



Demystifying Higher Education Transfer

Identifying common barriers facing transfer students in Oregon

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Executive Summary

This project sought to identify barriers facing transfer students as they transition from two- to four-year higher education institutions in Oregon.

The major barriers facing transfer students were identified by this research to be:

- No or Inadequate Advising
- Perceived Lack of Support Services After Transfer
- Misunderstanding of Financial Aid
- Lack of Coordinated, Meaningful, and Accurate Information About Transfer Requirements

The research uncovered frustration in every facet of the transfer process. From community college students to students who had successfully transferred to a four-year university, and from transfer professionals at both two-year and four-year institutions, there was consternation that the transfer process was not more transparent and predictable. Students and staff expressed the idea that transfer was a moving target, and that things were always changing without notice, or that they could not keep up with the changes even if they were aware of them.

To overcome the barriers identified by this research, we make 5 recommendations: (1) A universal question on all community college applications indicating whether the applicant intends to transfer; (2) Regular visits by four-year transfer staff to two-year colleges to acquaint future transfer students with four-year staff; (3) A transfer orientation specific to transfer students, held at the four-year institutions prior to transfer; (4) A back-facing statewide online portal that tracks students through their time in higher education in Oregon; and (5) Expansion of scholarships and grant opportunities for transfer students after transfer.

Introduction

The University of Oregon's Master of Public Administration (MPA) program culminates with a community-based capstone group project that involves real-world policy implications.

This capstone team's research is guided by the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), a 14-member state commission established in 2011 to ensure an accessible, affordable, and coordinated network of options for postsecondary education.¹ HECC staff have tasked the capstone group with designing and implementing a qualitative research study to identify common barriers facing two-year transfer students in Oregon as they attempt to transfer credits to four-year universities to complete their bachelor's degrees.

Project Background

In 2011, the Oregon Legislature set an ambitious 40-40-20 goal to increase the general population's education level. The goal is for 40% of citizens to have a bachelor's degree or higher, 40% to have an associate's degree, and 20% to have a high school diploma or equivalent. As part of the effort to reach the 40-40-20 goal, the Oregon legislature passed House Bill 2525 in 2015, which amended ORS 341.430 relative to standards for applying community college credit toward a bachelor's degree.

HECC

HECC is a state agency established in 2011 to advise the Oregon State Legislature, the Governor, and the Chief Education Office on higher education policy. HECC focuses in the areas of: investing resources to maximize student success, increasing postsecondary affordability, improving pathways to and within postsecondary institutions, and connecting job-seekers with employment.

The Mandate

House Bill 2525 (2015) mandated that HECC develop policies, practices and a research plan to aid students who transfer from community colleges to state universities in Oregon. HECC has access to quantitative data specific to transfer students, but does not have qualitative research identifying barriers facing transfer students in Oregon.

Capstone Project

HECC tasked this capstone group with identifying common barriers affecting students in their transfer of credits from two- to four-year higher education institutions in Oregon.

Our team examined the transfer student experience through qualitative data collection, including focus groups and an online survey. We worked with the dyads of Lane Community College-

¹ <http://www.oregon.gov/highered/Pages/index.aspx>

University of Oregon in Eugene, and Linn-Benton Community College-Oregon State University in Corvallis. At each institution, we conducted a focus group with students in an effort to identify common transfer barriers. We also conducted two nominal focus groups with transfer professionals at UO and LCC to supplement the data obtained from the student focus groups.

Research Purpose

The purpose of our qualitative research project was to determine the following:

1. What do transfer students at key stages of their academic progress tell us about their experiences with regard to transferability of credits, effective practices that aided their academic progress, or barriers they encountered specific to transfer or articulation of course credits?
2. How can educational institutions and/or HECC assist with policies or practices that encourage transferability of coursework or timely information on applicability of credits?

Research Methodology

This study was composed of two types of focus groups and an online survey of eligible college students. We conducted focus groups with two- and four-year students and with transfer professionals. Data from both of these groups was important in order to more completely answer our two research questions, especially with regard to policies or practices that supported the transfer process.

In addition to the focus groups, we distributed a 14-question Qualtrics survey to eligible students via email to supplement the data we collected from the student focus groups. Students surveyed did not participate in a focus group. The survey asked largely the same questions as the focus groups. It consisted of multiple choice, Likert scale, and fill in the blank questions.

Between the student focus groups and the Qualtrics survey, we obtained data from 39 unique students - 28 from four-year institutions, and 11 from two-year institutions.

Student Focus Groups

To obtain qualitative data from two- and four-year students in Oregon, we conducted four (4) focus groups, one at each of: Lane Community College (LCC), University of Oregon (UO), Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC), and Oregon State University (OSU). The client requested that two (2) dyads be utilized in this research to gather a more complete picture of the transfer process between the most seamless institutional pairings. The dyads of LCC-UO and LBCC-OSU were chosen to meet this research criterion.

The four student focus groups were conducted in person in March and April 2016. All three capstone group members were in attendance at each student focus group. LBCC and LCC contacted students meeting the research parameters on our behalf. OSU sent the research team a

list of students to contact, which we did via email. Staff at UO sent emails to students meeting the research parameters and asked them to contact the research team. Once we received their emails, we reached out to them regarding scheduling. The method for contacting students was correlated with the number of students who attended each focus group (see below).

The focus groups contained the following number of students:

- OSU, 5 students
- LBCC, 4 students
- LCC, 3 students
- UO, 1 student

One of the three capstone group members facilitated the student focus group, while the other two group members took notes. Staff from HECC attended the focus groups at LBCC, LCC, and UO, and took notes and asked follow up questions. This information may be relevant for future studies seeking to recreate this research methodology.

For the list of questions utilized during the student focus groups, please see Appendix A.

Focus Groups With Transfer Professionals

We conducted two nominal focus groups² with transfer professionals at both LCC and UO, separately.

The LCC focus group was comprised of 7 individuals involved in the transfer process. Their titles were:

- English Faculty
- Music Faculty
- Academic Advisor
- Dean, Counseling and Advising
- Coordinator, Student Learning and Curriculum Development
- Director, Institutional Research, Assessment and Planning
- Associate Dean, Center for Accessible Resources

The UO focus group was comprised of 3 individuals involved in the transfer process. Their titles were:

- Academic Advisor
- Director, Office of Admissions
- University Registrar

² A nominal focus group is a highly structured process for working with groups in order to minimize personal interaction and focus on idea generation.

We utilized the nominal group structure to minimize cross-talk and encourage individuals to speak only when prompted by the facilitator. This helped to ensure that the participants answered the questions based on their own experience only. The LCC focus group was 45 minutes long, whereas the UO focus group was 60 minutes long.

All three capstone group members attended the LCC focus group, whereas two group members attended the UO focus group. Staff from HECC did not attend either transfer professional focus group, as it was this group’s belief that their presence would impact the participants’ willingness to be frank and forthcoming.

For a list of questions asked during the focus group and a detailed description of the facilitation process, please see Appendix A.

Qualtrics Survey

To solicit eligible students to take the Qualtrics survey, we sent the survey link to our points of contact at each of the four institutions to disburse to students. Twenty-six students completed the Qualtrics survey. Please see the table below for specific information regarding responses.

For a list of questions asked on the survey and additional information, refer to Appendix B.

Institution	Number of Respondents
University of Oregon	19
Oregon State University	3
Lane Community College	4
Linn-Benton Community College	0

Explanation of Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data, we first attempted to utilize the statistical analysis software R, which is an open source quantitative analysis software akin to Stata. However, the amount of input needed to perform substantive, meaningful analysis in R was not able to be obtained through this study. Therefore, the results of the R analysis were discarded and are not reported here.

With respect to the qualitative data obtained from students and transfer professionals via the focus groups, we analyzed the data by grouping the responses into themes, which are reported below. The themes were then fleshed out using details from the focus groups, and illustrative quotes from students and transfer professionals.

The Qualtrics survey data was analyzed using basic Excel functions and is reflected in tables and graphs in Appendix B.

Research Findings

Results from Focus Groups

1. Lack of consistent advising, lack of access to advising, and misinformed advisors were identified as major barriers for two-year students.

Over the course of the four student focus groups, students consistently voiced that academic advisors were misinformed, were unavailable, or were unidentified for the course of the students' tenure at their respective institutions. This runs in contravention to the crucial need for advising in the transfer process. As one LBCC student put it, “[a]dvising is the core of institutionalized education. A more involved advisor equals more involved and successful students.”

Students at every institution shared that if an individual did not yet have a major, or if that individual was not enrolled in an advising program like TRiO³, it was difficult to identify who their advisor was. Even when a student took the initiative to reach out to an advisor and schedule an appointment, advisors' availability was extremely limited. LBCC students felt there simply weren't enough advisors to meet the need. LBCC students also shared that it seemed like it was within each advisor's discretion whether to reach out to their advisees, which resulted in some students never being contacted by an advisor their entire time at LBCC.

³ TRiO is a federal program administered by the U.S. Department of Education that is designed to identify and provide services to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

All three LCC students reported that their advisors were minimally helpful. The students also shared that the general advisors were not helpful with regard to guiding them toward what classes to take to facilitate transfer in their majors. To the extent the students had relatively easy transfer experiences, they explained that it was due to their own initiative coordinating with advisors at UO (the receiving institution) and cross-referencing what they learned to ensure that the classes they were taking at LCC really would transfer and would count toward their major at UO. One LCC student shared that she would have benefitted from advising that emphasized classes that complemented her major, but also fulfilled transfer requirements.

To the extent students saw general (non-major) advisors at their institutions, it was predominantly a function of the student's own initiative in finding out who their advisor was, and making an appointment. Only one institution - OSU - mandated that students saw an advisor as part of the transfer orientation process. All other institutions may have encouraged it, but did not seem to have any mechanism in place to ensure that every student was eventually connected with an advisor; indeed, many students weren't. A UO student shared that meeting with an advisor seemed voluntary, and he had never been contacted by an advisor.

