



**University of Wisconsin – Madison
Office of the Provost**

**Committee on the Transfer Student
Experience
Final Report**

May 20, 2004

UW-Madison Committee on the Transfer Student Experience

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policy and practice surrounding issues in undergraduate education are dominated by the traditional one of students who enroll right after high school and stay until graduation. Nationally, the trends to observe student “swirl” – circulation of undergraduates from one institution to another and back again – is increasing and the influences of these trends are felt at UW-Madison. About 20 % of new undergraduates started college elsewhere and about 80% of UW-Madison graduates carry transfer credit. Many pressures and prospects – both internal and external - have turned our attention to transfer students and motivated the work of this committee.

In October, 2003, Provost Peter Spear and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Paul Barrows appointed the Ad Hoc Committee on the Transfer Student Experience (CTSE), with Virginia Sapiro, Associate Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning as chair. The committee charge was to

- facilitate communication and coordination across the various bodies already at work on identifying and solving problems related to undergraduate transfer student experiences and
- take a big-picture look at the experiences of transfer students on campus -- including the transfer process itself, advising, and academic and student life issues -- to identify areas of special concern and make recommendations regarding what steps should be taken and by whom.

We defined transfer students as those students who first matriculated at a different post-secondary institution and then enrolled at UW-Madison in some subsequent semester

The CTSE gathered together information about the transfer student experience and used that evidence to test how accurately the anecdotes, impressions, and well-circulated myths stand up to the evidence. We drew from several sources: reports from recent committees addressing issues related to transfer students, the existing scholarly literature on transfer students, analyses of student record data, analyses of the 2003 Undergraduate Survey and other survey data, a series of focus groups conducted with UW-Madison transfer starts, and an assessment of the communication skills of seniors in capstone courses done by faculty in those courses.

Several broad themes emerged from our work.

First, transfer students are “our” students. We all noted a tendency for people to use language implying that UW-Madison students are those who arrive in their first year of college, and that transfer students are add-ons, not truly “our” students. Although we found no evidence of intentional differential treatment, we agree that all UW-Madison students, equally, should receive the same care, attention, and expectations for success. Prospective transfer students also merit careful attention. These early contacts influence their experience and success as UW-Madison students.

Second, our research indicates that transfer students’ experiences are diverse with respect to their process of arrival to the campus and integration into it, their preparation for life as a UW-Madison student, and their expectations or desires for their life here. Consequently, it is difficult to make sweeping generalizations about their experience. We do recognize that some of their needs are distinct from other new students and programs designed for them, for example SOAR, will be more effective when it is designed to meet the specific needs of new transfer students.

Third, many, but not all, indicators show that transfer entry students, in the aggregate, face more challenges academically than do students who enroll at the beginning of their college careers. Our analysis does not allow us to identify the reasons for the differences that appear,

but they are likely to be a combination of many factors, including the different pool from which these students are drawn; their prior preparation; financial, social integration, and other challenges they face; factors that may have contributed to their motivation to transfer in the first place, and disruptions caused by moving from one institution and location to another.

Fourth, as for so many aspects of life at UW-Madison, communication is a challenge. Sharing information among Admissions, prospective students, newly enrolled transfer students, UW-Madison advisors, advisors at sending institutions, program faculty and staff, and others who need to know on many aspects of the transfer student experience

Finally, as we expected, there are things we can and should do at the campus, college, and more local level to improve the experience for transfer students. Although we discovered that students did not commonly find some aspects of the experience as difficult as we had expected – transferring credit is a key example – we can identify areas for improvement.

We offer the following recommendations that, in keeping with the decentralized nature of the campus, should be implemented at the most local level possible that assures effectiveness and coherence.

1. Build an infrastructure for communication on issues related to transfer students, including communication outward from the institution to prospective transfers and their sending institutions, applicants, and transfer starts and intra-institutional communication among Admissions and the schools and colleges.
 - a. Develop information that is more accessible to prospective transfer students and their advisors at sending institutions, and deliberately assemble this information into a coherent package with an obvious entry point for prospective transfer students.
 - b. Reinforce the communication with prospective and new transfer students that there is a specific requirement to declare a major, and that indicating interest in a major during the admissions process is not a declaration.
 - c. Improve communication between Admissions and the schools and colleges, especially as it relates to notifying selective programs about projected numbers of new transfer students. Improve communication between programs and Admissions about the level of competitiveness and requirements for admission to the major.
 - d. Explore ways to communicate and coordinate the specific requirements for entry to majors and programs across the University community, for example through the Undergraduate Catalog.
 - e. Build a one-stop front door for transfers, either on-line or in physical space.
2. Develop orientation programming for transfer students early in the semester after transfer students have enrolled. Address transfer student needs in a developmentally appropriate way. For example, at SOAR improve connections between transfer starts and other students on campus and explicitly encourage transfer starts to get involved in campus activities early on.
3. Expand new student and student welcome activities, alumni receptions, etc. to *all* new students, ensuring that the activities are specifically appropriate for students transferring from other institutions. With respect to campus academic and student development programs available to incoming first year students, consider whether these programs or others like them should actively recruit transfer students as well.
4. Encourage deans and college APC's to initiate a review of requirements for admission to their programs that exceed requirements for admission to the University, and evaluate if those requirements are necessary to achieve academic goals of the program. Where GPA cut-offs are used solely as a way to restrict access to high demand programs,

consider if other measures of potential contribution to a discipline are more appropriate. Review the Undergraduate Catalog description to see if it is clear and accurate.

5. Convene discussions with UW System about the adverse impact of the current UW System policy—a policy that differentiates the admissions and registration processes of UW System students and transfer students from other institutions. Specifically consider the impact on all students with regard to course access, transfer credit evaluation, advising, particularly prior to enrollment, orientation, and communication across institutions and with students.
6. Encourage collaboration between student affairs and student academic services units to provide a more seamless support network and out-of-classroom engagement and learning opportunities.
7. Explore ways to improve the transition to campus of transfer starts to close the existing gap in progress in the first term enrolled and the retention and graduation rates of transfer starts (Section 2K).
8. Provide more on-campus housing opportunities for transfer students, particularly housing with students at their same academic level.
9. Be attentive to the demands on financial aid resources and on Financial Student Services for transfer starts, given transfer students have more limited financial resources that may place them at an educational disadvantage.
10. Urge the Council on Academic Advising or other appropriate advising bodies to develop advising strategies and assistance designed to strengthen the academic success of transfer starts based on specific understanding of the issues facing transfer start students.
11. Establish a Transfer Student Issues working group with a point-person from each school/college and from Admissions to coordinate communication and cooperation across units and programs, and to follow-up on the recommendations set forth from this report. Use this group as a resource in future discussions of policies on transfer students and transfer student admissions.
12. Circulate this report for information and consideration widely across campus including to the colleges with undergraduate programs, the Office of Admissions, the Council on Academic Advising, and elsewhere as appropriate.

PART 1. INTRODUCTION

1A. Motivation and Scope of the Committee's Work

"The traditional 'linear-matriculation' image of the college student still influences policy formulation and educational practice at all levels, despite the reality that the majority of 18- to 24-year-olds, not to mention older students, do not experience a college education in a linear fashion." So writes Victor Borden in a recent article in *Change* on "student swirl," a term referring to the fact that most undergraduates today earn their college credits at multiple institutions. Transferring from one institution of higher education to another – and then perhaps to yet another – is now a common pattern among American undergraduates. A study of undergraduates who first matriculated at four-year institutions in 1989-90 showed that 28% eventually transferred to another institution. The figures are much higher, of course, among those who started at two-year institutions.¹

The undergraduate student body of the University of Wisconsin – Madison certainly participates in this national trend, although the percentage of new undergraduates who are transfer students has actually declined since the early 1990s. In 1992, 30% of new undergraduates (2069) arrived as transfers compared with 23% (1718) in 2001. In 2001-02, about 20% of UW-Madison degree recipients started as transfer students. That number was as high as 30% in 1993-94. Although the portion of students who start as transfers has decreased, these students still represent a substantial portion of our undergraduates.

