

**Chancellor's Office
California Community Colleges**

An Overview of Postsecondary Student Transfer in the California Community College System

**Informational Hearing
Senate Select Committee on College and University Admissions and Outreach**

November 14, 2007

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Senate Select Committee on College and University Admissions and Outreach
Hon. Alex Padilla, Chair
State Capitol, Room 112

RE: Informational Hearing on "Community College Transfer Rates"

The following report entitled "An Overview of Postsecondary Student Transfer in the California Community College System" is provided to you to address the agenda of the informational hearing.

The report outlines how the California Community College (CCC) System has leveraged its unitary data system to build a very complete view of student transfer from the CCC to the four primary segments: UC, CSU, In-State Private/Proprietary/For-Profit institutions, and Out-of-State institutions. Using this data, we have developed methodologies that portray both annual volumes of student transfer along with transfer rates.

Among the major findings are the following:

Regarding Annual Volume of Transfer:

- The annual volume of transfer has been steadily climbing for the past ten years. Transfers to CSU and UC are both on the increase.
- Transfer volume has increased at a rate greater than the rate of increase in total CCC population over the past ten years.
- Thirty percent of students transfer to in-State Private/Proprietary/For-Profit or Out-of-State institutions.
- Large gains in the number of students transferring to the University of Phoenix have been observed over the past ten years; 42% of these transfers to Phoenix are either African-American or Hispanic/Latino.
- Many transfers to Out-of-State institutions are actually enrollments at institutions providing distance education.
- There are significant disparities by ethnicity on which sector students choose to transfer to.

Regarding Transfer Rates:

- The CCC system has a well-established methodology for determining which students show an intention to transfer. Only a portion of the 2.5 million students attend with an intention and an aptitude requisite of transfer eligibility.
- According to a recently published report funded by the Hewlett Foundation, transfer rates have been steadily increasing over the past fifteen years.
- Older students tend to not be nearly as successful at transferring as younger students.

Regarding the Future of Transfer:

- Budget cuts and fee increases caused the CCC System to lose 300,000 students in the early 2000's; these students would now normally be reaching transfer eligibility, and there is potentially a diminished pool of potential transfers as a result.
- The number of high school graduates and the number of 15-24 year olds in California will decline between 2010 and 2020, potentially impacting growth in the area of transfer in the future.

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Speaker: Patrick Perry, Vice Chancellor of Technology, Research and Information Systems

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO)

Counting and Measuring Transfer. The CCCCCO has any number of sources and methods for measuring student transfer activity, and has the most complete picture of transfer movement between the segments of higher education (UC, CSU, In-State Private/Proprietary/For-Profit, and Out-of-State institutions.)

Data Matching. The CCCCCO has data matching agreements in place with the UC Office of the President, CSU Chancellor's Office, and the National Student Clearinghouse (a national entity that hosts a database containing over 90% of postsecondary enrollments). These three primary data sources allow the CCCCCO to send unitary student records annually for matching, thus providing a clear picture of student transfer movement.

Transfer Volumes and Transfer Rates. Transfer is measured using two primary methods:

- **Annual Volume of Transfer.** This method counts the number of students who have moved from the CCC to other postsecondary systems in any given year. For instance, the statement: "13,000 students transferred from a CCC to a UC campus in 2005-2006" is a metric of transfer volume. These 13,000 students all had different starting dates in the CCC system (some might have started 2 years ago, some 4 years ago, some 8 years ago) but all transferred in the same year.
- **Transfer Rate.** This method counts what percentage of a starting cohort of students eventually transferred from a CCC to another postsecondary segment within some number of years. For instance, the statement "40% of all transfer-seeking students that started in a CCC in 1999-2000 eventually transferred to another postsecondary segment within six years" is a transfer rate. The cohort may have had 100,000 students in it, of which 40,000 eventually transferred. The transfer date of these 40,000 students may have been one year after starting in the CCC, 3 years after starting, or 6 years after starting.

Transfer Volume

The most commonly understood and recognized transfer metric is that of *annual volume of transfer*. Shown below are annual volumes to the four segments since 2001-02:

Table 1: Annual Volume of Transfers, CCC System

Segment	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	<i>06-07 Pct. By Segment</i>
CSU	50,473	50,746	48,321	53,695	52,642	54,391	55.7%
UC	12,291	12,780	12,580	13,211	13,462	13,874	14.2%
In-State Private	17,070	15,541	18,100	17,505	16,491	17,729	18.2%
Out of State	10,762	10,540	11,150	12,569	13,075	11,654	11.9%
Total	90,596	89,607	90,151	96,980	95,670	97,648	100.0%

The annual volume of transfer has been on a relatively steady increase, even counting as far back as ten years ago. Transfer volume has increased at a higher rate of growth than the general population growth in the CCC system, and the ethnic diversity of the students who transfer has not lost any ground to the overall growth of underrepresented students in the CCC population (equity gaps have not been increasing as related to transfer in the past ten years.)

Table 2: Comparison of Total and Transfer Headcount and Underrepresented Students

Item	Ten Years Ago	Today	Change
Total CCC Population Served: <i>(Annual Unduplicated Headcount)</i>	2.44 million	2.62 million	+7%
Total Transfers	CSU: 44,943 UC: 10,177	CSU: 54,391 UC: 13,874	+24% <i>(compared to only 7% growth in overall CCC population during same time period)</i>
Percentage of Total CCC Population: Underrepresented Ethnicities <i>(Afr-Amer, Hispanic/Latino, Native Amer, Filipino, Pac. Islander)</i>	36%	42%	+6%
Percentage of Transfer Population: Underrepresented Ethnicities	CSU: 28% UC: 20%	CSU: 34% UC: 26%	+6% <i>(has kept pace)</i>

Factors that affect transfer volume. The number of students transferring annually is affected by a number of supply/demand issues, including:

- **Overall budget/growth in the CSU and UC systems.** Transfer volumes to CSU and UC are highly correlated with the status of the UC/CSU system budgets and growth targets. Essentially, when budgets are good or bad for UC/CSU, they can serve more or less students, which translates into greater or fewer available “slots” for CCC transfers. Once the growth targets for transfers are identified, UC and CSU work toward meeting these targets using marketing and enrollment management techniques (outlined below).
- **CSU/UC 60:40 Ratio.** CSU and UC both strive to retain a ratio of 60% upper division headcount/FTEs to 40% lower division headcount/FTEs. CCC transfers, the bulk of which are upper-division, feed into the 60% portion of the ratio.
- **Competition in the educational marketplace.** CSU and UC represent 70% of all transfer destinations; the other 30% of students choose to attend another institution. Students who may have difficulty being served by a CSU or UC in their local marketplace who cannot relocate to another CSU/UC campus with an available slot will frequently look to other educational opportunities offered by other private/proprietary/for-profit postsecondary institutions.
- **Number of students working their way through the CCC transfer “pipeline”.** The annual volume of students reaching educational attainment levels in the CCC system that are considered eligible for UC/CSU transfer (generally 60 transferrable units, completion of transfer level math/English, and in many cases specific courses leading to preparation to specific majors) affects the supply of UC/CSU applicants. Students choosing to attend other institutions, however, do not necessarily need to adhere to the UC/CSU standards/model of transfer preparation.

