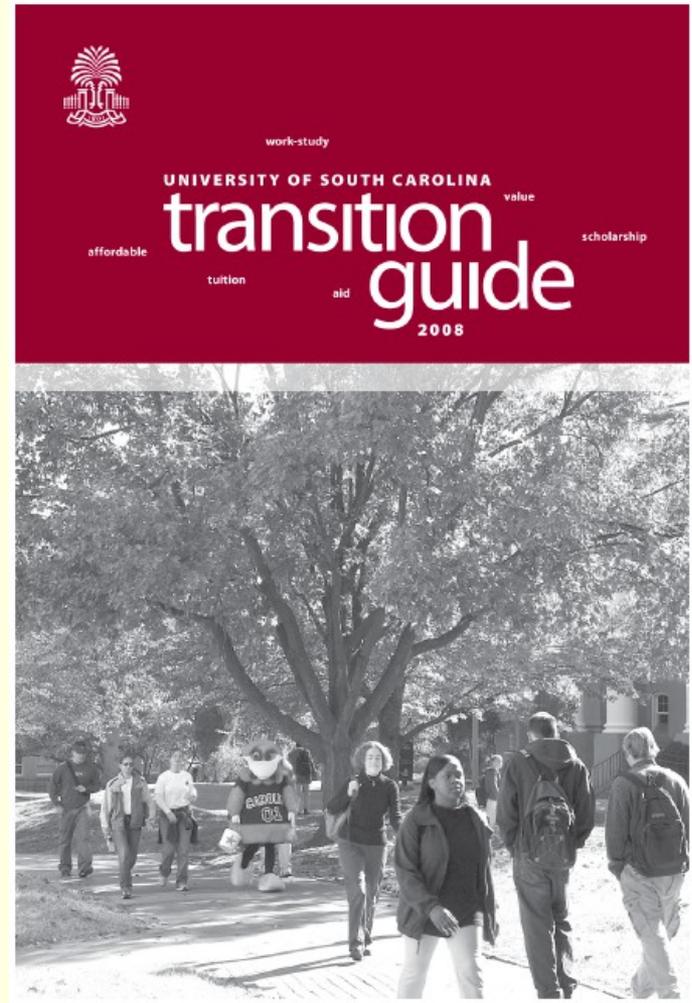
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Majors Pursued: Economics, Education (2), English, Exercise Science, History (3), Journalism, Math (3), Sociology

# Appendix C

- Transition Guide



# References

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- Kerr, T.J., King, M.C., & Grites, T.J. (2004). Advising Transfer Students: Issues and Strategies. *National Academic Advising Association, 12*.
- Merriam, J.B. (1988) Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass