



It Takes a Whole College: Fostering Transfer Identity Development at California Community Colleges

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Table of Contents

BACKGROUND 4

Research design 4

Clarification of Participant Perspectives 5

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 5

High-Level Findings 5

Considerations for the Colleges 6

FOUR ELEMENTS OF TRANSFER SUPPORT 7

1. Promising Practices 7

Collaboration 8

Cohorting 9

Intrusive Efforts 10

Transfer Identity Development 11

Peer-to-Peer Support 12

Professional Development 13

2. Institutional Buy-In 15

Enthusiasm, Strong Support, and Innovative Spirit 15

Resources 15

Leverage Data and Research 16

3. Campus Procedures 17

Orientation and Onboarding 17

Course Selection and Availability 17

Associate Degrees for Transfer (ADTs) 18

Early Alerts 18

Academic Notice (Probation)	19
Completion and Exit Teams	21
4. Perspectives and Approaches	22
Transfer Culture	22
Cultural Competency	22
Caring Campus	23
Relationships with Transfer Destinations	23
CONCERNS AND CONSIDERATIONS	25
Considerations for the Colleges	25
Maximize and Leverage Co-Location Opportunities	25
Increase Students' Sense of Belonging Through Cultural Competency Professional Development in Service Areas and Pedagogy	25
Use Local Data to Develop and Implement Innovative Pilot Programs	25
Minimize Impacts on Students by Streamlining Campus Procedures	25
Automate Communication of Transfer Information to Students	26
CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS	26
APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS	27
APPENDIX B: REFERENCES AND RESOURCES	29
References	29
Resources	30
APPENDIX C: METHODOLOGY	32
APPENDIX D: MIND MAP	34

Background

Recently the California State Auditor's Office conducted a review of California's Systems of Public Higher Education (2023-123). As noted in the audit, "By 2023 the proportion of undergraduate students enrolled in community colleges had risen to about 75 percent, with the remaining 16 percent attending CSU and 9 percent attending UC." Further, Governor Newsom and the three public post-secondary education systems—University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), and California Community Colleges (the system)—announced new segmental multi-year compacts in May 2022. These combined shared priorities are designed to advance multiple student-focused goals (i.e., close equity gaps and expand transfer student access) through intersegmental collaboration and in conjunction with predictable State support for the systems.

[Vision 2030: A Roadmap for California Community Colleges](#) explicitly drives support of the state's credit mobility and credential attainment goals through meeting the unique needs of current and prospective learners regardless of age, race, and socioeconomic status. Moreover, within the Vision 2030 framework, the Chancellor's Office, in partnership with community colleges, is supporting demonstration projects related to the improvement of transfer outcomes.

Such goals embrace a substantial body of state and national research around transfer from a community college to a four-year university. In turn, the Chancellor's Office distilled this evidence into the interactive website, [Five Barriers to Transfer for California Students: Why Coordination Is the Path Forward](#). Inclusive of data-informed support materials this call specifically elevated the need of California's higher education partners to "do more to work across systems, campuses and disciplines to better standardize, simplify and streamline the student transfer process."

While transfer initiatives and programs continue to influence transfer rates, "underlying low transfer rates are several fundamental barriers that transfer-intending students face...Although some barriers involve factors largely outside of the higher education systems' control, the systems can still take important steps to facilitate and simplify the transfer process" (Parks, 2024).

California community colleges play a critical role in helping students navigate the complexities of the transfer environment. However, the state transfer audit identified inconsistencies in the ways transfer supports were provided across colleges. Thus, a recommendation was made to help community colleges improve their transfer rates by having the Chancellor's Office identify "any specific best practices ... and share these practices with all colleges."

RESEARCH DESIGN

The Chancellor's Office research team designed a qualitative assessment that began with the identification of community colleges that have higher transfer success (based on the US Department of Education *Raise the Bar: College Excellence and Equity: Postsecondary Success Recognition Program*, link unavailable, but information available upon request) supplemented by colleges whose transfer data indicate growth potential. In addition to

identifying promising practices, the Chancellor's Office was interested in identifying common areas where colleges could use more support.

Invitations for community college participation resulted in seven colleges agreeing to site visits. This qualitative approach included interviewing key college personnel (i.e. Student Services, Counseling, Transfer Center, Academic Senate, and/or cultural resource centers/programs) and included a tour of the transfer centers. The qualitative approach contextualizes how promising transfer practices have been implemented successfully and allows for direct feedback from colleges regarding enhancing systemic support. (Refer to Appendix C for a full methodology description.)

CLARIFICATION OF PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES

The primary goal of this study on effective transfer practices is to understand community college practitioners' perspectives across the state. While the research team has made every effort to accurately reflect the perspectives shared, the analysis, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this report do not necessarily represent the views, positions, or policy directions of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, the Board of Governors, or the State of California.

Executive Summary

When asked about their transfer success, participants from high-transfer colleges unanimously agree that transfer is complicated and that no single practice was behind their high transfer rates. Institutional collaboration was identified as the most important principle in assisting students to successfully transfer. The collaborative spirit begins with enthusiastic support from executive and administrative leaders in the form of championing the transfer mission and allocating resources and personnel to support effective transfer practices. The collective practices, approaches, and transfer culture all contribute to a framework we are calling Transfer Identity Development, the procedure of guiding students into becoming transfer-intending students.

HIGH-LEVEL FINDINGS

These high-level findings are a summary of the prominent themes that emerged through an analysis of the study's qualitative data. They point to the most frequent topics mentioned by participants in the study.

- **Collaboration** is the most important principle to promote transfers with equity from California community colleges. This includes cross-campus partnerships, leveraging the expertise of faculty and classified professionals in planning and governance, and fostering collegiality. *Transferring a student takes a whole campus.*
- When resources are limited, institutions can **build capacity through co-location** with learning communities, cohorted programs, and faculty partnerships.
- The importance of **cultural competency** in a college's transfer process cannot be overstated. Faculty, classified professionals, and administrators who engage in ongoing learning communities for professional development provide culturally competent transfer-focused course materials, programming, and services to their diverse student bodies.

- **Institutional buy-in and support** is critical to transfer success. Institutions can “start with a ‘Yes!’” when considering pilot efforts, center equity in planning, and empower employees through resources and facilities.
- **Early Alerts** are effective at identifying struggling students to coordinate counseling and other interventions. However, Early Alerts seem to be universally difficult for colleges to implement and follow-up on. A surprising and encouraging finding is that ***Early Alerts can potentially be rendered unnecessary if Promising Practices are employed.***
- **Transfer Identity Development.** The practices and approaches described by study participants can collectively be described as Transfer Identity Development or developing in students an internal identity of being a transfer-intending student.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE COLLEGES

- **Maximize and Leverage Co-Location Opportunities.** Colleges with existing cohorted programs and learning communities could encourage collaboration and cross-training with the Transfer Center Director to share transfer information with employees. Directors and personnel associated with cohorted programs and learning communities could then leverage their existing relationship with each other and students to provide academic and transfer support in culturally competent ways. Colleges without a suite of cohorted programs and learning communities could consider instituting them to augment transfer advising capacity.
- **Increase Students’ Sense of Belonging Through Cultural Competency Professional Development in Service Areas and Pedagogy.** Because a student’s ability to transfer is dependent on their course success, the Equity Officer could work with service departments and discipline faculty to develop and implement employee learning communities focused on increasing cultural competency and sharing evidence-based, equity-minded pedagogical practices. Colleges that are not already employing Caring Campus principles could consider embracing such a program.
- **Use Local Data to Develop and Implement Innovative Pilot Programs.** Each college is unique and could partner with their Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning office to design and implement pilot programs to discover innovative ways to deliver transfer information early and often to students. Examples include identifying high-success culturally relevant courses for cohorts of students and implementing embedded tutoring in STEM and ESL courses.
- **Minimize Impacts on Students by Streamlining Campus Procedures.** Academic notice (probation) can disrupt or end a student’s transfer trajectory, and students with excessive units can find themselves without access to financial aid at their transfer destination. Leveraging cross-campus collaborations that include Admissions and Records and Articulation Officers can streamline campus procedures, including orientation, early alert responses, and completion and exit strategies, for improved efficiency. “Academic Probation” could be renamed as “Academic Notice” or “Academic Renewal” and reimagined as an “invitation to stay” to be more inviting to students
- **Automate Communication of Transfer Information to Students.** Student Management Systems at the colleges could integrate with student communication efforts to enhance

proactive and just-in-time communications. The college's existing learning platform can be leveraged to create Canvas shells for Transfer that automatically enroll students who have earned an appropriate number of completed eligible units.

Four Elements of Transfer Support

The primary findings that emerged from this qualitative study are configured as the Four Elements of Transfer Support (Figure 1). The study revealed that while these four transfer support elements are strategically important individually, implementing them requires a “whole campus approach”.



Figure 1: The four elements of transfer support

1. **Promising Practices** – practices identified by participating colleges to provide explicit and implicit Transfer Identity Development, even in students who are not initially transfer-intending.
2. **Institutional Buy-In** – the degree to which the college champions, supports, and provides resources to transfer efforts.
3. **Campus Procedures** – seemingly unrelated to transfer, several campus procedures from orientation to academic notice (probation) impact students' Transfer Identity Development and their ability to transfer to a four-year institution.
4. **Perspectives and Approaches** – the degree of human-centeredness and collegiality at a college in service of student transfer.

Importantly, all elements work closely with each other. The mind map (Appendix D) illustrates the interconnectedness of the elements and reinforces the emphasis on intra-college collaboration.

To protect the anonymity of participants, all college names are pseudonyms, and all personnel are referred to by their titles only. Any phrase or statement in quotation marks is a direct quote from either the interviewer or one or more participants.

1. PROMISING PRACTICES

Before proceeding, it is necessary to acknowledge that there is not a singular transfer pipeline that all community college students leverage. The colleges interviewed described a variety of transfer pipeline options, dependent upon varying programs, policies, and resources,

necessitating individualized support through the implementation of selected data-informed practices. Consequently, the transfer practices discussed here are offered in relationship to the needed attention to a college's own transfer pipelines, specific loss points, and application of potential solutions that can be standardized within the college culture and operations.

Several administrators and Transfer Center Directors¹ at high-transfer colleges emphasize that “there is no silver bullet” to successfully transferring students to four-year institutions. The Promising Practices listed below are inextricable from the other three elements of transfer and are implemented in concert with each other and with intentional, culturally competent, cross-campus collaboration, according to the practitioners. The following Promising Practices have proven impacts on transfer outcomes at participating colleges.

Collaboration

Collaboration was the first and most frequent response to the question “to what do you attribute your successful transfers?” with responders using the actual word, as well as describing collaborative practices. Within their descriptions there was an acknowledgement that Transfer Center Directors and transfer counselors simply do not have the capacity to counsel each individual student due to high counselor-to-student ratios (Parks, 2024). To build capacity, Transfer Center Directors “work very closely with” cultural or cohort programs, campus procedure teams, and discipline departments on campus to provide multiple intervention points to promote transfer. Supporting practices that contribute to collaboration include the following:

Co-location. Physical locations that house support programs—cohort or otherwise—are used as sites for transfer interventions and conversations. These include Umoja, Puente, Honors, MESA STEM, EOPS, FYE, Veterans Centers, DSPS, Pride Centers, and more. Even the Basic Needs center can be a site for transfer intervention:

“Right now, we have a young man, Val. Val is an automotive student, but he's heavily involved in the Dream Resource Center, heavily involved in our Basic Needs Center. And we start to talk about the opportunity that ‘you volunteer your time and your effort, not only to do the work that you're doing in automotive, but also that you're doing these things. You should consider an opportunity of a career [as a higher education practitioner].’” - *Basic Needs Coordinator, O'Hara College.*

Although the Basic Needs Center is not a formal program with a cohort structure, it is nevertheless a potential site for developing a transfer identity within a student.

Communication and Cross-Training. Transfer Center Directors at several high-transfer colleges agree that “all counselors are transfer counselors” and “transfer information is widely distributed to” faculty as well as directors and coordinators of programs and services. Building capacity through collaboration requires early and often communication with key personnel throughout the campus. O'Hara's Basic Needs Coordinator was equipped to facilitate Val's

¹ Most colleges have a Transfer Center Director, but some do not. For this report, personnel responsible for coordinating transfers at their college are referred to as Transfer Center Directors, even if that is not their title.

intervention because O'Hara's Transfer Center Director cross-trains personnel who interact with students.

The "early and often" philosophy extends to communications to students at several high-transfer colleges as well—beginning at orientation or onboarding, continuing through classroom assignments such as writing a personal statement in a transfer-level English course, and even into Transfer Canvas shells where students may be auto-enrolled based on the number of completed degree-applicable units. By making transfer information widely available, especially in an asynchronous format, Transfer Center Directors are building the campus' capacity to serve all transfer-intending students.

Wraparound Services. Wraparound services are designed to intentionally aid community college students along their educational journey. Supporting students in academic and non-academic ways is important because a student's ability to transfer is fundamentally dependent on their ability to stay enrolled at the college. All colleges with high transfer rates echoed some version of the following:

"I think each of our programs is unique because we do offer wraparound services to help increase students' retention and success. And I think this is critical. Yes, I want you to transfer, but how can I support you, not just giving information with counseling or with transfer information, but how do we support those students so they can get to the finish line and transfer and successfully get to the university and succeed at the four-years?" - *MESA STEM Director, Edwards College.*

The services most-often mentioned by study participants are textbook loans or the use of Open Educational Resources or Zero Textbook Cost (OER/ZTC) efforts, culturally competent individual counseling, culturally competent mental health supports, basic needs services, and childcare.

Connecting students to wraparound services requires intrusive efforts on behalf of faculty, including resources on syllabi, course websites, or inviting providers into the classroom for short presentations. Also helpful is the cross-training of faculty and practitioners to assess students' potential needs and provide a warm handoff to appropriate services. Many high-transfer college personnel gave some version of the following about the practice:

"Everybody wholeheartedly works collaboratively. I mean, I feel like [the] Basic Needs Coordinator and I share so many students between [us]; we're constantly emailing in regard to making sure students' basic needs are met, and I feel like it's everything that everyone has said at [this] table. It's a collaboration. It's the Caring Campus approach." - *Dream Center Director, O'Hara College.*

Although these four supporting practices—Co-location, Communication and Cross-Training, and Wraparound Services—fall under the Collaboration umbrella, they are stand-alone Promising Practices that can be deployed individually or in concert with one or more other supports.

Cohorting

Cohort structures allow colleges to build capacity for transfer interventions and assistance by personalizing the student experience and enabling cohort managers to guide students into courses that make sense for their educational goals. Institutions cohort students using existing learning communities such as Umoja, Puente, and MESA STEM, through academic support programs like First Year Experience (FYE) and EOPS, and by leveraging non-academic programs such as Disability Services (DSPS) and Veterans' centers. Cohorting is closely related to co-location but includes an intentional effort to support students academically.

"Our special programs, when you think of Puente, when you think of Umoja, even our Asian Pacific Islander groups, they do cohort their students in classes together. They usually have student development, if not English, some type of ethnic studies or history class, something together." - *Transfer Center Director, Luzon College*.

"One of the things that we're going to be doing in our MESA program is calculus workshops every other week. These workshops will be run by faculty. And the key part—I'm almost forgetting—the key part. We have faculty who are well versed in understanding the students' challenges." - *MESA STEM Director, Edwards College*.

Cohort leaders are adept at identifying areas where students may need more support and provide that support virtually or on-site and with students' cultural and academic identities in mind.

Through collaboration and cross-training, cohort leaders can apply transfer advisement training they have received from the Transfer Center Director to augment student assistance. In response to a question about academic notice (probation), the Dean of Counseling at Luzon College said,

"Before, all the [academic standing] follow-up and intervention was done through the counseling department. Now we've moved that; we can break it down for specialized programs, so they get their own lists. EOPS gets their own list. The Veteran's Center gets their own list so they can follow up. And we do have a counselor that oversees that."

Some colleges even leverage data to create cohorts of "independent" students. For instance, at Edwards College, the Transfer Center Director worked with researchers to identify men of color who were not participating in any men of color programs, cohorted them together, and assigned them a transfer counselor to keep them on track.

Intrusive Efforts

Because community college students have complicated lives, they are often not able to add a trip to the transfer center to their busy schedules, so practitioners respond in a variety of ways. Across the board, Transfer Center Directors in the study collaborate with academic departments and faculty to present transfer information in physical and virtual classrooms every semester, even pre-recording a short video for asynchronous classes, as practiced at Del Rio College.

Counseling personnel from all high-transfer colleges report expanding beyond templated emails to reach students through personalized emails, phone calls, and even social media messages.

The primary intrusive effort mentioned consistently across colleges is embedded tutoring.

“The research that Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning carried out showed that the students who are meeting with the embedded tutor in our writing courses have four times the chances of succeeding in the class than students who don't.” - *Academic Senate President, Mattel College.*

Embedded tutoring on its own can be academically effective, but practitioners stress the importance of cultural competency in the embedded tutors:

“For Puente, in terms of math, we do have faculty that went through the [cultural competency] training as well. Collaborating with the MESA center, we were able to get a tutor for the first year. And then this year, we got a OneHelp mentor, which is a former student that was in the class... Having that tutor or the OneHelp mentor really has helped the students connect a little bit more, encouraging them to stay and to build those working relationships with other students. So, they tend to go a lot more to the MESA center, they tend to do study groups. And then it helped the professor to see what the student needed.” - *Puente Director, Edwards College.*

“And sometimes it is slow for certain departments to buy into that anti-racist and equity-minded work. But we kind of know how to get in those courses the back-end way of ‘you’re gonna get an embedded tutor,’ because we know that the students need that, and the faculty want it, and so they can still make those presentations and connect the students to their resources.” - *EOPS/CARE, Monet College.*

Peer or near-peer embedded tutors typically share a cultural identity with students, enhancing students’ Transfer Identity Development by relaying their own transfer experience.

Transfer Identity Development

Although no participants mentioned the words “transfer identity development,” the practices they described are in alignment with other student identity development practices (Abes et al., 2019). Transfer Identity Development is the name the Chancellor’s Office research team is labeling the collective practices designed to guide a student toward envisioning themselves as capable of transferring to a four-year institution. This is accomplished in part through normalizing transfer as an option for all students, including special-admit (high school), non-credit, incarcerated, and Career and Technical Education students. Culturally competent learning communities generally lead the way with promoting these efforts:

“Umoja, AAPI, Puente, those programs, too. The Transfer Center Director works really well with the folks that are the coordinators for those programs to try to encourage students who may not think that transfer is an option for them.” - *Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning Dean, Luzon College.*

It is important that Transfer Identity Development be rooted in cultural competency to be maximally effective:

"I would add that a lot of our students are first generation students, and so it's so important for them to be able to envision themselves in a four-year college space." - *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director, Valentina College.*

The cornerstone of Transfer Identity Development is a strong transfer culture, where employees wear shirts from their alma maters and casually ask students, "Where do you want to transfer?" beginning with their first day on campus, especially in the classroom. Consider the following three statements:

"Another thing that we do fairly well is starting the conversation about transfer early. Even when we're at Orientation Weekends, one of the first questions we'll ask is, "Oh, where do you plan to transfer? Have you considered transfer?" And that conversation just kind of tracks students all throughout the process, so they're aware, like, 'I probably should start thinking about the options that I have, what I want to do after I'm done here.'" - *Basic Needs Coordinator, O'Hara College.*

"In my ESL classrooms, I have students who have PhDs from other countries, yet they get [excited about] moving on in their journey because of the support that we give them and the types of conversations we have in the classroom with their peers and at the college. Having that student at the center of instruction and the support services allows us to be conduits of that idea of you can go on to a four-year school too, regardless of where you come from." - *Academic Senate President, Mattel College.*

"I know in my interactions with formerly incarcerated and system-impacted students (Rising Scholars), I always talk about, 'Have you thought about transfer? Like you really should be thinking about transfer.' And for a lot of them, no one has ever communicated to them that they are capable of getting a four-year degree." - *Dean of Counseling, Del Rio College.*

The three statements illustrate the power of casual yet intentional conversations with students who may not have chosen "transfer" as their educational goal, yet who are capable of transferring, graduating from a four-year college, and in some cases returning to their community college as faculty or a practitioner.

Peer-to-Peer Support

Central to Transfer Identity Development is peer-to-peer support, as alluded to by the quote from the Transfer Center Director from Valentina College in the previous section. Students are able to envision their journey through the experiences of people who share a cultural background. Peer-to-peer support can happen in casual settings, such as classroom discussions and conversations in learning communities. It can even be a by-product of embedded tutoring:

"We are using the embedded tutor program for many things. Obviously, academic support [but also] inclusion. Allowing students to see themselves in our embedded tutors. That 'I can do that too. I'm a multilingual speaker. I can also learn enough English so that I can come back and be part of the teaching community.'" - *Academic Senate President, Mattel College.*

“Near-peer” support falls into this same category, referring to graduate students who return to their home community college as tutors or coaches. This also includes recently transferred students who participate in alumni panels at the colleges or at transfer destinations as part of a campus tour. Students “seeing themselves” in the experiences of such a person contributes to students developing an internal transfer identity.

“Typically, universities have panels where [transfer students] share those experiences and advice to students. In reading the student surveys, that's typically the main highlight. Hearing directly from students' advice and experience, it's what they bring home, and I think that really prepares them to be more inquisitive as they prepare in their journey.” - *Transfer Center Director, Valentina College.*

Professional Development

Administrators, practitioners, and faculty participants in the study agreed unanimously that professional development focused on equity and cultural competency is imperative in transfer success, particularly when applied to transfer-level English, math, and STEM courses. However, professional development that is irregular, rare, or voluntary only reaches “the coalition of the willing.” Colleges report great success with professional development that is ongoing, engaging, and that is inviting and rewarding to participants. Some learning communities such as Umoja and Puente offer training sessions that anyone can attend.

“We do also have a training institute that is sponsored by the state [Puente] office that they have in Berkeley. When the instructor gets selected, they are sent to that institute before they actually become part of the Puente program. Then we continue having yearly trainings through the state office with culturally relevant material for English instruction, math instruction, now they also have a STEM component.” - *Puente Director, Edwards College.*

“We are very fortunate that we are able to offer the opportunity to have that specific, culturally responsive training. We offer that through the Umoja program; before an Umoja instructor can teach an Umojafied class, they have to do the Umoja training. And we have a long wait list of faculty waiting to go.” - *Umoja Director, O'Hara College.*

Faculty who complete Puente or Umoja training are then allowed to teach “Umojafied” or “Puentefied” classes, as defined by those programs. As a bonus, students in their other classes benefit as well from the culturally competent approach faculty learned in the training academies. Umoja, Puente and other programs provide funds at the state level to ensure college personnel can attend the sessions. Summer training is available to personnel other than faculty.

“There's been some intentionality on the part of the Umoja Director to ensure that whenever there's summer learning opportunities to get Umojafied, she's intentional and not inviting just the Black folk, or just faculty. She's taking faculty, the Basic Needs Coordinator, even facilities people. Because as we cross-train with each other, we're able to support each other and have an ability to speak to that experience of saying, ‘Hey, this is what you can get from Umoja. This is how we're going to be able to support you through the Dream Resource Center.’” - *Dean of Students, O'Hara College.*

In addition to Umoja or Puente summer academies, college personnel benefit from home-grown learning communities of faculty and practitioners; many study participants note having great success in improving students' success and retention rates.

"Our Professional Learning Coordinator has developed a race-conscious certificate and is bringing that to instructors. Counselors were the first cohort, managers were the second cohort, but eventually instructional faculty will have access to that as well, to be bringing that lens to the work that they're doing." - *Guided Pathways Coordinator, Monet College.*

"The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Learning Community (DEILC) [is] an opportunity for semester-long or year-long focused study around building literacy around diversity, equity and inclusion. [We were] thinking about the practices that happen at an institutional level, but also what's happening in [transfer-level] courses. The math faculty committed to doing that work to meet on a monthly basis. Even after the semester was over, we continued to meet on a regular basis to follow through on what kinds of changes they've implemented, what's working, and to create the sense of community around doing this work. Following that, the math faculty made a presentation at Flex Day about how successful the Math DEILC was to build their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion literacy, to share best practices, and to think about how their syllabi could be reworked to incorporate more equity-based strategies." - *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director, Valentina College.*

The learning community model at Valentina was first conducted with leaders from Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Academic Senate. Valentina College has had such success with the program that it was expanded to include science and psychology departments in the coming academic year.

In addition to synchronous Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work, many colleges utilize self-paced, asynchronous Canvas shells or other online knowledge hubs for faculty, classified professionals, and administrators to complete and earn certificates. The asynchronous nature facilitates the participation of part-time faculty, who teach at least half of the courses at any college.

"The professional development that's provided to our part-time faculty is the most and best I've ever seen on my multiple campuses. It's easy to forget them in professional development, but if we come back to 'what are we doing for our students?' Why would you exclude them? We have had more professional development that includes our part-time colleagues as well... Why would you limit half of your students to receive the best education, pedagogy, and whatever training they need by limiting them? I think the professional development piece is key." - *Vice President of Instruction, Mattel College.*

Although professional development is important for all employee groups, practitioners emphasize that because instructional faculty have the most face time with students, they are the group that stands to benefit most from an engaging and collaborative professional development practice, which ultimately impacts course success and transfer rates.

2. INSTITUTIONAL BUY-IN

Enthusiasm, Strong Support, and Innovative Spirit

Fostering a transfer culture at an institution begins with institutional buy-in and enthusiastic support from leadership. This includes prioritizing transfer initiatives, leveraging policy to enact changes, and dedicating resources and personnel to transfer efforts. Practitioners overwhelmingly credit strong, enthusiastic leaders who “lead with a yes, then figure it out,” when presented with new ideas. Practitioners attest that they are inspired by leaders’ enthusiasm and then apply it to their own work.

“We don’t run away from the work that [promoting transfer] involves. We know that that’s part of it, that it’s not a one size fits all. I’ve been at other institutions where it’s like, ‘Well, no, that’s more work.’ Here, it’s like ‘Okay, we’ll figure out how we’re going to do it. We may not know how yet, but we will get there.’” - *Dean of Counseling, Mattel College.*

Executive and administrative leaders who participated in the study highlight the mindset that “failure has to be an option” when designing new approaches. Regardless of the successes or failures of new initiatives, colleges report learning valuable information in the process.

“When you have leadership that allows these conversations, [they] encourage robust conversations and an ability to fail and then retry and embrace these different ideas so that we can try different things.” - Vice President of Student Success, Mattel College.

Conversely, practitioners at high-transfer colleges that have low institutional buy-in report being frustrated and unnecessarily overworked, while practitioners at low-transfer colleges find it difficult to maintain enthusiasm for their efforts, citing high executive turnover and lack of support. Practitioners at one high-transfer college—incidentally, leadership at this college did not participate in this study despite multiple efforts to connect—universally agreed with their Transfer Center Director when he mentioned

“I think we have success *despite*, not because of the support.” - *Transfer Center Director, Edwards College.*

Beyond enthusiastic support, leaders emphasize that institutions must be willing to allot the resources necessary to ensure that initiatives are not just implemented but carried out with quality.

Resources

High-transfer colleges ensure quality implementation of transfer efforts through investing in physical and human resources, such as physical transfer centers, supportive technology for automation, and adequate staffing, to implement evidence-based practices.

Transfer Centers. Colleges benefit from having a physical transfer center with a dedicated, full-time director rather than housing transfer efforts under counseling or being led by a non-instructional faculty member with little directorial or financial control, as at Luzon College.

“The Transfer Center Director is still classified as faculty. Which means they can’t supervise, they can’t have budgetary reins. They have to work within the confines of the

faculty contract, but they're being asked to do *management work* without being a manager, and without being able to have some of the flexibility that managers have.” -
Dean of Research, Luzon College.

In these lean budget times, high-transfer colleges are coordinating efforts between intervention programs and cultural support communities, braiding funding to maximize impacts, and collaborating on impactful practical actions relevant to the student population to support the college's transfer efforts.

Student Management Systems and Automation. A critically important resource is a student management system that seamlessly integrates with local data for student metrics and communications platforms to automate as many processes as possible so practitioners can concentrate on serving students. Automated processes noted in the study include organizing students with an educational goal of “transfer” into a cohort list for the Transfer Center to instantly “share information early and often.” Another noted practice is enrolling students into a Transfer Canvas shell after they earn a certain number of degree-applicable units, so they are made aware of transfer resources, deadlines, and other relevant transfer information.

Leverage Data and Research

Collaboration with campus Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning offices is a critical first step in implementing and evaluating efforts. Focusing resources on evaluating metrics related to successful student transfer enables institutions to measure and address gaps in relevant student outcomes. Developing inclusive measures of student transfer progression (i.e., apply, admit, enroll) provides the information that campus leaders need to support improvement in transfer procedures.

Every participating college emphasized their ongoing, iterative partnership with their campus' Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning researchers to:

- Identify students for various outreach efforts based on success, retention, units earned, educational goal, demographics, or other metrics.
- Cohort students who are not participating in any formal programs, yet who share educational or demographic characteristics.

“We have two [Canvas Transfer shells], one for new students... they can enroll in, and then we have one for when they're applying. And that one we actually enroll all the transfer-ready students. We have around 7,000 students that we enroll in that every fall.”
- *Transfer Center Director, O'Hara College.*

- Launch and assess local research studies to identify promising supports. For example, Puente efforts at Mattel College relied heavily on data:

“We're doing a pilot program that is incorporating math. The first year was really to “Puentefy” [the course] or to embed a math component [such as tutors]; the second year was to look at how successful we were in those math classes. Now that we're in our third

year, we're actually changing our offerings and the way that we're offering [classes] based on that data... We were able to verify the specific math classes that make sense for Mattel College students entering our Puente program, rather than just randomly choosing classes that might help them." - *Puente Director, Mattel College.*

Leveraging existing campus data resources can ensure that any transfer efforts are based on sound research practices and evaluated using rigorous data analysis methods. Institutional buy-in can be borne out through empowering Institutional Effectiveness, Research and Planning offices to provide timely data in the form of automated processes linked to student management systems and data dashboards that are easily accessible to key personnel.

3. CAMPUS PROCEDURES

Part of collaboration is ensuring the college's campus procedures promote course success and transfer at every stage of a student's journey from orientation to completion. Effective teams assess existing procedures for their effect on transfer-intending and transferring students, their ability to maximize the exposure of transfer messaging, and their inter-procedural alignment.

Orientation and Onboarding

High-transfer colleges utilize orientation as an opportunity to introduce transfer as an option for new community college students by incorporating counseling and educational planning into the process.

Some participants report frustration at the loss of mandatory student orientation, seeing it as a missed opportunity to begin Transfer Identity Development on day one of a student's journey.

"We've been told [by our administrators], 'We don't do orientation or make it mandatory, because that's going to scare students away.' What if we feel that it's beneficial [for informing students about career and transfer possibilities]?" - *Transfer Center Director, Del Rio College.*

Course Selection and Availability

As mentioned previously, practitioners at several high-transfer colleges collaborate with Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning offices to identify courses that are suited for students in different programs, such as MESA STEM or Puente.

"Honors and FYE are very intentional about the curriculum that they select; the curriculum that they identify as important to be part of their learning communities to ensure that those classes are not only transferable, but key transfer courses for admission." - *Transfer Center Director, Edwards College.*

This collaboration extends across the campus to ensure that transfer-intending students can access the courses that they need to satisfy transfer requirements at the time that they need them.

"When certain courses have 50 or 60 students on a waiting list, we've been able to let the VPSS and the VPI know, 'these students are looking to leave here because to take and finish their degree elsewhere, because our class schedule does not meet their

needs.' On occasion, they've been able to [open] a couple of math courses [in a] virtual [format]." - *Director of Student Success Initiatives, Mattel College.*

Ensuring that courses are available can reduce the number of students enrolled at more than one community college. Students enrolled at multiple colleges may not be effectively tracked by all colleges, complicating the process of supporting their academic success and as they apply to a university.

Associate Degrees for Transfer (ADTs)

The Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) is complicated for students: a noted refrain from the participants of this study was that "one size does not fit all," as not all colleges, not all disciplines, and not all transfer destinations are aligned. While ADTs benefit many students by clarifying their path to a non-impacted CSU that offers their chosen major, other students find themselves with a different educational plan for each transfer destination they are considering.

The Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act of 2021 (AB 928 provision) directs community colleges to place students on the ADT pathway if students declare a goal of transfer on their mandatory education plans. However, the statute allows each community college to use their existing processes for student education plan development to implement any potential opt out or exception feature where an ADT exists.

Statutory exceptions from auto-ADT placement include:

1. An ADT pathway does not exist in the chosen major at the college.
2. The student's educational pathway is better served by a local associate degree.
3. The student plans to apply to transfer to a UC campus or an independent college or university.
4. The student is seeking to complete a community college baccalaureate degree program.
5. The student is seeking to complete a career technical education program that does not have an ADT pathway.

The complexity of ADT pathways, even at colleges that make clear program maps publicly available, requires counselors to regularly explain caveats and exemptions to students who seek their services. As colleges enter an era where students may be automatically placed in an ADT pathway upon enrollment, practitioner efforts can be coordinated across multiple areas to inform students of their options to support their successful transfer to a four-year institution of their choice.

Early Alerts

Students who are enrolled at more than one community college were mentioned often by practitioners regarding early alert efforts, as students may be receiving needed support at one college, but another college may not know to reach out to that same student.

Universally, practitioners regard Early Alerts as difficult to implement, requiring faculty to add this administrative task to their course obligations.

"Do we have a strong, early alert program? Absolutely not. We're hoping that with this new system, we're going to be able to create some things that will be helpful, because

the current program doesn't. Faculty are just not responsive to it, and we rely on faculty to tell us when the flag's going up, not at the end of the semester.” – *Vice President of Student Success, Mattel College.*

Following up on Early Alerts is also difficult, as it requires establishing contact with and gaining the trust of a student and then working with them on an individualized plan to stay on track.

An intriguing finding of this study is that there are indications that Early Alerts may not be as necessary if the college implements some of the Promising Practices. Taken together, the Promising Practices mentioned earlier in this report may serve as pre-emptive interventions which can make students feel cared for, keep them engaged, and empower them to more easily prioritize their academic success.

“We worked with the research office for six to seven years trying to see, ‘we have a group where we're doing all this extra intervention and then the control group.’ We can never actually get the intervention group to show a significant [rise in] success over the control group. And as we dug down, we found out it's because they're already getting these supports from other areas.” - *Faculty Association President, Mattel College.*

More research is needed on this topic, but it may be reasonable that expanding the capacity of support services to directly support transfer-intending students through culturally competent, proactive, intrusive efforts can mitigate the need for a robust early alert process.

Academic Notice (Probation)

All colleges that participated in the study report three major concerns with Academic Probation as related to a student's ability to transfer: the name and process are based in punitiveness that is uninviting to students, students confuse “academic progress” (the academic metric) with Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) for financial aid, and the timeline for getting students into satisfactory standing is not universally applicable.

The timing of academic notice (probation) was mentioned by every college that participated in the study, with many noting that their internal structure of probation almost guarantees that a student is not able to get their academic and transfer journey back on track.

“Let's say Amanda is a first-time student and tanks the first semester but is able to register for classes for the second semester. We as an institution do not see that Amanda's at risk until she's probably three or four weeks into the *next* semester. So, by the time that we even try to intervene with her, Amanda could be like 25 to 30 units in the hole. It's going to take a pretty Herculean lift to get her out of that.” - *Director of Student Success Initiatives, Mattel College.*

Top of mind for many colleges is the punitive nature of traditional Academic Probation because it is based in carceral language and feels like a punitive process for students who may already be struggling. Renaming “Academic Probation” to “Academic Notice” or “Academic Renewal” and reframing the process as “an invitation to stay” are practices that colleges are implementing to engage students more effectively in the process.

“For EOPS, [academic notice is] more of an invitation to come back, an invitation and ‘you are welcome to come participate. Come meet with our counselor, participate in our workshop. Let’s create a plan on how to get back on track.’ In the past, the wording has been very harsh. ‘You’re on probation! And you have three months and that’s it!’ Adjusting that wording and just making it more of a welcoming approach, ‘We’re here to help. We’re here to support you.’” - *Associate Dean of Student Support, O’Hara College.*

Some practitioners note that Academic Notice procedures can miss students who are under a 12-unit threshold, complicating efforts to keep a student on their early path to transfer.

“If [students] are part time for several semesters in a row, they don’t even appear on the probation list until they earn a certain number of units. So, can you get off probation in one semester? You can’t!” - *Dean of Counseling, Del Rio College.*

This is a particularly pressing issue for veterans and students enrolled at multiple community colleges. Practitioners from a college that has a high proportion of students enrolled at multiple colleges note that a “wonky” academic probation process potentially creates a surprise roadblock to transfer when the student is “at the transfer gate” (Cooper & Brohawn, 2023).

“Basically 50% of our students who are with us in the Fall are not re-enrolled with us in the Spring. And if you go Spring to Fall, it’s closer to 60 or 70 percent. Now you start having this issue of, ‘I’m going to communicate to Natalie in February that she’s on probation based on her Fall grades,’ but Natalie isn’t even with us in February. How does she resolve that? It’s super complicated... And then the clock starts over after a year. She could be on probation and not take courses for two semesters. She’s not gonna reappear on the probation list, and potentially now she’s going to petition to graduate and apply to transfer, but her GPA or Satisfactory Academic Progress is going to be so low that actually she’s not able to do either of those things, and she’s not going to get notified about it because of the logic that’s built into the process.” - *Dean of Counseling, Del Rio College.*

Veteran students pose a unique challenge because the requirements of the GI Bill appear to be out of alignment with Academic Notice processes, and veterans may not be prioritized for specific mental health services to adjust to an educational environment.