The CCC Transfer “pipeline” is affected internally by course availability, the effectiveness of remediation, and the efforts of counseling/transfer center personnel at the CCC campus to assist in the transfer planning process of students. With student to counselor ratios generally over 1000 to 1, the CCC system is very stretched to adequately serve students needing guidance in the transfer process.

Transfer Students and Enrollment Management. All segments of higher education practice some form of “enrollment management”, or the controlled management of the delivery of educational services with limited resources. CCC, UC, and CSU are provided funding by the State and by student fees collected that limit the number of students that can be served.

In a macro sense, CSU and UC must attempt to create equilibrium between potential CCC transfers and the number of transfers they can serve while staying within their own 60-40 ratios. At certain points in history, there is a surplus of potential CCC transferees, and many more applicants than admits. As is CSU and UC policy, all qualified CCC transfers are admitted, but not necessarily to the first or second campus of choice. Some students are admitted only to locations that have excess capacity for transfer students, thus making transfer to CSU or UC, for some, only an option for CCC students willing to relocate. During such times, enrollment management techniques may include the raising of GPA standards for certain

impacted campuses or majors, the movement of application deadlines to earlier dates in the year, and the non-acceptance of Spring term transfers.

During times when the supply of CCC transfer applicants is down, many of these enrollment management techniques are relaxed. As a result, the transfer “landscape” facing a CCC student may be a changing one, and dependent on the most current state of supply and demand. Along with a very localized and non-uniform course articulation system, the changing enrollment management parameters greatly add to the complexity of the transfer process for the student.

Supply and Demand: Other Segments. Below are the top 10 transfer destinations in 2004-05 for CCC students for the in-state private/proprietary/for-profit sector and the out-of-state sector. Note for the latter, five of the top ten destinations are actually distance education programs being delivered from out-of-state locations:

Table 3: Top Ten Transfer Destinations, In-State Private and Out of State Institutions (2004-05):

In-State Private/Proprietary/For-Profit	Count	Out-of-State (* denotes distance ed)	Count
UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX	7,987	WESTERN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY *	869
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY	1,122	UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA-LAS VEGAS	525
CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY	1,027	UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA-RENO	332
DEVRY UNIVERSITY-CALIFORNIA	838	ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY	325
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA	838	EMBRY RIDDLE AERONAUTICAL UNIVERSITY *	279
AZUSA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY	571	BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY	256
ACADEMY OF ART UNIVERSITY	470	UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII	240
CALIFORNIA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY	393	UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND-UNIVERSITY COLLEGE *	224
UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO	347	COLUMBIA COLLEGE *	220
BIOLA UNIVERSITY	305	PARK UNIVERSITY *	191

University of Phoenix as a transfer destination. The largest gains in transfer volume for a single destination have been to the University of Phoenix, an accredited for-profit system that has increased its academic offerings and geographic diversity greatly in California (currently numbering 41 campuses and learning center locations):

Table 4: Historical Annual Volume of Transfers from the CCC to the University of Phoenix

Year	Number
1996-97	2,290
1997-98	2,885
1998-99	3,508
1999-00	4,358
2000-01	5,220
2001-02	5,817
2002-03	6,862
2003-04	8,696
2004-05	7,986

Transfers from CCC to Phoenix also have a much higher percentage of African-American and Hispanic/Latino students than do transfers to UC and CSU (42% for Phoenix; 16% for UC ; 29% for CSU):

Table 5: Percentage of Transfer Pool by Segment for Major Ethnic Groups

Ethnicity	UC	CSU	U. of Phoenix
Asian	29.3%	14.2%	4.6%
African-American	2.4%	5.2%	15.6%
Hispanic/Latino	13.6%	23.8%	26.1%
White	39.1%	43.6%	40.6%

Anecdotally, Phoenix has marketed aggressively on CCC campuses, sometimes setting up permanent recruitment booths at multiple locations on campus (student lounge, quad, business building). CCC counselors and transfer center directors report that they are not directing students to Phoenix. Phoenix offers any number of appealing options to potential CCC transfer students, including nearly full course articulation, the ability to continue studies part-time, the ability to continue studies fully online (entire programs online), sequentially-timed cohort-based programs that ensure timely graduation, and financial aid.

With California facing an ongoing shortage of an educated and degreed labor supply, the labor market will dictate that Phoenix degrees have an economic value, especially in high demand areas as Nursing, K-12 education, and technology, all programs offered at Phoenix. Similar scenarios exist at National, Chapman, and DeVry.

Sector of Choice by Ethnicity. Student choice of transfer destination varies greatly by student ethnicity. The chart below shows the segment of choice by ethnicity:

Table 6: Sector of Choice for Transfer by Major Ethnic Groups

Ethnicity	UC	CSU	In-State Private	Out of State	Total
Asian	39.2%	49.4%	6.6%	4.8%	100.0%
African-American	10.0%	50.2%	12.6%	27.3%	100.0%
Hispanic	16.0%	65.1%	11.2%	7.7%	100.0%
Native American	13.5%	55.6%	10.7%	20.1%	100.0%
White	18.7%	56.4%	11.7%	13.2%	100.0%

For every ten Asian students that transfer, 4 will go to UC, 5 will go to CSU, and 1 will go to an in-state private or out of state. Notably, the percentage of African-American students that transfer to an in-state private or especially out of state institution is quite high (when drilled down, quite a number of African-American transferees are attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities in other states.) The percentage of Hispanic/Latino students that go to CSU is also higher than other ethnicities to CSU. Asian students transfer to UC at two to four times the rate as other ethnicities.