Many forces converged to stimulate the establishment of this ad hoc committee to examine the transfer student experience and make recommendations for improvement. First is the realization that although a large portion of UW-Madison undergraduates arrive as transfer students, the standard image that guides policy and practice on undergraduate education is the traditional one of students who arrive right after high school and stay until graduation. Second, many new pressures and prospects have turned our attention to transfer students. Leaders in state government and their constituents are pressing for more coherent connections among state institutions, especially the 2-year UW Colleges and the technical colleges on the one hand, and UW-Madison and the other 4-year UW institutions on the other. Transferring has been facilitated by programs such as the UW-Madison Connections Program, which allows dual admission at one of the UW Colleges or Madison Area Technical College and simultaneously at UW-Madison. Third, frustrations and complaints have surfaced regarding different aspects of the transfer experience suggesting it is time to take stock and make adjustments.

In October, 2003, Provost Peter Spear and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Paul Barrows appointed the Ad Hoc Committee on the Transfer Student Experience (CTSE), with Virginia Sapiro, Associate Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning as chair. The committee charge was to

- facilitate communication and coordination across the various bodies already at work on identifying and solving problems related to undergraduate transfer student experiences and
- take a big-picture look at the experiences of transfer students on campus -- including the transfer process itself, advising, and academic and student life issues -- to identify areas of special concern and make recommendations regarding what steps should be taken and by whom.

Our first task was to set a working definition of transfer students. *We defined transfer students as those students who first matriculated at a different post-secondary institution and then*

¹ Victor M.H. Brown, "Student swirl: When traditional students are no longer the tradition," *Change* (March/April 2004), pp.10-17.

enrolled at UW-Madison in some subsequent semester. We use the terms “freshman start” and “transfer start” to distinguish our students based on when in their college career they first enrolled at UW-Madison. Freshman starts includes students who were continuously enrolled at UW-Madison through degree completion, and those who were first enrolled at UW-Madison, went away, and then re-enrolled at UW-Madison after an absence.

We explicitly did not address issues related to transfer-outs – those students who started at UW-Madison and chose to continue their education elsewhere – nor did we consider the problems associated with transfer credit for continuing and reentry students. We also did not consider special programs or agreements, for example the UW-Madison Connections Program or the transfer agreement with Miami Dade Community College.

1B. Addressing the Charge

The first CTSE meeting was held in early November 2003². In preparation, numerous documents were collected and circulated to the committee to be read before the first meeting³. During the first two meetings CTSE generated from members’ reading and experience a list of problems and topic areas that needed exploration. CTSE then broke into working groups with each assigned a topic area to study and in which to develop recommendations. The committee as a whole, reconvened from February to April to discuss the working groups’ findings and recommendations and to develop this final report.

With respect to the first charge, to facilitate communication and coordination across the various bodies already at work on transfer student issues, CTSE has been a success merely by drawing so many of the actors together in discussion and deliberation. But also, CTSE has developed recommendations for improving communication and coordination into the future.

This report represents our response to the second charge, to study and make recommendations. The remainder of the report is divided into two major sections. The first, “Understanding the Transfer Experience,” is a narrative of our major findings drawn from the many different sources of information and data. The second, “Recommendations,” lists our collective conclusions about further steps to improve the experience and success of transfer students at our institution.

1C. Preliminary Observations

Before we move on to the details, we note three broad observations that emerged from our work.

First, transfer students are “our” students. We all noted a tendency for people to use language implying that UW-Madison students are those who arrive in their first year of college, and that transfer students are add-ons, not truly “our” students. Although we found no evidence of intentional differential treatment, the linguistic difference is unfortunate. All UW-Madison students deserve, equally, the same care, attention, and expectations for success. Prospective transfer students (those who are seeking information but haven’t decided to apply for transfer, those who have applied and are waiting for acceptance, and those who have been accepted but haven’t decided if they will enroll) also merit careful attention. These early contacts influence their experience and success as UW-Madison students.