“The number one reason that most colleges lose their veterans is if they’re on academic probation for two semesters, then they lose their [GI Bill] benefits at that college. The biggest reason that [veterans] get into academic probation is not because of an inability to learn and to grow. It’s more from transition and readjustment and the mental health struggles that go along with that. That will tank their grades, and then we’ll lose them because they can’t get recertified.” - *Director of Veteran’s Services, Mattel College.*

College practitioners respond to the complexity of Academic Probation by first renaming it to Academic Notice and then developing their capacity to work individually with students. They do this through sharing resources and collaborating with directors of programs as well as creating Canvas shells to relay information and important dates to students.

“We had other efforts in place, ensuring that there was at least one counselor in each special program and the general counseling area that were identified for probation. So, EOPS has a counselor that works with the probation students, and having those identified people just in counseling has been helpful, because nine times out of 10, students are going to meet the counselor first when they are hit with the ‘you’re on probation’ notice. Making sure that somebody in every area is aware of what the current policy is, the practices, and then also the interventions or strategies to support students on that helps.” - *Umoja Coordinator, O’Hara College.*

“Somebody mentioned this linear path to transfer. It’s not. It’s curvy, it’s messy, and there’s some exits sometimes, and reentry. I think that having communities like EOPS and CalWORKs and Umoja, having students aware that they exist, so that they can easily come back in and get right back on track.” - *Associate Dean of Students, O’Hara College.*

The responses from the colleges regarding the complex nature of Academic Notice point to the potential of proactive practices in and out of the classroom to help students avoid derailing their transfer goals. As indicated by the responses from colleges, when students are placed on Academic Notice, the college’s response includes increased touch points and is enhanced by automating the disbursement of information in a more personalized way, such as through a transfer Canvas shell that facilitates easy discussion within the cohort and with the Transfer Center Director. Completion and Exit Teams

For students’ final academic stage before transferring to a four-year institution, high-transfer colleges utilize proactive Completion and Exit teams to reengage ADT earners and students who are close to their transfer point based on their total transferable units earned—broadly, students who have achieved at least 45 units with an overall 2.0 GPA (Cooper & Brohawn, 2023, p. 4). What they are doing is “helping them exit, making sure that they complete their degree, get them connected with transfer as soon as possible.”

“We were trying to capture near completers, and so we ran the data, and found that there were over 7,000 students who were near completion of a degree—meaning four courses away from a degree or two courses away from a certificate. We sent out communications via email and text, and surprisingly, I had many students respond saying that they didn’t know they were that close. Some of them had already completed but never applied for their award. Others said, ‘I did that course at another college; does that mean I’m done?’ Students got a stipend if they completed, but they didn’t even care about the stipend. They were more appreciative of someone actually taking the time to say, ‘you’re close to this degree.’” - *Career Education Counselor, Mattel College.*

High-transfer colleges credit cross-campus collaborations and an equity focus for their Completion and Exit teams’ high rates of success.

“We realized that our Black students had lower success rates when it came to graduation applications, and their grad apps were getting denied at a higher rate than other students. We realized that when a student submits a graduation application, it could be months before the evaluation team actually gets back to a student to let them know that they are not eligible or that they are missing other college transcripts. Sometimes students don’t read the email or don’t get around to it, and at that point it’s

too late. That's where that partnership started between Counseling and Admissions and Records to say, 'Give me all the applications that you're not doing anything with yet. We can be doing a pre-evaluation.'" - *Transfer Center Director, Monet College.*

To summarize the findings regarding campus procedures, communications about transfer happen “early and often,” and then at every stage of a student’s educational journey—beginning with orientation and ending with guiding students through a completion and exit process. Communications around degree completion and transfer processing are coordinated with cultural programs, learning communities, and other structured programs rather than being disjointed or distinct.

4. PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES

Transfer Culture

As the Umoja Director from Edwards College states, community college students “should only be here for a stop, not a stay.” To reflect that, high-transfer colleges actively promote a transfer culture on campus, which includes implementing the Transfer Identity Development Promising Practices as well as hosting transfer academies and end-of-year transfer celebrations.

Due to the diversity of students at community colleges, practitioners at high-transfer colleges agree that transfer efforts must “meet students where they are” both physically in classrooms and other service areas, and mentally by understanding that students have complicated lives.

“There's a very nurturing, loving approach to realizing that we have lives outside of the campus, and we model that for our students. So, when we work with students that are just focused on a career path, we invite them to consider the possibility of transfer, that we invite them to tap into some other possibilities.” - *Dean of Student Engagement, O'Hara College.*

Practitioners stress the importance of a human-centered approach to Transfer Identity Development such as accommodating students during off-peak times, in online or asynchronous formats, and with a culturally competent lens.

Cultural Competency

Professional development for cultural competency. Because instructional faculty are the most impactful presence for students at any college, it is imperative that they engage students with culturally competent Transfer Identity Development practices.

“We're bringing a service to them, but they also see the community within the faculty, and they know that they can trust us, that they have accessible folks trying to meet them where they're at. This is a combination of efforts. I always say the faculty are a door of opportunity [to connect students to transfer efforts].” - *Career Education Counselor, Mattel College.*

Faculty at high-transfer colleges participate in equity-centered learning communities dedicated to sharing pedagogical strategies and materials that allow Transfer Identity Development to be implemented through understanding students’ unique positionalities. This strategy requires making learning communities and resources easily available—through a home-grown,

asynchronous Canvas course, or through the Umoja Summer Learning Institute, for example—to part-time faculty, who may teach upwards of half of all courses at any college. Professional Development also extends to classified professionals and administrators that can result in program completers being celebrated for improving their cultural competency through earning a credential or similar recognition. The Vision Resource Center and CVC@One offer several general and discipline-specific equity courses that may prove relevant here.

Caring Campus

In addition to culturally competent professional development, many high-transfer colleges adopt the [Caring Campus](#) approach, which humanizes employees for students through warm handoffs and other human-centered practices. Practitioners repeatedly mention the importance of gaining “the trust and confidence” of students.

“Students need to know that we care about them, we care about their future, we care about their success and being able to have that time and space to build that relationship with them over the course of 2, 3, 4, years is such an asset.” - *Associate Dean of Student Supports, O’Hara College.*

Caring Campus principles include several common suggestions such as asking students their names first before asking for their student ID number and walking students to the next office and handing them off to a colleague there while explaining their issue.

Relationships with Transfer Destinations

A common practice employed at all colleges is to have strong relationships with transfer destinations. While the Master Plan set up the community colleges in certain areas to be feeder schools for local California State Universities (CSUs), Transfer Center Directors find that students increasingly want more options than just their local four-year institution. Beyond assisting in crafting articulation agreements, Transfer Center Directors and directors of other programs find that making connections to their counterparts at students’ transfer destinations can help smooth out the transfer process for their students. For instance, regarding incarcerated students,

“Once they’re done with us, they hope to be on campus. They’re very much in tune with the Project Rebounds at the CSUs. We have a great working relationship with CSU Monet, but UC Tipton touches dear heart with me, because they always accommodate our students when I get them connected to the right people there.” - *Transfer Center Director, Del Rio College.*

Another practitioner emphasizes the importance of students having a warm handoff to the transfer destination.

“We have a big event every spring, ‘UC Middleton & CSU Cox Day’. What is it? Just two tables? No, we have *all* the programs and services and departments from those two schools so that we can cross-collaborate with the students, but also with our coordinators and counselors. Relationship building with our partners extends beyond the transfer center.” - *Transfer Center Director, O’Hara College.*

As every Associate Degree for Transfer is not accepted by all CSUs, community colleges are ensuring students have a pathway to transfer by establishing articulation agreements with additional transfer destinations based on the ADT requirements and guarantees.