Transfer Rates

Transfer Rates are measured by a “cohort study”, or longitudinal tracking of first-time students moving forward for some number of years.

Not all students entering a CCC have the intention of transferring, or even getting a degree. The CCC system has multiple missions, and frequently students come to CCC to explore general educational opportunities. As a result, it is very difficult to clearly identify each student’s exact goal. While students are asked to mark a goal on their CCC application, studies have shown this to be a poor and somewhat uninformed measure of student intent.

As a result of a need to specifically measure the outcomes of students with transfer intent for accountability purposes, the CCC system has refined its intention metric to one that is based on student academic behavior; that is, does the student take a course load indicative of someone desiring to transfer. More specifically, the strongest marker of student transfer intent is whether or not the student ever attempted a transfer level math or English course in their academic history.

Using this base methodology, approximately one-third of all CCC students meet the “transfer-intended” criteria, and of these, approximately 40% of these students eventually transfer within six years of entrance. Stretching the analysis out to ten years yields a transfer rate of nearly 50%, and the ethnicity of students transferring in years 7-10 are far more African-American and Hispanic/Latino.

Transfer Rate Trends. A recent study funded by the Hewlett Foundation (*Horn and Lew, “California Community College Transfer Rates: Who is Counted Makes a Difference”; MPR & Associates, May, 2007*) examines transfer rates by various degree-seeking denominators, but concludes one very important thing: no matter which denominator is used, transfer rates appear to be going up for the past 15 years. In other words, a greater percentage of degree-seeking students (regardless of how one identifies degree-seeking) are actually transferring now as compared to 15 years ago.

Transfer Rates by Demography. Two demographic variables show divergence in transfer rate: age groups and ethnicity.

Table 7: Six-Year Transfer Rates of Degree-Seeking Students by Age Group:

Age	Transfer Rate
0-19	43.9%
20-24	34.2%
25-29	28.0%
30-34	25.5%
35-39	24.0%
40-49	22.6%
50+	19.3%

Table 8: Six-Year Transfer Rates of Degree-Seeking Students by Ethnicity:

Ethnicity	Transfer Rate
Asian	56.6%
Other Non-White	48.1%
White	44.6%
Filipino	43.7%
Pacific Islander	41.2%
African-American	35.9%
Native American	32.7%
Hispanic/Latino	31.4%

In general, the older the student is, the less likely it is that he/she will transfer. Anecdotally, this is because other influences in life tend to be greater for older students, including work commitments and families, all of which contribute to attending college on a more part-time basis, having work schedules interfere with academic progress, a greater number of dependents, and the inability to relocate easily to continue at another institution.

Anecdotally, differences in transfer rate by ethnicity are expressed in terms of differing levels of academic preparedness, socioeconomic status and first-generation status of students.

Increasing Transfer Volumes and Rates. While it is ultimately a goal of all segments to increase both the volume and rate of transfers, it is worth noting that a sudden increase in the transfer rate and subsequent volume of students eligible to transfer could not be immediately absorbed by CSU and UC without enabling their capacities to handle more transfers where demand is needed. If all barriers to CSU and UC transfer were solved tomorrow, and a rapid increase of transfer-eligible CCC students ensued with no increased capacity to receive them, we would likely only increase the quality of the transfers to CSU and UC, not the quantity.

Transfer: Future Projections

The CCC system endured a series of poor budget years in the early 2000's, and student fees were increased from \$11/unit to \$26/unit during this period, both depressing demand. As a result, the system lost 300,000 students. Annual volumes of first-time students have also been steadily dropping:

Table 9: Historical Annual Unduplicated and First-Time Student Headcount in the CCC System

Year	Annual Headcount	First-Time Headcount
2001-2002	2,812,023	961,722
2002-2003	2,829,860	960,954
2003-2004	2,545,443	824,267
2004-2005	2,515,550	822,830
2005-2006	2,550,247	818,207
2006-2007	2,621,388	812,348

With average times to transfer closer to 4-5 years, losses in headcount in the early 2000's are now starting to affect the pool of candidates eligible to transfer now. Both CSU and UC are noting a decline in the number of CCC transfer applicants.

The CCC system is currently increasing in headcount, but current increases will not likely manifest themselves into increases in transfer applicants for another 4-5 years.

The demographic future of the transfer pipeline is also uncertain, as the 2010-2020 century has a much smaller overall population of 15-24 year olds, and a much smaller estimate of high school graduates:

Table 10: Estimated Annual Volume of California High School Graduates, 2006-2016

Year	CA K-12 HS Grads
2006	363,662
2008	374,877
2010	371,848
2012	366,720
2014	354,046
2016	348,000

Table 11: Estimated California Population, 15-24 Year Olds, 2000-2020

Year	CA Population Estimate: 15-24 year olds
2000	4,850,103
2010	5,969,955
2020	5,953,842

Specifically, 2010 will mark the end of the baby-boomer offspring or “Tidal Wave II” phase of California educational demography, and will mark the beginning of the children of “Generation X”, a much smaller generational cohort, moving through. All segments will likely struggle with ensuring growth in the number of freshman and transfer students.

On the positive side, the current trend in CCC student population is one of an increasingly younger, higher unit load, and more-degree seeking profile, all factors that will positively affect transfer. Additionally, with rapid tuition increases at CSU and UC, it is likely that more freshman-eligible CSU and UC students will choose to enter the CCC system and transfer for economic reasons.

On the negative side, along with the aforementioned projected declines in overall population and high school graduates, a greater percentage of Californians and the only group increasing in population will be that of the Hispanic/Latino ethnicity; unfortunately, this group has the lowest participation and transfer rates of all ethnicities currently in the CCC system. As shown in the “Sector of Choice by Ethnicity” table above (Table 6), this group also shows the least propensity to relocate in order to pursue a postsecondary education.

California Community College Transfer: A Program Perspective

Overview

Each community college district is required to ensure that its colleges maintain student transfer counseling centers or other counseling and student services designed to help students transfer. Community College Transfer Centers were originally established to strengthen the transfer function, and to increase the number of California Community College students prepared for transfer to baccalaureate-level institutions through the coordination of college transfer efforts. Further, transfer centers were established to enhance the transfer of low income, disabled and first generation college students.