Second, our research indicates that transfer students’ experiences are diverse with respect to their process of arrival to the campus and integration into it, their preparation for life as a UW-Madison student, and their expectations or desires for their life here. Consequently, it is difficult

² See Appendix A for committee membership.

³ See Appendix B for an index of support documents available on-line (<http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/obpa/CTSE/>).

to make sweeping generalizations about their experience. However, we did find some key themes and issues that are described below.

Third, as we expected, there are things we can and should do at the campus, college, and more local level to improve the experience for transfer students. Although we discovered that students did not commonly find some aspects of the experience as difficult as we had expected – transferring credit is a key example – we can identify areas for improvement.

PART 2. UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFER EXPERIENCE

A core effort of the CTSE was to gather together information about what we know about the transfer student experience and to assemble that information into a common, coherent, evidence-based picture. The committee was composed largely of individuals who had some piece of that puzzle to contribute because of their past experience related to transfer students. This analytical stage was intended partly to test how accurately the anecdotes, impressions, and well-circulated myths stand up to the evidence.

The committee determined to base our findings on high quality, systematic evidence as well as personal observations from experience, and we drew from several sources: reports from recent committees addressing issues related to transfer students, the existing scholarly literature on transfer students, analyses of student record data, analyses of the 2003 Undergraduate Survey and other survey data, a series of focus groups conducted with UW-Madison transfer starts, and an assessment of the communication skills of seniors in capstone courses done by faculty in those courses.

As noted above, we defined transfer students as those who first matriculated at a different post-secondary institution and subsequently enrolled at UW-Madison. For comparative analysis, we use the terms “freshman start” and “transfer start” to distinguish our students based on when in their college career they first enrolled at UW-Madison.

We begin with a profile of our transfer students. Our findings then proceed chronologically according to students’ experience. We begin with the prospective students, and then consider the application process, the issue of transfer credit equivalencies, advising, orientation, registration, and the issue of access to courses. We follow that with a review of the social and academic integration of transfer starts, and indicators of their academic success.

2A. Who are UW-Madison Transfer Students and Where Do They Come From?

National studies describe a trend in enrollment patterns in which undergraduates enroll at multiple colleges and universities – simultaneously or sequentially – on the way to degree completion. This phenomenon is referred to as “swirl”. At some colleges and universities more than half of the undergraduates are transfer starts. Not so at UW-Madison. The proportion of undergraduates who are transfer starts – about one in five in Fall 2003 – has decreased from about one in three in 1990. The national trend towards student swirl is manifested at UW-Madison not as an increase in transfer starts, but as an increase in the proportion of freshman starts who bring with them college credit and continuing students who transfer credits back to UW-Madison from enrollment at other institutions during the summer, from study abroad, or from courses taken elsewhere during a stop out period. For recent graduating classes, about 20% were transfer starts, but about 80% of degree recipients had at least some transfer credit on their student record.

In recent years, UW-Madison has received about 5,600 transfer applications annually (compared with more than 20,000 freshmen applications), and enrolled about 1,700 new transfer students. Three-quarters of transfer applications are for fall admission. For fall

admissions, of 100 transfer applicants, 50 are admitted, and 30 choose to enroll. By comparison, for 100 freshmen applicants, 64 are admitted, and 28 enroll. Thus, a transfer applicant is *less* likely to get an offer of admission and *more* likely to enroll than a new freshmen applicant.

Trends in Transfer Applicants, Admits, and Enrolls – Fall Term

	Year			
	2000	2001	2002	2003
Applicants	3615	4167	4368	3900
Admits	1951	2103	2197	1923
Enrolled	1186	1261	1294	1132
Admit Rate (% of applicants who were admitted)	54	51	50	49
Yield Rate (% of admits who enrolled)	61	60	59	59

Source: Applicant data views. Clare Huhn, Academic Planning and Analysis, 11/03. See <http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/obpa/>.