A number of students shared that they felt pressured by their advisors to earn the AAOT⁴, even though it was not necessarily appropriate for their major or career goals. In fact, those that had completed the AAOT were often still required to complete 100-level classes once they transferred to a four-year institution. One LCC student was initially pursuing her AAOT, but after speaking to a UO advisor, she decided direct transfer was best. However, she discovered that some of the credits she had completed toward the AAOT did not transfer in the same way if they weren't in the AAOT "package," so her new plan to direct transfer left her with numerous credits she no longer needed. As one LCC staff member eloquently opined, "the AAOT is a political solution to a pedagogical problem."

Other students talked about being "sold" classes by their advisors, even though the degrees did not necessarily fit the students' goals. One student who had attended Rogue Community College prior to transferring to OSU stated frankly, "what saved me was I never used advisors at Rogue. I used TRiO." Another OSU student stated, "had I take my advisor's advice instead of my professor's, I would have ended up with a [community college] degree that I didn't want." A third OSU student shared that he did not realize he could transfer to a four-year college without first earning a community college degree, based on the information from his advisor.

⁴ The Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer degree ("AAOT") reflects the core curriculum of a liberal arts education, and ostensibly fulfills the lower division general education requirements at any four-year college in the Oregon public university system.

The students who reported positive advising relationships had seen an advisor in their major department, most often who was also an instructor in that department. These individuals were most consistently available to students, showed that they were dedicated to the student's success, and mandated regular check-ins to ensure that the student was still on track to transfer. One issue with this approach, however successful it may be, is that for students who have undeclared majors, they do not have the option to see a major advisor, as they have no home department.

Numerous students at both two- and four-year institutions reported very positive experiences with TRiO, especially with regard to advising and guidance toward transfer.

2. Perceived lack of support services at four-year institutions left transfer students feeling unsupported after transfer.

Students in all four focus groups spoke about the supportive environment at community college as opposed to their perception of a lack of support at four-year universities.

Many students reported that they attended community college for small class sizes and availability of faculty and staff. They wanted the more intimate setting, and the university option seemed personally and/or socially daunting. An OSU student shared: “[community college] gave me time to explore. At a four-year university it’s all about getting it done.” This sentiment was mirrored by an LCC student who explained, “[c]ommunity college is the perfect way to ease yourself into academia.”

Another LCC student who was in the process of transferring to UO shared,

I had a really good experience at LCC. LCC did a fairly good job of getting people in the school mindset, having a schedule, going to classes. But I do know that I have friends who have transferred from LCC to UO who have dropped out because they weren't really prepared. There are some things that are academically harder to do at the university. Mostly the difficulty of the transfer for me was the workload, and that's a bit of a shock. The workload at UO was more, it's not harder. More papers, more reading, more time investment. 200 level classes at LCC are completely different from 200 level classes at UO.

Students who had transferred from community college to both OSU and UO shared that the amount of work required at the four-year university was beyond what was required of them at community college. It was not that they were *academically* unprepared to complete the work, but that the *workload* was noticeably larger at the four-year university.

Students also stated they were more able to find services, such as clubs, TRiO, and other support organizations, at the community college. While these services are often available at the four-year institutions, students reported that they were unaware how to access the services. As one LCC student explained, “I feel like starting here [at LCC] has been beneficial because it’s smaller and I feel like there’s a lot of programs here that really want to help. There’s a lot of resources here. I’m not sure if they have those resources at UO.” An OSU student who relied heavily on TRiO services

shared that she would not have known about the TRiO program at OSU if not for the director at her community college.

In sum, the supportive environment to which they had become accustomed at a community college was not reported to be experienced by transfer students once they transferred to a four-year institution. Moreover, the transition from one campus to the other was reported to be difficult for students to navigate. Coupled with the higher workload and less knowledge of available services, the logistical transfer to another institution -- experienced as a perceived lack of support services -- was identified as a major barrier for transfer students in Oregon.

3. Lack of information about financial aid and the impact of credits on financial aid eligibility left some students without support in their final terms.

Another consistent theme among the students was that they were unaware that they could “max out” their financial aid. This was confirmed by transfer professionals at both LCC and UO. While it is the research team’s understanding that the financial aid program is promulgated and regulated by the federal government, the root of the instant problem appears to be a lack of communication between the community college financial aid offices and students.

Student Feedback

One LBCC student who was planning to transfer to OSU had earned 107 credits from a military school that did not transfer toward his degree (even as electives), but counted against his financial aid eligibility. Similarly, an OSU student shared that he received a lot of credit for participating in student government at his community college, but was shocked to discover that not only did the credits not transfer, but they counted toward his financial aid, resulting in lost funding.

An LCC student shared that many community college students believe that financial aid “resets” once they start at a four-year university. In her case, the student explained that financial aid at LCC “cut [her] off,” and she is hoping she can obtain more financial aid once she transfers to UO. Another LCC student shared that the financial aid staff were not as informed as they could be, and this student knew of several students who had to stop attending school after they lost funding for having too many credits.