Despite this important mission, there is currently no uniform or minimum level of **state** funding dedicated to Transfer Centers and/or the mission of transfer in the community college system. Depending on the local colleges' or districts' priorities, some Transfer Centers enjoy consistent fiscal support; others do not. This resource issue notwithstanding, our college transfer centers provide exceptional services that ensure students transfer. In fact, over 97,000 California Community College students transferred to a four-year college or university in 2006-07.

Below is a list of current grant projects, on-going Intersegmental activities and other transfer related functions undertaken by the community college system to support student transfer to four-year colleges/universities.

Grant Projects and Other Activities

- \$335,000 to fund a **Transfer Awareness Campaign** that will educate middle and high school students, parents, counselors and administrators, as well as community college students about the community college transfer option. The "Campaign" will use targeted mailings of brochures, posters and other similar types of traditional collateral materials and advertisements to reach students starting in middle school and high school, in addition to current community college students. The campaign will also focus on using newer, Web-based marketing tools to advertise on popular Web sites such as Google, My-space and other internet applications to reach the targeted audience.
- \$300,000 to fund a **Transfer Counselor Website** that will provide counselors with searchable access to current transfer admission requirements by college or university, including the changing supplemental admission requirements for

impacted campuses and majors. The website will maintain information on the various UC and CSU initiatives and all forms of transfer admission agreements/guarantees offered throughout the state, including those with private or independent and out-of-state colleges or universities. It will also serve as a repository of information on effective community college transfer practices.

- \$500,000 to fund a **Transfer Research Project** to conduct quantitative and qualitative research of course-taking patterns of several cohorts of students, including those who begin in ESL/Basic Skills courses and those who begin in transferable level courses. The research will also examine successful transfer practices employed at seven community colleges that have successful transfer rates, with the goal of identifying effective intervention strategies that can be replicated and funded throughout the community college system.
- Fund on-going training and support to Transfer Center Directors and counselors at each college. The Transfer Center concept was developed to serve as the hub of transfer services at each community college so students would have a place to go to find accurate counseling services and timely transfer information so they could navigate the transfer process. In addition, Transfer Center's coordinate campus transfer events like Transfer Days and other visits by four-year representatives and provide transfer workshops to students.
- The Chancellor's Office works in close cooperation with both CSU and UC system offices on a number of intersegmental issues and functions, including the following:
 - a. Maintain and support ASSIST (Articulation System Stimulating Inter-institutional Student Transfer), which is an online student-transfer information system that shows how course credits earned at one public California college or university can be applied when transferred to another.
 - b. Maintain transfer advisory boards with UC and CSU as forums for addressing transfer barriers and proactively responding to emerging transfer issues.
 - c. Co-sponsor the annual Ensuring Transfer Success Institutes with UC to provide the latest UC transfer admission information to counselors; and
 - d. Work closely with the CSU on the Lower Division Transfer Pattern project to resolve outstanding implementation issues related to this new CSU transfer initiative.

How to Improve Transfers

The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges recently adopted its 2008-09 system budget, which included an \$11 million request to support additional transfer services on all 110 community college campuses. That Transfer Initiative is described in greater detail below:

Transfer Initiative: This \$11 million initiative will support transfer activities on each of the 110 college campuses (\$100,000 per college) that will lead to an increase in the number of community college students who transfer to four-year institutions. Currently, the number of community college transfer students applying to UC and CSU is flat or declining.

Transfer services are funded at the discretion of each college district, but local funds to support these services and to conduct student follow-up activities to help guide potential transfer students to four-year institutions have been insufficient at many colleges. If given some additional resources, colleges can do more to move students into available transfer slots at the four-year universities. For example, we know that there are certain colleges and transfer center programs that are highly successful at reaching out, finding and helping transition students to baccalaureate institutions.

The \$11,000,000 proposed for Fiscal Year 2008-09 would provide each college with \$100,000 to support a base level of services and functions at each college. This allocation of funds would provide for an equalization of transfer services throughout the state by reinvigorating transfer services at those colleges hardest hit by past budget reductions. With a relatively small investment of state resources dedicated to providing additional transfer services, the community colleges could likely direct more students down a transfer-eligible path.

Listed below are some examples of the types of services colleges could fund with their \$100,000 allocation:

- Early identification and contact of students with transfer course-taking patterns. For example, identification of students who have taken transfer level math/English and completed 30 credits. This would require college MIS identification of these students, mailings/emails to those students, initial counselor contact and follow up with these students.
- Identification and intervention with “transfer prepared” students to determine why they have not transferred and counseling these students on overcoming barriers to their transfer.

- Fund additional counseling and advising hours so more students are able to confer with a transfer counselor. While the numbers vary from campus-to-campus, counselor-to-student ratios average 1 to 1,900 on college campuses. These funds could support additional student contact hours to ensure students are seeing counselors and developing education plans that will facilitate their transfer.
- Fund a full-time counselor/coordinator to serve as the college point person for conveying effective transfer activities so the latest information on transfer admission requirements is communicated to counselors and students. The counselor/coordinator will work with counselors/support staff in monitoring and encouraging the progress of students who have either identified transfer as their goal or who, by their course taking patterns, have demonstrated the potential to be a successful transfer student.
- Support transfer identified students to visit prospective four-year universities, speak with admissions officers and meet four-year institution faculty. A number of colleges have discontinued campus visits because of increased costs of transportation. However, campus visits help promote student transfer.
- Follow up with students who have been admitted to a university in the spring for the following fall semester. This data would have to be provided by the CSU and UCs to each college campus. This information would be used by community college counseling and transfer center staff to contact these students to facilitate their transfer to the university. Often, students who have been admitted to a university fail to complete the necessary paper work for housing, financial aid, etc., resulting in their inability to transfer the following fall.

Community colleges can do a better job, if given the resources, of tracking, monitoring and intervening with students to ensure that more of them transfer to four-year institutions and complete a baccalaureate degree.



California Community College Transfer Rates Who Is Counted Makes a Difference

By Laura Horn and Stephen Lew

This is the first in a series of MPR Research Briefs published on the outcomes and experiences of California community college students.

The research, funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, focuses primarily on transfer students, but we are also investigating the financial aid support that community college students receive.

