

# Increasing Success for Two-to-Four-Year Transfer Students Within The City University of New York

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Graduate NYC (GNYC) is an initiative that partners with The City University of New York (CUNY), the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE), and non-profit organizations in increasing the college readiness and success of New York City students. Over the 2015-16 academic year, GNYC supported a study of the first-year experiences of approximately sixty transfer students and freshmen at three CUNY four-year colleges. The study also includes the perspectives of a smaller group of upperclassmen and college administrators. All student participants were selected at random and compensated for their participation.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transfer students represent the *majority of first-time enrollees* on four-year campuses within CUNY; they comprised two-thirds of first-time entrants in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Yet their experiences have been less documented and understood than those of first-time freshmen. The study detailed in this report builds on a concerted effort underway in New York City and around the country to learn more about transfer students' unique characteristics and needs.<sup>2</sup>

This study relies on over 200 interviews conducted by two Columbia University researchers with college students, faculty, and administrative staff at three CUNY four-year colleges over the course of an entire academic year. It emerges from a yearlong collaboration between GNYC, CUNY's Office of Policy Research, and the Columbia researchers.

Though the focal students in this study certainly cannot speak for all two-to-four-year transfer students, the length of time researchers spent with these students and the depth of their perspectives have yielded six primary recommendations that colleges can heed to increase transfer student success:

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Get Students On Track Academically**
2. **Promote Sustainable Performance**
3. **Share Clear Information**
4. **Provide Flexible and Helpful Support**
5. **Create Opportunities for College Connection**
6. **Build on Sense of Commitment**

<sup>1</sup> CUNY, Admissions to Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Programs by College (New York, NY: Author, 2014) [http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2\\_AY\\_current/ADMS\\_0012\\_UGGR\\_DEG\\_PRG\\_HIST.rpt.pdf](http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/ADMS_0012_UGGR_DEG_PRG_HIST.rpt.pdf), accessed January 7, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Davis Jenkins and John Fink. Tracking Transfer: New Measures of Institutional and State Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students Attain Bachelor's Degrees (New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2016) <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/tracking-transfer-institutional-state-effectiveness.html>, accessed January 7, 2017.

Doug Shapiro, Afet Dunder, Phoebe Khasiala Wakhungu, Xin Yuan, and Autumn T. Harrell. Transfer & Mobility: A National View of Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2008 Cohort (Signature Report No. 9) (Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015).

Joshua Wyner, KC Deane, Davis Jenkins, and John Fink. The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges (Aspen, CO and New York, NY: The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program and the Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2016) <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/transfer-playbook-essential-practices.html>, accessed January 17, 2017.

## 1. Get Students On Track Academically

During the first few weeks of transfer students' first semester, they must make important academic decisions that shape the remainder of their four-year experience. These decisions often have implications for both financial aid and future course-taking opportunities. Without sufficient guidance, information, and support to get on track academically, transfer students can miss critical deadlines and requirements, derailing their academic progress and jeopardizing the likelihood of degree completion.

## 2. Promote Sustainable Performance

Unlike freshmen, who typically take introductory classes populated mostly with other freshmen, transfer students often begin taking intermediate or advanced courses with challenging content and a fast pace alongside other students who have been on the campus for two or more years. Succeeding academically can be difficult in this context, especially if students lack sufficient academic preparation or understanding of senior college course expectations. College professors can increase sustainable performance by becoming aware of the large number of transfer students enrolled in their classes, understanding the challenges they face, and providing explicit explanation of classroom expectations and resources for support.

## 3. Share Clear Information

One of the most notable causes of transfer students' uneven experiences is ineffective or inconsistent communication about important information such as course registration periods, financial aid deadlines, and requirements related to their majors. Ensuring that transfer students have sufficient access to accurate information and know how to respond to it is essential for their success.

## 4. Provide Flexible and Helpful Support

As with the majority of freshmen, transfer students often require support or guidance at some point during their first year of college—whether academic or personal. For support to be most useful to transfer students, it needs to be tailored to their particular circumstances and must include flexible scheduling for those who are juggling responsibilities in addition to school.

## 5. Create Opportunities for College Connection

Transfer students often feel like permanent newcomers or outsiders tasked with navigating the administrative, academic, and social infrastructures of their four-year colleges completely on their own. To help transfer students feel less isolated, it is beneficial to create more opportunities for them to engage with one another and the academic dimension of their college communities, especially during their first year at a four-year college.

## 6. Build on Sense of Commitment

Many transfer students arrive at four-year colleges with a deep commitment to attaining their bachelor's degrees—often more so than first-time freshmen. This commitment is an invaluable resource for transfer students, and it can be leveraged to support degree completion.