Overall, approximately 10% of the students in the focus groups expressed a concern regarding financial aid eligibility upon transfer.

Transfer Professional Feedback

Both UO and LCC staff reinforced the information shared by students, and explained that transfer students often run out of financial support in their 5th year.

UO staff also shared that more financial aid is available to students who start at the university as freshmen, due to grants and scholarships, so the logic behind starting at community college to save

money is not universally applicable. This is especially true if a student has changed majors a number of times or took time to “explore” their major while in community college. For this reason, UO staff shared concern about the Oregon Promise program, to the extent that it will encourage students to attend community college straight out of high school, causing them to miss out on many funding opportunities available only to first-time freshmen.

LCC staff shared that financial aid is a primary barrier for their students who attempt to transfer to four-year universities. One LCC staff member explained that the transfer of equivalent classes is also inconsistent between two- and four-year universities. For instance, LCC’s theory courses are four credits, but UO’s are only two, causing LCC students use up their financial aid more quickly.

LCC staff also shared that students often declare the AAOT in order to obtain financial aid. However, as reported by both students and transfer staff, the AAOT is fraught with difficulty and often is not the best option for students intending to transfer.

4. Lack of information about transfer requirements delayed two-year students’ transfer to four-year universities.

Student Feedback

Many students reported that they took it upon themselves to research transfer requirements online. A number of students reported “googling” the requirements, and piecing them together between various online resources and information from peers and self-identified “advisors” (usually faculty members).

A number of OSU students in particular shared that they accessed articulation agreements online to attempt to enroll in transferable classes at their community college(s). However, one student reported that OSU maintains outdated articulation agreements in an online archive, which this student accessed and used to inform her class choices at community college.

Students at OSU and LBCC shared that they heard about transfer requirements from their peers. UO staff shared that this was frustrating to them, because it can perpetuate false information; however, the OSU students were uniformly positive about the accuracy of the information they heard from their peers with regard to both advising and transfer requirements.

One OSU student shared that she could have begun taking classes at OSU sooner had she been able to secure housing, but OSU did not offer any support for transfer students moving to Corvallis.

With regard to a transfer orientation, OSU students shared that they were told to attend the freshmen orientation, but did not receive any individualized information nor did they get connected to anyone to help them with the transfer process. One student who transferred from a California university explained that “it would have been helpful to sit down with an advisor during registration to help specifically with transfer students. The freshmen orientation wasn’t helpful. I had freshman standing until almost the end of fall term, because my credits didn’t transfer appropriately.”

One feature that helped LBCC identify potential transfer students was a question on the school's application which asked, "do you plan on transferring?" It then informed students of the dual degree program with OSU, and asked students if they qualified to check the box. Every LBCC student in the focus group was aware of the dual degree program with OSU, and were in various stages of utilizing that program to transfer. While not perfect, this process seemed to ease many of the burdens facing transfer students with respect to identifying who intended to transfer and making them aware of transfer resources.

Transfer Professional Feedback

LCC staff shared that the lack of consistency in transferring between institutions was a "nightmare for students." They shared the sentiment that the requirements were "different for every institution [the students] might want to transfer to." They also shared concern that some transfer credits were not being "honored" at the four-year institutions, particularly with regard to hard sciences. As a result, staff reported that students often had to take the courses again after they transferred.

Some LCC staff members were frustrated with the sheer number of articulation agreements in existence. For instance, one staff member explained that there were 8 articulation agreements for 6 institutions for business majors alone. Some institutions in particular (Western Oregon University was named) were difficult to even develop articulation agreements with in the first place, impeding the transfer process for students intending to satisfy their prerequisites before attending those institutions.

LCC staff also expressed frustration that they did not have enough staff members to do transcript evaluation for students prior to transfer. As a result, students are not aware of what credits and classes will transfer until right before they transfer. There was also a perception among LCC faculty that four-year institutions look down on community college curriculum, believing it "isn't up to standard." This was deemed an "elitist barrier." Staff shared that while this perception may not be directly stated, "it is felt. Sometimes it's hidden in the policies."

UO staff shared that it would help the transfer process if they could identify future transfer students when they were still at the community college. Staff shared that they believed they could reach students before they earned excess or nontransferable credits, and could better educate them about available resource earlier in the process. As an example, UO staff would like to explain that community college students do not obtain a degree audit from UO until they apply to transfer, which in many cases is too late to remedy many common pre-transfer pitfalls. However, UO staff did not express any plan or intention to develop policies to better support potential transfer students.

Qualtrics Survey Data

Most of the data obtained from students via the Qualtrics survey was consistent with the data obtained in the student focus groups.

For instance, 60% of the respondents obtained an AAOT or another transfer degree prior to transferring. Only 36% of the respondents noted that all of their credits transferred to the four-year university. Of the 64% that noted that some of their credits did not transfer, the number of transferable credits ranged from 5 to 42. Less than half of the respondents believed that the orientation process helped them locate transfer resources.