California Community Colleges (CCC) enroll roughly two-thirds of all California college students and nearly one-fourth of all community college students in the nation. Their low fees and open-admission policies provide critical access to many students who otherwise might not attend college. Yet recent research reports have concluded that students who enroll in California Community Colleges complete a degree or transfer at relatively low rates. For example, Sengupta and Jepsen (2006) from the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) reported that about one-quarter of “transfer-focused” students had transferred to a 4-year institution, and Shulock and Moore (2007) from the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy (IHELP) reported that about one-quarter of “degree-seekers” had completed college, either through transfer (18 percent) or earning a formal credential (6 percent). In light of the scrutiny these studies have received and to better understand who should be counted in determining transfer rates, we examine transfer rates in the context of different course-taking patterns and illustrate how rates have changed over time. The purpose of this research is to provide empirical data and a broader context for ongoing policy analyses and discussions.

Data

Using data files provided by the Chancellor’s Office from the California Community Colleges Management Information System (COMIS), we analyzed three cohorts of first-time students enrolled in 1993–94, 1998–99, and 2000–01. “First-time students” are defined by the Chancellor’s Office as those who have never before enrolled in a community college

(i.e., no enrollment records were found prior to the cohort year in the COMIS). The cohort data we received from COMIS did not include “special admit” students, defined as first-time community college students concurrently enrolled in K-12 schools. In addition, we excluded students who reported they already held college degrees (AAs and BAs) and those whose dates of transfer preceded their CCC enrollment dates (i.e., reverse transfers) from our analysis.

Changing Denominators: Who Is Counted in Transfer Rates

The first question one must ask in calculating transfer rates is who should be included in the denominator. Not all students intend to transfer. If you look at what students report as their initial goals when they first enroll, roughly one-third hope to transfer (with or without a degree) and another 10 percent intend to earn a formal credential (AA or vocational certificate).¹ Thus, together less than half of California community college students report intentions to complete a formal course of study. Other students enroll to obtain or enhance job skills, for personal enrichment, or for obtaining basic or pre-collegiate skills. For these students, completing one, two, or even a series of courses may be all they expect to accomplish during their enrollment.

The data also indicate that first-time students are fairly uncertain about their initial education goals: about 1-in-5 either report that they are undecided or do not report any goal. We know that many of these students go on to earn a degree or transfer to a 4-year institution.² Given such uncertainty and the variability in student-reported goals, we calculated transfer rates based entirely on transcript

¹Based on the 2000–01 cohort.

²For example, about 16 percent of students who were undecided about their goal when they first enrolled in the 2000-01 cohort transferred to a 4-year college.

data, using defined course-taking patterns as a guide to students’ intentions. Among these denominators, we included two measures of transfer-oriented course-taking patterns defined in the Accountability Report for California Community Colleges—ARCC (Drummond and Perry 2007).

The six denominators used to calculate transfer rates begin with the most inclusive population—students who completed any transfer units within 6 years—and in general become increasingly restrictive. The first three denominators are based solely on credit accumulation, while the remaining three are based on transfer-oriented course completion. The percentage of students and the total number of students included in each denominator are shown in Table A.

Six Denominators

- **Completed any transfer unit.** This is the least restrictive denominator; at least 70 percent of all community college students meet this criterion.
- **College Pathway Status achieved** (completed 12 degree-applicable or transfer units). About 40 percent of all community college students meet this criterion. College Pathway Status is one of the “milestone events” set forth in a model developed by the State Student Data Project.³
- **Halfway milestone reached** (completed 30 degree or transfer units). Completing 30 units is the halfway mark for the number of units required for transfer to a UC or CSU.⁴ Students may or may not have completed the required

³The State Student Data Project is a collaboration of the Lumina-funded Achieving the Dream (AtD) initiative and Ford-funded Bridges to Opportunity initiative: http://www.achievingthedream.org/_images/index03/State_Data_Project_Jan2006.pdf.

⁴Based on the definition of “transfer prepared” in the ARCC report, which calls for the completion of 60 credits (Drummond and Perry 2007, Appendix B, p. 701).



Table A. Percentage of California community college students in each denominator and the total number in each group

Denominators	1993–94	1998–99	2000–01
	Percent of all CCC students		
Completed any transfer credits ¹	70.7	72.7	72.3
Reached college pathway status ²	39.3	41.9	41.0
Halfway milestone reached ³	25.0	28.1	27.8
Completed 12 credits and attempted math or English ⁴	26.9	29.7	28.9
Math milestone ⁵	13.7	15.6	15.2
Transfer ready ⁶	4.2	5.9	6.0
	Total number of CCC students		
Total	569,153	488,618	512,435
Completed any transfer credits ¹	402,367	355,407	370,603
Reached college pathway status ²	223,880	204,636	209,913
Halfway milestone reached ³	142,204	137,179	142,402
Completed 12 credits and attempted math or English ⁴	152,877	144,911	147,901
Math milestone ⁵	78,082	76,282	77,738
Transfer ready ⁶	24,084	28,658	30,591

¹Completed any transfer units.

²Completed 12 degree or transfer units.

³Completed 30 degree or transfer units.

⁴Completed 12 degree or transfer units and attempted a transferable math or English course; defined by California Chancellor's Office MIS as students demonstrating transfer intentions.

⁵Completed transfer math course.

⁶Met minimum transfer requirements defined in the ARCC report: completed 60 units including both English and math requirements, with at least a 2.0 GPA.

SOURCE: COMIS 1993–94, 1998–99, and 2000–01 first-time student cohorts.

math or English transfer course. Some 28 percent of community college students reach the 30-unit milestone.

- **Transfer intentions demonstrated** (completed 12 degree-applicable or transfer units *and* attempted a transfer math or English course). This definition meets the criteria defined in the ARCC report for showing intent to transfer.⁵ Just under 30 percent of community college students demonstrate transfer intentions.
- **Math milestone** (completed math transfer course). The findings from our analysis indicate that completing the required math course for transfer is a major hurdle for transfer-oriented students, and about 15 percent of community college students complete the course.
- **Transfer ready** (completed 60 transfer units with a grade of C or better and completed a transfer math and English course). This denominator includes only students who have met the minimum requirements for transfer to a UC or CSU.⁶ Only about 6 percent of community college students meet these specifications.⁷

Figures A and B show the 6-year transfer rates for the six different denominators for three cohorts: students who enrolled for the first time in 1993–94, 1998–99, and 2000–01.