“We have good partnerships with the UCs and CSUs, but over the last couple of years [we are strengthening the connection to] the private schools, the AICCUs, as well as out-of-state schools, they're accepting the ADTs.” - *Transfer Center Director, Del Rio College.*

All colleges that participated in the study engage in campus tours: transporting students to potential transfer destinations to experience a four-year institution. These efforts are often coordinated by the directors of learning communities, such as Puente, Umoja, or MESA STEM, but due to the collaborative nature of the college, they share transportation and resources with interested students from other learning communities.

“When there is a transfer activity, or when another program like Umoja with their college tours. It's not sitting in isolation, that thought of college tour is not just ‘Umoja college tour.’” - *Vice President for Student Services, O'Hara College.*

A few community colleges also encourage their students to participate in student research events:

“We do have an honors research conference that our students are able to participate in every year. It's hosted by the Honors Transfer Council of California, which is a group that honors programs at many different California community colleges are a part of. They hold it every year and it's an opportunity for students to get to present their own research during their first couple years of college, and I think that that really helps them understand what transferring could mean and gets them excited about it.” - *Honors Program Director, Edwards College.*

Beyond providing student engagement opportunities, a strong formal relationship with a four-year university can also mean a potential data-sharing agreement.

“Students came here to go to CSU Cox because the state set up our schools that way; we're supposed to be pipelines to the local CSUs. We have a very close relationship with CSU Cox. We have a lot of projects in place where we share documentation. For students that float between the two campuses, we don't have to say, ‘Oh, go, go talk to your advisor at CSU Cox.’ We can pull up their records because we have a data-sharing agreement... The partnerships we have with our universities are critical. It is what makes a difference. If there's a student who gets denied somewhere, I pick up a phone and figure out why. Not to get them in necessarily. Sometimes it works, but most of the time, it's to find out what happened. Let's figure it out so that this doesn't happen again, and so we can prevent this for future students and open more doors.” - *Transfer Center Director, O'Hara College.*

Creating and fostering strong connections with local transfer destinations, according to practitioners, can help to mitigate some more typical complications that might arise in a student's transfer journey.

Concerns and Considerations

In response to an invitation to share perceived or real challenges to effective transfer and suggestions for support they would appreciate, practitioners from participating colleges provided a range of information. The seven colleges that participated in the study, based on their expertise and experience, pointed toward funding issues, numerous directives and reporting requirements, concerns with data and research capabilities, and the needed collaboration with intersegmental partners. The Chancellor's Office is extremely grateful for the candor and passion of each study participant.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE COLLEGES

The Chancellor's Office research team has compiled recommendations for community colleges drawn from the qualitative data so generously shared by practitioners at the seven participating colleges.

Maximize and Leverage Co-Location Opportunities

Colleges with existing cohorted programs and learning communities encourage collaboration and cross-training with the Transfer Center Director to share transfer information with employees. Directors and personnel associated with cohorted programs and learning communities can then leverage their existing relationship with students to provide academic and transfer support in culturally competent ways. Colleges without a suite of cohorted programs and learning communities could consider instituting them to increase the capacity for transfer advisement. Co-location is not limited to official programs and learning communities, as casual transfer messaging can occur at any location and in any capacity at the college.

Increase Students' Sense of Belonging Through Cultural Competency Professional Development in Service Areas and Pedagogy

Because a student's ability to transfer is dependent on their course success and persistence, the Equity Officer could work with service departments and discipline faculty to develop and implement employee learning communities focused on increasing cultural competency and sharing evidence-based, equity-minded pedagogical practices. Community colleges without resources to craft home-grown culturally competent professional development can access many equity and cultural competency courses available on the Vision Resource Center. Colleges that are not already practicing Caring Campus principles could consider embracing such a program.

Use Local Data to Develop and Implement Innovative Pilot Programs

Each college is unique and could partner with their Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning office to design and implement pilot programs to discover innovative ways to deliver transfer information early and often to students. Perhaps consider identifying high-success culturally relevant courses for cohorts of students and implementing embedded tutoring in transfer-level English, math, and STEM courses as well as ESL courses.

Minimize Impacts on Students by Streamlining Campus Procedures

Academic notice (probation) can unintentionally disrupt or end a student's transfer trajectory, and students with excessive units can find themselves without access to financial aid at their

transfer destination. Leveraging cross-campus collaborations that include Admissions and Records and Articulation Officers can propose options to streamline campus procedures, including orientation, early alert responses, and completion and exit strategies, for improved efficiency. “Academic Probation” could be renamed as “Academic Notice” or “Academic Renewal” and reimagined as an “invitation to stay.”

As students approach the transfer gate, data sharing at the district and system levels can alleviate the complications that arise from students enrolled at multiple colleges, easing the transfer process through institutions’ access to one district- or system-wide transcript. All California community colleges have access to [eTranscript California](#) which can reduce financial barriers and the onus of responsibility on students, yet not all colleges and districts have fully embraced the exchange platform.

Automate Communication of Transfer Information to Students

Student Management Systems at the colleges could integrate with student communication efforts to enhance proactive and just-in-time communications. The college’s existing learning platform could be leveraged to create Canvas shells for Transfer that automatically enroll students who have earned an appropriate number of completed eligible units.

Conclusion and Next Steps

As the qualitative evidence in the preceding sections indicates, it takes intentional efforts across a whole college to transfer students. Successful efforts are most effective when led by enthusiastic, transfer-focused leadership and should leverage existing programs across the campus to build capacity for transfer advisement and counseling.

Personnel from colleges that participated in the study were universally grateful for the opportunity to share their thoughts and encourage the system to explore more opportunities for qualitative research. In a continuation of this effort to explore transfer success, the Chancellor’s Office research team is designing a longitudinal qualitative study of recently transferred students and students active in the transfer process, projected to begin Fall 2025.

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Academic Probation - When a student's GPA drops below 2.0 out of 4.0, Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations requires CCC and the CSU to place students on academic probation.

Academic Notice or Academic Renewal – Potential ways to rename “Academic Probation” to avoid deficit-minded terminology and remove any linkages to the carceral system.

ADT – Associate Degree for Transfer

CalWORKs – California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids. CalWORKs helps students with public assistance get access to vital services such as work study, job placement, childcare, curriculum development, skills training, and more.

Canvas – The educational platform in use at all 116 California community colleges which houses instructional materials, multiple means of communication, and methods for students to submit materials.

Dream Center – Dream Resource Centers may offer support services, including, but not necessarily limited to, academic counseling, peer support services, psychological counseling, referral for social services and state-funded immigration legal services. The space in which the liaison is located may be deemed a Dream Resource Center and may be housed within existing student service or academic centers.

DSPS – Disabled Student Programs and Services assists students with disabilities, so they have equal access to all educational programs and activities on campus.

EOPS – Extended Opportunity Programs and Services supports students disadvantaged by social, economic, educational, or linguistic barriers by offering comprehensive academic and support counseling, financial aid, and a bevy of other services (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2025).

ESL – English as a Second Language. A discipline with the mission of teaching English to English language learners.

FYE – First Year Experience. A program for incoming first-year students to orient them to a community college.

Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning – A term used in this report to describe colleges' research and data offices although they may go by different names.

MESA – Math, Engineering, Science, Achievement. This intersegmental collaboration supports underserved and underrepresented students pursuing calculus-based Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) bachelor's degrees.

Pride Center – A term used in this report to describe physical centers that house academic and support resources for sexual and gender minorities, including but not limited to two-spirit, intersex, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students.

Puente – The California Community College Puente Projects provide academic counseling and mentoring support services for students to transfer to four-year institutions.

SAP – Satisfactory Academic Progress. As defined by studentaid.gov, satisfactory academic progress is the process a school uses to determine if a student is meeting all their educational requirements and is on target to graduate on time with a degree or certificate.