Students obtained information regarding the credits that would transfer from the following sources (students checked all that applied):

- Community college advisor - 36%
- University advisor - 60%
- Campus support group - 4%
- Google - 14%

Over half of the respondents believed that the transfer process could be improved. Students posited the following ideas to improve the transfer process:

- “More information about how/why my credits did not transfer and counted for nothing [at my four-year university].”
- “Better advising department at Lane Community College. They let people fumble around with no direction and their advisors are not as knowledgeable as they should be about the transfer process. ...That has extended my school by an entire school year.”
- “Further explanation of what credits would or wouldn’t transfer and why. Also explain clearly the general education requirements [at my four-year university].”
- “Transfer orientation. I don’t connect with 18 year olds anymore.”
- “I would have liked to be informed that the AAOT does not mean I met all of the general education requirements for a bachelor’s degree. Also, perhaps a mandatory meeting with each transfer student and an academic advisor. Seeking one out was complicated for me and I still felt like I didn’t get the answered I needed.”
- “Making the information more accessible online. I had to search quite a bit.”
- “Understanding that an Associate’s degree is not required to transfer to the University of Oregon might have changed my choices.”
- “Having a previous transfer student show new transfer students around the new campus, as networks are hard to build and they have more knowledge about how the transfer process works.”
- “A more in-depth transfer orientation. It was not very personal, and everyone got only 10 minutes with student advisors. Also, I didn’t know about most of the resources on campus.”

For the list of questions in the Qualtrics survey, additional responses, and graphs representing some of the data obtained, please see Appendix B.

Additional Information

Value of College

Students interviewed during our research universally agreed that the higher education experience was more than just attending class and becoming qualified in their major area. When asked, “What is the value of college?” one student responded by saying,

Being in college has helped me to think more critically, and as a result of that has changed my worldview in many ways. I have learned about art, nature, genetics, history, psychology, sociology, and math. I am an [Family and Human Services] major, but these other subjects have given me a broader view of the world. I have grown intellectually and personally since returning to college and I am very grateful for the opportunity.

Other students agreed that a college education is more than simply finding a career or obtaining a degree. Students spoke about the value of an educated society, social and personal development, and learning how to navigate complex organizations and institutions. For those who attended community college before transferring to a four-year university, this skill development and growth began at community college. All community college students interviewed stated that they would recommend that others attend community college prior to attending a four-year institution.

The reasons for attending community college range between the lower cost, the smaller class sizes, and the location of the school. Many students shared that they attended community college because they were unsure they would be accepted at a four year institution. One student explained, “[c]ommunity colleges provide you with a second chance. If you have previously not done so well in a scholastic setting, and you can enter in with a clean slate, and build off of that, and it makes it a lot easier to move on over [to a four-year institution].”

Our research bore out colloquial wisdom that access to community college provides non-traditional students the opportunity to be successful in higher education. The research confirmed that access to resources and support services such as TRiO, academic tutoring, student clubs, and the availability and involvement of professors, all contribute to support students’ success, and prepare them to be successful upon transfer to a four-year institution. It appeared from this research that community colleges continue to act as an essential component of the higher education system, and through better advising and capturing students in the transfer process sooner, they will continue to act as an important counterpart in Oregon’s higher education system.

Institutional Observations

What we observed was that the students who reported feeling more content with their transfer experiences were also the students attending the schools who responded with the most administrative and logistical support in setting up the focus groups.

For example, nearly 100% of students in the OSU focus group reported positive experiences with advisors and transfer staff at OSU. The research team also found the OSU administrative staff to be the most helpful in terms of setting up the focus group, scheduling, recruiting students, and responding to our requests in a timely manner. We believe this impacted the number of students who attended the focus group, and received the most attendees at the focus group held at OSU.

By contrast, communication with the last institution at which we scheduled focus groups - our own, UO - was administratively burdensome, untimely, and, ultimately, not entirely successful. For instance, we were only able to recruit one student for our focus group, due to the way UO staff configured contacting the students (based on their understanding of FERPA), and how long it took to get the ball rolling. In addition, the UO transfer professionals were of the opinion that the transfer process was “easy,” and did not seem overly concerned with the struggles facing transfer students. It is the opinion of this research team that the two are related.

Analysis & Recommendations

Analysis

In the six focus groups conducted, we encountered frustration across every facet of the transfer process. From community college students to students who had successfully transferred to a four-year university, and from transfer professionals at both two-year and four-year institutions, students and staff alike were frustrated that the process wasn't more transparent and clear. Multiple students and staff expressed the idea that transfer was a moving target, and that things were always changing without notice.

Students were frustrated that they felt inadequately supported in the transfer process, received incorrect information, had to hunt down their advisor, and weren't informed about the financial aid implications of spending a few years “exploring” at community college.

Community college staff were frustrated by the perceived bias held by four-year institutions with regard to the value and academic rigor of community college classes, and by the “political” solutions proffered by the legislature.

Staff at the four-year university were frustrated that there is no process in place to notify the four-year university that community college students would be transferring until the term before they transfer, which obstructs the school's ability to provide the student with useful information prior to transfer.