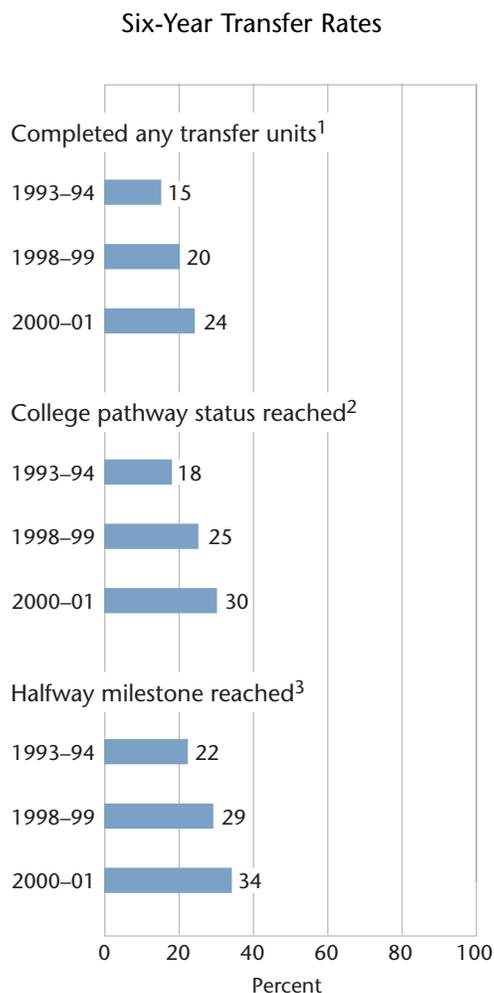
⁵Drummond and Perry (2007), Appendix B, p. 702.

⁶These students meet the definition of both “transfer directed” (completed required math and English transfer courses) and “transfer prepared” (completed 60 transfer credits with a grade of C or better) as defined in the ARCC report (Drummond and Perry 2007), Appendix B, p. 701.

⁷The proportion of students meeting the transfer-ready criteria is smaller than the proportion who actually transfer. This means that some students transfer without having met the transfer-ready criteria. These students may be transferring as first-year or lower-division students after completing courses needed for matriculation as freshmen. We will investigate the course-taking patterns of such transfer students in our next Research Brief.



Figure A. Six-year transfer rates by college credit accumulation



¹Completed any transfer units.

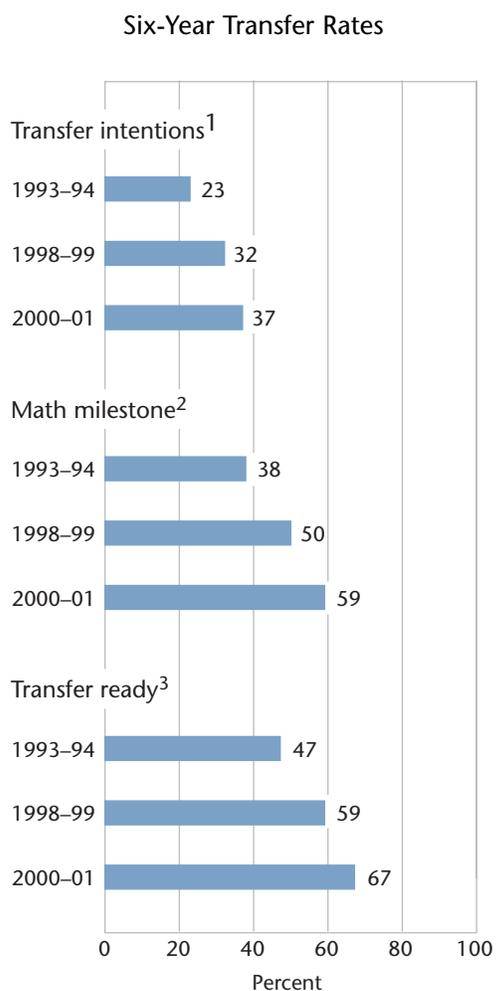
²Completed 12 degree or transfer units.

³Completed 30 degree or transfer units.

SOURCE: COMIS 1993–94, 1998–99, and 2000–01 first-time student cohorts.



Figure B. Six-year transfer rates by transfer-oriented course-taking



¹Completed 12 degree or transfer units and attempted a transfer math or English course; defined by California Chancellor's Office MIS as students demonstrating transfer intentions.

²Completed transfer math course.

³Met minimum transfer requirements defined in the ARCC report: completed 60 units including both English and math requirements, with at least a 2.0 GPA.

SOURCE: COMIS 1993-94, 1998-99, and 2000-01 first-time student cohorts.

Are Transfer Rates Increasing?

What is immediately apparent from both figures is the systematic increase in transfer rates over time. The cause of this increase is subject to speculation, but chief among them is better transfer data reporting over time. To investigate this possibility, we disaggregated the transfer data from the three reporting sources: UC, CSU, and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC).⁸ The NSC is a central data system to which member institutions report enrollment and degree completion data, and this database is used to track students who transfer to private institutions in California or out of state. It wasn't until about 1999 that most colleges and universities participated in NSC, thus the later years in the study would likely have greater numbers of transfers reported by NSC.⁹ On the other hand, UC and CSU transfer data have been consistently reported by the UC and CSU systems over the period examined in this study, so if transfer rates increased at these institutions, one might conclude that the upward trend in rates is not entirely due to differences in data reporting. Table B illustrates increases in transfer rates in both the UC and CSU systems. For example, the first row of the table under "UC transfers" indicates that among students who completed any transfer units, the 6-year transfer rate to a UC increased from 2.8 percent in 1993-94 to 5.8 percent in 2000-01. Similarly, the comparable transfer rates to CSUs increased from 7.7 to 11.4 percent for those who had completed any transfer units.

⁸Our data originated from the COMIS transfer file; the COMIS receives the data from the three reporting sources.

⁹Personal communication with Patrick Perry, Vice Chancellor of Technology, Research and Information Systems, California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office.