SEA – The Student Equity and Achievement Program supports the California Community Colleges in advancing the systemwide goal to boost achievement for all students with an emphasis on eliminating achievement gaps for students from traditionally underrepresented groups.

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math

Transfer Center – a term used in this report to describe the physical hub for transfer activities and efforts on a campus.

Umoja – A Kiswahili word meaning unity, Umoja is a statewide student success program dedicated to enhancing the cultural and educational experiences of African American and other students.

Veterans' Center – A physical location on many community college campuses that houses Veterans' Services, which provide academic programs and career training for returning veterans, as well as assisting with transitioning to life after military service, particularly after combat deployment.

Appendix B: References and Resources

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University of California (May 2022). *Multi-Year Compact Between the Newsom Administration and the University of California*, <https://dof.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/352/Programs/Education/UC-Compact-May-2022.pdf>

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RESOURCES

Besides the links provided in this report, additional information on effective transfer practices can be found within these documents and may prove useful as colleges work to develop and enhance their transfer efforts.

[2023 Final Report and Recommendations](#), AB 928 Associate Degree for Transfer Intersegmental Implementation Committee, December 2023 California Community Colleges (2024). *Five Barriers to Transfer for California Students: Why Coordination Is the Path Forward*, <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/Transfer-and-Articulation-Program>

California Community Colleges (May 2022). *Multi-Year Roadmap Between the Newsom Administration and the California Community Colleges*, <https://dof.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/352/Programs/Education/CCC-Roadmap-May-2022.pdf>

California State Auditor (September 2024). *2023-123 California's Systems of Public Higher Education: Streamlining the community College Transfer Process Could Increase Access to Bachelor's Degrees*, <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2023-123/#summary>

California State University (May 2022). *Multi-Year Compact Between the Newsom Administration and the California State University*, <https://dof.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/352/Programs/Education/CSU-Compact-May-2022.pdf>

[California State University - California Community College Transfer Partnerships: A Retrospective Look](#), College Futures Foundation, February 2024

[Effective and Equitable Transfer Practices in the California Community Colleges](#), The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, Fall 2020

[Power to the Transfer](#), Dimpal Jain, Santiago N. Bernal, Alfred R. Herrera, 2020

[Raise the Bar: Attaining College Excellence and Equity](#), U.S. Department of Education, 2025 State of California (2002). *The California Master Plan for Higher Education: The California Promise*, <https://ahed.assembly.ca.gov/sites/ahed.assembly.ca.gov/files/hearings/master%20plan.pdf>

[Strengthening California's Transfer Pathway](#), Public Policy Institute of California, August 2023

[Through the Gate Transfer Initiative](#), The RP Group, ongoing

[The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges](#), The Aspen Institute and Community College Research Center, May 2016

University of California (May 2022). *Multi-Year Compact Between the Newsom Administration and the University of California*, <https://dof.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/352/Programs/Education/UC-Compact-May-2022.pdf> [Using Data Effectively to Drive Equitable Improvements in Postsecondary Student Success A PLAYBOOK](#), U.S. Department of Education, May 2023

[Vision Resource Center](#), California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2025

Appendix C: Methodology

The qualitative transfer audit of promising practices and needed supports began with a review of literature produced in the last 5 years. Using the EBSCO search engine housed in the California State Library, the researcher used the search terms “transfer,” “higher education,” “equity,” “California,” and “community college.” Based on the results of the search, the additional terms “academic probation,” and “early alerts” were added. The search was supplemented by a search of the websites of California higher education research and policy partners including The RP Group, California Competes, and the Public Policy Institute of California.

A scan of the existing research regarding equitable transfer rates in California revealed several key themes that became the focus of the qualitative research:

1. Passing gateway courses in the first year is correlated to students’ likelihood of transferring; however, the cultural responsiveness of the course materials is a mitigating factor (Cooper & Brohawn, 2023; Felix et al., 2022).
2. Academic counseling that occurs early and often and is culturally responsive positively influences transfer rates (Cooper & Brohawn, 2023; Felix et al., 2022; Wyner, et al., 2016).
3. Learning communities and cultural programs provide non-academic support such as textbook vouchers and childcare, an increased sense of belonging, and are correlated to effective counseling (Cooper & Brohawn, 2023; Felix et al., 2022).
4. Academic probation poses a complex barrier to transfer that can be mitigated with an effective early alert system (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2023; Boretz et al., 2021; California Competes, 2024; Cooper & Brohawn, 2023).
5. Institutional leaders who lead with critical perspectives, empower and enable transfer work, and creatively leverage policies are critical to improving transfer rates (Cooper & Brohawn, 2023; Felix et al., 2022; Wyner, et al., 2016).

The Chancellor’s Office research team constructed the college site selection protocol in January 2025 by identifying target schools based on the *Raising the Bar* study that is no longer available on the US Education Department’s website. Researchers selected supplemental colleges that were similar to the target colleges in area, size, transfer destination college(s), urbanicity/rurality, and location within California. Eight colleges emerged as sites of interest and represent Northern and Southern California; small, medium, and large colleges; and colleges located in small cities, large cities, and suburbs of medium and large cities.

Based on the themes, the primary researcher assessed the participating colleges’ approaches to transfer, academic probation, early alerts, equity-mindedness, ADT availability, and institutional buy-in through a brief content analysis of the colleges’ equity plans; strategic plans; SEA Plans; mission, vision, and values statements; counseling and transfer center web pages; and cultural programs and learning communities available to students.

The research team invited the eight identified colleges to participate in the study via email, requesting that they assemble one or two teams of key personnel that support transfer practices at the college. Seven colleges responded and participated in focus groups.

Researchers conducted nine focus groups at seven college sites in February and March 2025. Focus groups were 1-1.5 hours. The researchers employed a semi-structured interview protocol to allow for a robust conversation with participants. College personnel in attendance included presidents, vice presidents of student affairs and other areas, chief instructional officers, directors of institutional research and planning, academic senate presidents, directors of cultural programs and learning communities (such as Umoja, Puente, First Year Experience, MESA STEM, veterans' centers, and others), transfer center and honors transfer directors, admissions and records personnel, and counseling deans. Many participants also serve as instructional faculty in addition to these roles. Site visits included a tour of the transfer center.

Participants signed a consent form that keeps their names and colleges confidential and agreed to audio recording. The recordings were transcribed in Otter AI and edited by the primary researcher for confidentiality and clarity. Recordings were deleted after transcription, and the transcriptions were saved under pseudonyms in a password-protected file folder. The key to the pseudonyms is only available to the primary researcher and is saved in a separate password-protected area. Researchers crafted reflection memos immediately after each site visit. Participants had the opportunity to review this guidance memo prior to publication to ensure confidentiality had been maintained and to ensure that their messaging was maintained through the analysis and writing process.

After editing the transcriptions, the primary researcher uploaded them, the reflection memos, and meta-memos into NVivo qualitative analysis software to group similar statements “in vivo” and thematically, identifying important themes. Additional visual analysis was conducted with Mural.com mind mapping technology to assess the connection points between the themes and various sub-themes. Thematic findings have been incorporated into the main body of the report as well as visualized in the form of a mind map (Appendix D) for visual reference.

Appendix D: Mind Map

A mind map is an analytical tool that enables a researcher to visualize the themes that emerge from qualitative research as well as the ways in which themes are interconnected. The mind map for this project is highly connective, reinforcing many participants' statements that "there is no silver bullet" for improving transfer and that "collaboration is key." This mind map was created using Mural.com.

Because a mind map is an analytical tool, the themes, practices, and findings in the report do not precisely reflect the arrangement of items on the mind map, yet it provides a useful illustration of the complex interconnectedness of the elements and themes.