Despite the varying levels of difficulty transferring to four-year institutions, all community college students interviewed reported that they would recommend community college to others. They reported receiving value in the small class sizes, more intimate relationships with professors, more support, affordability, and in the ability to “explore” different areas of study and majors. Community college staff also conveyed a deep attitude of care for their students, and the clear desire to support them in the transfer process and help them succeed. That was not our impression of all of the transfer staff we interviewed from UO.

Recommendations

We make the following recommendations to address barriers facing transfer students in Oregon:

1. **A universal question on community college applications regarding the applicant’s intent to transfer to a four-year university.** This information would be communicated to specific advisors at both the community college and the four-year university indicated (if applicable). This would allow both institutions to maintain regular contact with the student, and provide support throughout the student’s tenure in community college, and through the transfer process to the four-year university.
2. **Transfer staff from the four-year institutions regularly visit the two-year institutions** to provide information to potential transfer students and to allow two-year students the opportunity meet with advisors from the institution to which they hope to transfer.
3. **Four-year institutions develop a transfer orientation aimed specifically at transfer students’ unique circumstances.** At this orientation, students would meet with their assigned advisor, and they would have the opportunity to interact with other transfer students in their class as well as those who transferred before them. The orientation should include guidance on picking classes and on finding housing. Ideally, the transfer orientation would be held at least one month before the start of the term, if not prior.
4. **A statewide portal that tracks students through their time in higher education in Oregon.** The State could utilize the data from the National Student Clearinghouse and create a Statewide Longitudinal Data System for this purpose. Initially it would only need to be back-facing, to allow higher education institutions to monitor students’ progress, track courses, and perform degree audits at any point. Eventually it could be expanded to be front-facing to allow students to access the same information at any point, to help eradicate transfer barriers.

5. **Expanding scholarships and grant opportunities available to transfer students.** This eases the financial burden on transfer students and helps bridge the gap between financial aid eligibility and the amount of time left to complete their bachelor's degrees.

Questions for Further Research

- (1) What is the value of advisors? How much (more) would students pay to avoid transfer issues by having more access to advising?
- (2) (How) does the student to advisor ratio affect students' transfer experiences? Why aren't institutions investing in more advisors?
- (3) How do other states facilitate the transfer process between two- and four-year institutions?
- (4) What other policies at the four-year universities would support students in the transfer process?

Areas of Study Refinement

The primary shortfall of our methodology was the small overall n - the relatively small group of students from whom we received input. Due to time constraints, federal privacy laws, and institutional idiosyncrasy, the ways in which the research team recruited students for the focus groups was not uniform. This impacted not only the validity of the results, but also how many students were ultimately recruited and attended each focus group.

Along the same lines, due to time and funding constraints the research team was only able to conduct student focus groups at four (4) institutions, which are not necessarily representative of community college and four-year students across Oregon.

Additionally, the lack of access to students' email addresses limited the number of students to whom the research team could send the Qualtrics survey. Because some institutions had easier methods to email large groups of students, respondents from those institutions dominated the survey results.

Conclusion

Our analysis can be distilled into the following quote from an OSU student:

The transfer process would have been easier if I had had the articulation agreements my freshmen year, if I knew who to talk to, and if I had been advised what was best for me instead of what the community college was pushing.

Overall, students reported that they valued college, and those who attended community college valued their experience at a two-year institution. The research showed that every party touched by

the transfer process -- students and staff, and those from two-year and four-year institutions alike -- were frustrated by the transfer process. Students shared about not feeling adequately supported throughout the transfer process; a lack of advising; inconsistent or incorrect advising; and confusion and misinformation about financial aid eligibility.

The research demonstrates that the transfer process in Oregon is ripe for improvement, and this team recommends a number of revisions to the process to better support transfer students and facilitate involvement of the four-year university from the beginning of the student's time in higher education.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank HECC, the HB 2525 Workgroup, and the Oregon State Legislature for this opportunity. It has been an honor to support this research, and we are grateful for the experience.

We also wish to thank staff at LCC, LBCC, OSU, and UO for the courtesies and cooperation extended to our research group during the course of this research project.

Appendix A

Student Focus Groups

We asked the following questions in each of the student focus groups:

1. What is the value of college?
2. Why community college?
3. Have you accumulated unnecessary credits for transfer? Why?
4. How did you obtain information regarding the requirements to transfer to a four-year university?
5. Have you seen an advisor at your current institution? (If so, how often? Under what circumstances?)
6. Have you received higher education credits outside of the state?
7. Would you recommend to someone else to attend community college prior to transferring a four-year university? Why or why not?
8. Are there any final thoughts as to what would make the transfer process more efficient?

Nominal Focus Group with Transfer Professionals

We asked the following questions in each of the transfer professional focus groups:

1. Take three minutes and list all of the obstacles you see facing students transferring credits. After you have listed your obstacles, please rank them in order of most common to least common.
2. How do you obtain information relative to transfer requirements?
3. What changes over time have you seen in credits transferring to four-year institutions?
4. Do you see themes among certain departments or majors? Perhaps some that are or aren't able to transfer as many credits?
5. What would be helpful for you in ensuring that more credits are able to transfer for students?