Table B. Six-year transfer rates for 6 denominators, by transfer location

Denominators	1993–94	1998–99	2000–01
	Percent		
UC transfers			
Completed any transfer credits ¹	2.8	4.6	5.8
Reached college pathway status ²	3.1	5.0	6.4
Halfway milestone reached ³	3.8	5.6	6.8
Completed 12 credits and attempted math or English ⁴	4.1	6.4	8.1
Math milestone ⁵	7.7	11.7	14.6
Transfer ready ⁶	10.5	13.7	16.1
CSU transfers			
Completed any transfer credits ¹	7.7	9.5	11.4
Reached college pathway status ²	10.7	13.5	16.0
Halfway milestone reached ³	14.3	17.4	20.2
Completed 12 credits and attempted math or English ⁴	14.4	17.9	21.1
Math milestone ⁵	23.9	29.7	34.9
Transfer ready ⁶	32.2	38.7	44.5
In-state private			
Completed any transfer credits ¹	2.4	3.4	3.5
Reached college pathway status ²	2.4	3.5	3.8
Halfway milestone reached ³	2.5	3.5	3.7
Completed 12 credits and attempted math or English ⁴	2.8	4.1	4.4
Math milestone ⁵	3.6	4.9	5.2
Transfer ready ⁶	3.4	4.2	4.1
Out-of-state			
Completed any transfer credits ¹	1.8	3.1	3.4
Reached college pathway status ²	1.7	3.0	3.3
Halfway milestone reached ³	1.6	2.8	3.2
Completed 12 credits and attempted math or English ⁴	2.0	3.4	3.8
Math milestone ⁵	2.4	3.9	4.2
Transfer ready ⁶	1.3	2.2	2.6

¹Completed any transfer units.

²Completed 12 degree or transfer units.

³Completed 30 degree or transfer units.

⁴Completed 12 degree or transfer units and attempted a transfer math or English course; defined by California Chancellor's Office MIS as students demonstrating transfer intentions.

⁵Completed transfer math course.

⁶Met minimum transfer requirements defined in the ARCC report: completed 60 units including both English and math requirements, with at least a 2.0 GPA.

SOURCE: COMIS 1993–94, 1998–99, and 2000–01 first-time student cohorts.

Another factor that might contribute to the upward trend in transfer rates is a change in the demographic profile of students. For example, a notable increase in the proportion of “traditional age students” (those under age 20) was observed over the period, from about one-third to more than one-half of the student population. These are students who typically enroll in college immediately after high school graduation, and they generally complete college at higher rates than their older counterparts (Berkner, He, and Cataldi 2002). To look at this possibility, we present transfer rates for students under the age of 20 in Figures C and D. Even when restricted to traditional age students, transfer rates still increased over time, though the transfer rates are higher than those for all students. Thus, the results of this study suggest that, while transfer rates may be relatively low in California community colleges, they have increased over time. Why they increased is an important question for future research.

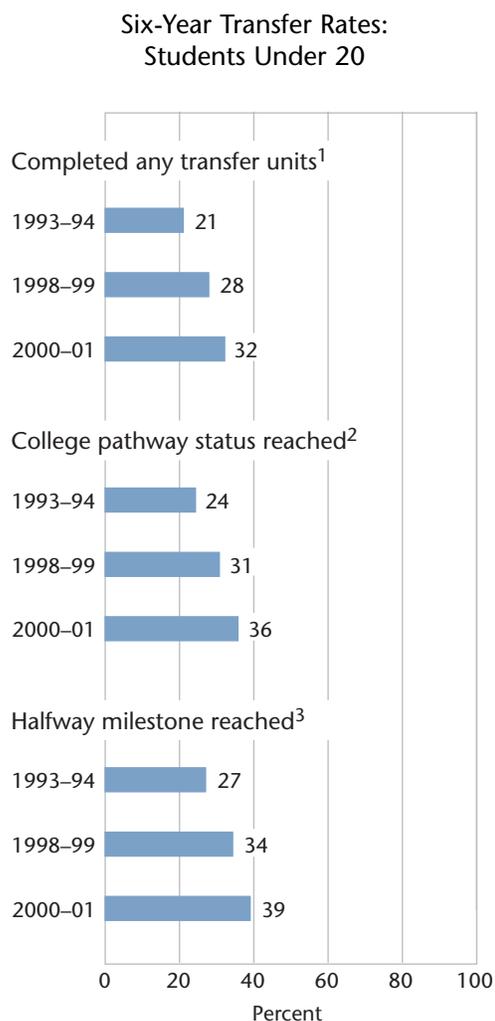
What Do the Different Transfer Rates Tell Us?

The first and most inclusive transfer rate we examined encompasses all students who completed a transfer unit. Figure A indicates that 24 percent, or roughly one-quarter, of 2000–01 students had transferred within 6 years. However, this denominator includes students who may have enrolled for personal enrichment, degree attainment, or transfer. In other words, many of these students may not have intended to transfer and, therefore, this rate is not necessarily an accurate assessment of transfer rates among students expected to transfer. However, the measure is useful for tracking system-wide transfer rate changes over time because it captures nearly all transfers, unlike the more restrictive measures described below.

The second and third denominators require the completion of a set number of college courses. Completing at least 12 degree or transfer units



Figure C. Six-year transfer rates by college credit accumulation for students under age 20



¹Completed any transfer units.

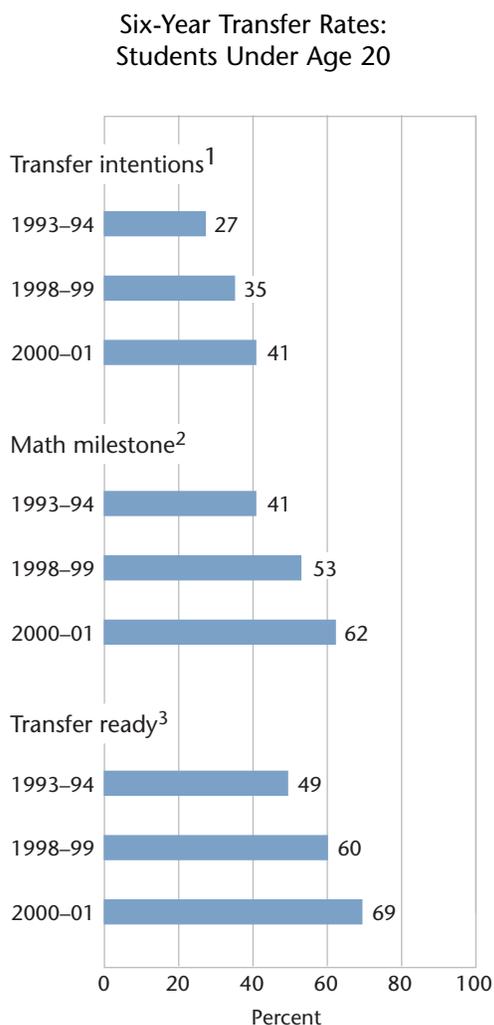
²Completed 12 degree or transfer units.

³Completed 30 degree or transfer units.