Consistent with nominal style, the facilitator posited one question at a time, debriefing with participants in between questions. For example, the focus group progressed as follows:

Facilitator: [asks question, gives participants time to think]

Facilitator: Participant 1, what did you say for question x?

Participant 1: [answer]

Facilitator: Thank you. Participant 2, what did you say for question x?

Participant 2: [answer]

Appendix B

Qualtrics Survey Questions

1. What is your current institution?
2. What is your major?
3. What institution(s) did you transfer from?
4. Credit Transfer Experience -- Likert Scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
 - a. I was/am adequately prepared for transfer
 - b. Transferring credits was straightforward
 - c. Community with administration was effective
 - d. I earned unnecessary credits toward a bachelor's degree
 - e. Learning about the transfer process was easy
 - f. My department accepted all my credits from community college
 - g. I knew who to talk to about transfer process, or could easily find out who, when I was unsure
 - h. Orientation or early-enrollment services helped me locate transfer resources
 - i. The transfer process could be improved
5. Did all of your credits transfer?
6. How many times did you transfer before attending your current institution?
7. If I could do it over, I would...
 - a. Enroll directly in university
 - b. Never come to college
 - c. Enroll in a community college
 - d. Other
8. Why did you attend community college instead of enrolling in a university?
 - a. Cost
 - b. Location
 - c. Acceptance/enrollment reasons
 - d. Social reasons
 - e. Class sizes
 - f. Relationships with professors
9. What, in your opinion, is the value of college?
10. Did you see an advisor? (check all that apply)
 - a. No
 - b. Yes, at my community college
 - c. Yes, at the university
 - d. Yes, from a support group
 - e. Other (please list)
11. How did you find out what credits would transfer? (check all that apply)
 - a. Community college advisor

- b. University advisor
 - c. Campus support group
 - d. Google search
12. Did you receive an AAOT or any other degree or certification prior to transferring to a university?
13. Please list any resources that helped you complete your transfer (e.g., TRiO, Career Center, Women in Transition, etc.)
14. Any ideas/thoughts on what would improve the transfer process?

Twenty-five respondents noted their major on the survey as follows:

Major	Number of Students
Psychology	5
Family and Human Services	3
Political Science	2
Business Administration	2
Music Technology	1
Criminal Justice	1
Accounting	1
Public Relations	1
Agricultural Sciences	1
Finance	1
Theater Arts	1
Computer Engineering	1

Economics	1
History	1
Education	1
Ethnic Studies	1
Environmental Studies	1

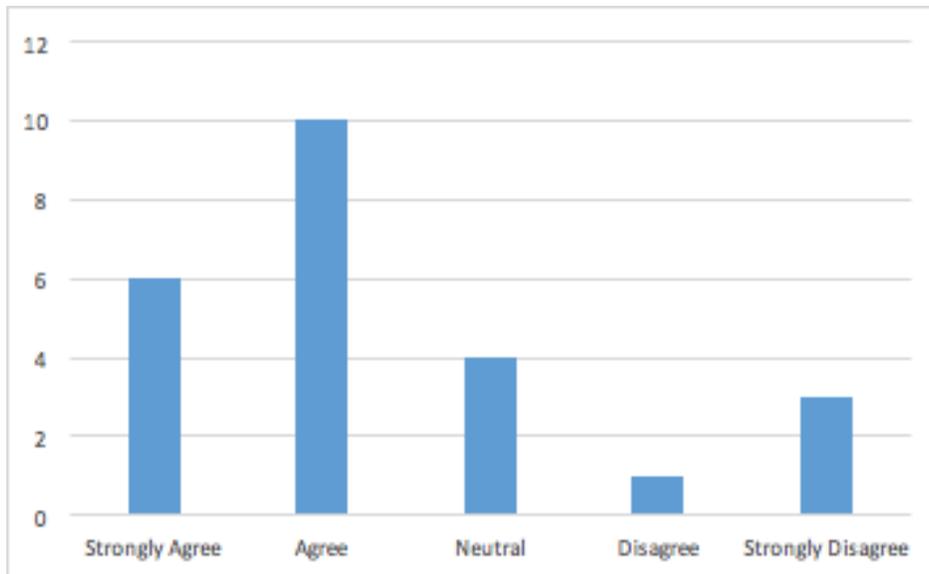
Twenty-three respondents noted their transfer institution as follows (note that some students attended more than one institution):

Institution	Number of Students
Lane Community College	8
Southern Oregon University	2
Chemeketa Community College	3
Portland Community College	2
Linn-Benton Community College	2
San Francisco State University	1
Mt. Hood Community College	1
Southwestern Oregon Community College	1
Oregon State University	1
Whitworth University	1

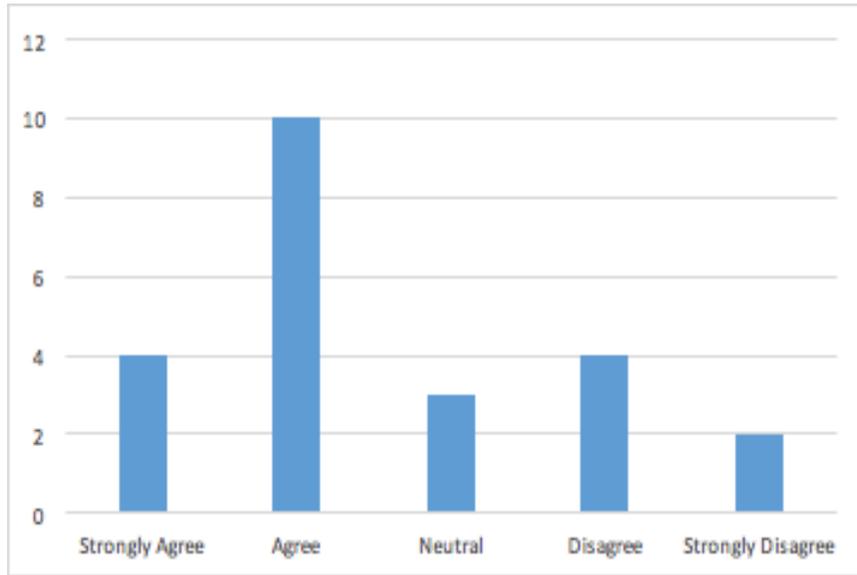
Blue Mountain Community College	1
Lower Columbia College	1
Southwestern University	1

Graphs of Qualtrics Survey Data

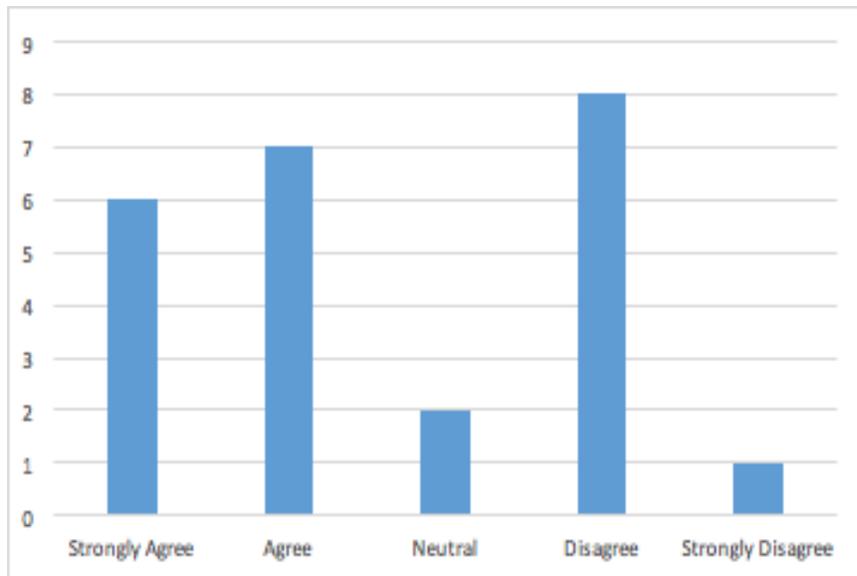
Transferring Credits Was Straightforward



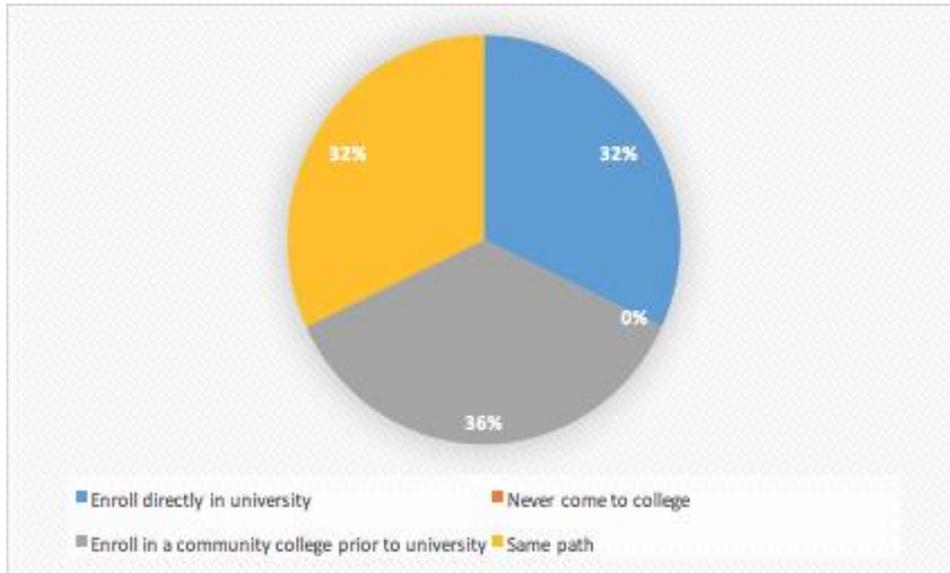
I Earned Unnecessary Credits Toward a Bachelor's Degree



My Department Accepted All of My Credits from Community College



If I could do it over I would...



I Saw an Advisor