SOURCE: COMIS 1993–94, 1998–99, and 2000–01 first-time student cohorts.



Figure D. Six-year transfer rates by transfer-oriented course-taking for students under age 20



¹Completed 12 degree or transferable units and attempted a transfer math or English course; defined by California Chancellor's Office MIS as students demonstrating transfer intentions.

²Completed transfer math course.

³Met minimum transfer requirements defined in the California Chancellor's Office accountability report: completed 60 units including both English and math requirements, with at least a 2.0 GPA.

SOURCE: COMIS 1993-94, 1998-99, and 2000-01 first-time student cohorts.

presumably removes students who intend to take only one or two courses for personal enrichment—i.e., those who are referred to as “incidental students” by Adelman (2005). However, because these students have not necessarily attempted the required math or English courses, their transfer intentions are not entirely clear. Among these students, 30 percent of the 2000–01 cohort had transferred within 6 years. Likewise, students who reach the halfway mark toward credit accumulation for transfer by completing 30 units may or may not have taken their required math or English course. It is notable that the transfer rates for these students are only slightly higher than the rates for those completing 12 units: about one-third of the 2000–01 cohort who completed 30 units transferred. Both measures are useful for tracking student progress toward completion, especially in terms of the time it takes for students to reach the benchmark and whether that time changes from year to year.

This brings us to the second set of transfer rates, which are based on transfer-oriented course-taking patterns. The first rate includes students who show clear transfer intentions by completing the equivalent of a full-time semester of coursework and attempting the required English or math courses. As shown in Figure B, among such students, 37 percent of the 2000–01 cohort had transferred within 6 years. In other words, among students whom one would expect to transfer, nearly 4-in-10 did so based on the most recent data available. Because these students demonstrate clear transfer intentions based on their course-taking behavior, one might use this rate as an accountability measure for transfer.

Looking at the remaining two transfer rates reveals just how strongly linked completing a transfer math course is to successful transfer. The transfer rate for those who complete the math class approaches the rate for those who meet all

transfer requirements (i.e., “transfer-ready” students), with 59 percent of the 2000–01 cohort transferring, and it is well above the rate for those who reach the halfway point in credit accumulation by completing at least 30 units. It is clear that that completing a transfer math course is a strong predictor of transfer within 6 years.

The final transfer rate is the most exclusive and encompasses only those students who meet the minimum requirements for transfer to a UC or CSU; they have completed the equivalent of 2 full-time years of coursework with a passing grade, including the required math and English courses. Fewer than 10 percent of CCC students reach this status and one would expect most of these students to transfer. However, only about two-thirds of the latest cohort transferred within 6 years. That leaves one-third, or about 10,000 students, who should have transferred but did not do so. Why would these students not transfer after investing significant time and resources? Did they apply to a 4-year college? Are they still enrolled at a CCC and delaying transfer for personal or cost reasons? Have they entered the labor market instead? Did they earn an AA/AS degree or certificate only? Our data can only answer the question about degree status, and they show that roughly one-half of these students earned a credential. That leaves about 5,000 transfer-ready students who neither transferred nor earned a degree. Understanding why this occurred should be an important focus of future research.

How Do the Transfer Rates Compare With Others?

As noted earlier, two studies reported transfer rates of 26 percent among students enrolled in 1997–98 (Sengupta and Jepsen 2006) and 18 percent among students enrolled in 1999–2000 (Shulock and Moore 2007). These two rates are based on very different denominators. The first is based on students for whom the majority of courses taken in their

first year were transferable (called “transfer focused”). About 50 percent of CCC students who first enrolled in 1997–98 were in this category. The second rate is based on three factors related to degree completion, including age, educational goals, and course taking. Students were identified as “degree-seeking” if they met one or more of following three criteria: being 17 to 19 years old, having a degree or transfer goal, or showing transfer intentions by their course-taking (i.e., the same as denominator #4 in this report). Some 60 percent of CCC students who first enrolled in 1999–2000 were identified as meeting at least one of the criteria. The transfer rates for these two studies are closest to the rates we calculated for the most inclusive denominator—students who completed any transfer units—yet this denominator makes up at least 70 percent of all CCC students and captures nearly all the transfers. While our data did not include the years analyzed by the two previous studies, the transfer rates we calculated for the years nearest to those analyzed by the two earlier studies, are 20 percent (vs. 26 percent) and 24 percent (vs. 18 percent).¹⁰ The fact that relatively similar transfer rates were obtained for such different denominators indicates the difficulty of targeting the population of students who are likely to transfer. In the case of the two earlier studies, many transfers were not captured in their target populations.¹¹

Finally, it should be noted that the transfer rates we calculated for students showing clear intentions of transfer (denominator #4) were different

¹⁰See Figure A; the rate for 1998-99 is closest to the year analyzed by Sengupta and Jepsen (who used 1997-98) and the rate for 2000-01 is closest to the year analyzed by Shulock and Moore (who used data from 1999-2000).

¹¹For example, Shulock and Moore identified 60 percent of 520,407 CCC students as “degree-seeking,” of whom 18 percent had transferred. The number of transfers identified by this method is about 56,000. Yet more than 85,000 students transfer every year from CCC (Drummond and Perry 2007, p. 5).

from the comparable rates reported in the ARCC report (Drummond and Perry 2007, table 9). This report showed transfer rates of 40.9 and 40.7 percent for the 1998–99 and 2000–01 cohorts, respectively, whereas our rates for these years are 32 and 37 percent. The differences are due in large part to the inclusion of “special admit” students (those concurrently enrolled in grades K–12) in the ARCC report calculations, whereas these students were not included in our data files.¹²

Taken together, these studies demonstrate how transfer rates can vary dramatically depending on the target population—the denominator. Moreover, just which rate should be used depends on what is being measured and from what perspective.

Next Steps

In our next research brief, we will investigate further why so many transfer-ready students do not transfer and examine the characteristics and course-taking of all transfer students, regardless of their transfer-ready status. Preliminary analyses indicate that a majority of transfer students do not follow the traditional transfer track of completing 2 years of coursework and transferring as upper-division students to UC and CSU. Instead they are students who are taking only a few courses and presumably transferring as first-year or lower-division students. Who are these students and what other courses are they taking? Do they differ by low-income status or by race/ethnicity? What institutions are they transferring to? We will address these questions and others in our next MPR Research Brief.

¹²Personal communication with COMIS staff.

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