Currently, about 20% of enrolled undergraduates are transfer starts and 22% of new undergraduates in 2003 were new transfer students. Over half of the enrolled transfer starts attended a public post-secondary institution in Wisconsin prior to transferring to UW-Madison: about 35% previously attended another UW four-year university, about 10% attended one of the UW Colleges, and about 10% attended a Wisconsin technical college (more than 90% of those transferred from Madison Area Technical College (MATC))⁴. The remaining 45% of transfer starts attended a private college in Wisconsin or an out-of-state college. Among the latter population are Wisconsin residents who went to a large university elsewhere and transferred to UW-Madison often, as we learned in the focus groups, for financial reasons or because they wanted to be closer to their families.

Trends in Annual Numbers of New Undergraduates

	Year			
	2000	2001	2002	2003
New First-Time Freshmen	5810	6153	5551	5625
New Transfer Students	1593	1777	1804	1571
% New of new students who are Transfers	21.5	22.4	24.5	21.8

Source: 2003-04 Data Digest.

Transfer starts and freshman starts share a number of demographic characteristics – patterns of gender, residency, and ethnicity are similar. However, the populations of transfer and freshman starts differ in some important characteristics. Compared to freshman starts, transfer starts are more likely to: have parents who didn't go to college; be parents themselves (although this is a small minority of students in both cases); have debt in the form of student loans from banks, loans from kin, and credit card debt; be enrolled part-time (although this also applies to a small percentage of students in both cases); work more than 20 hours per week; and work off campus. Although students who transfer to UW-Madison do not increase the gender, geographic, or ethnic diversity of our students, they do appear to add to our student population diversity in terms of economic background.

⁴ See UW-Madison Undergraduate Transfer Students, Retention and Graduation Rates- By Public Sending Institutions in Wisconsin, Jocelyn Milner, Academic Planning and Analysis, October 2002.

Work, Debt and Family Life – 2003 Undergraduate Survey Responses

	Percent of Respondents	
	Freshman Starts	Transfer Starts
Hours worked per week at a paying job: None	24	23
1-14 hours*	34	19
15-19 hours	16	16
More than 20 hours*	27	42
Worked ON campus*	47	30
Worked OFF campus*	45	64
Have dependent children*	2	7
Mother has college education*	73	62
Father has college education*	78	66
Enrolled Part-time	9	18
Enrolled Full-time	84	74
Have bank debt for student loans*	38	60
Have debt to kin*	16	22
Have more than \$200 credit card debt	23	35

*Indicates statistically significant differences between freshman starts and transfer starts ($p \leq .05$). Sample includes only juniors and seniors.

For more detail see "2003 Undergraduate Survey: Comparison of Responses for Freshman Starts and Transfer Starts." Yi Lu and Jocelyn Milner, 3/2004.

In summary, there are few common denominators among transfer starts; they come with a wide range of prior academic experience and preparedness. They have less homogeneous academic preparation than freshman starts who enroll directly from high school. Transfer starts are older, their life experience is more varied, and they are more likely to carry the responsibilities of adulthood with them to college. They are more likely to come from socioeconomic backgrounds that can create challenges for success in college.

2B. Preparing for Transfer – What is the experience of a prospective transfer student?

What is it like for someone who is or has been enrolled at another college or university to prepare to transfer to UW-Madison? These transfer prospects approach UW-Madison through a wide range of routes. Here are just a few examples:

- Wisconsin residents who enrolled at a two-year college, and whose aspiration was to transfer to UW-Madison from the time they first matriculated;
- Students who originally applied during their senior year in high school and ~~was~~ were admitted to UW-Madison, but chose to go elsewhere to start their college careers;
- Students who never considered UW-Madison until they had spent some time in an educational experience elsewhere;
- Place-bound adults who originally matriculated elsewhere, stopped out of college for some period of time, and are now ready to enroll at a university to complete a degree.

These individuals will have different levels of prior experience with UW-Madison, different strengths and qualities of prior academic experience, and different motivations for investigating admission. This heterogeneity means they have different service needs, and serving them all well is a considerable challenge.

Prospective transfer students obviously need a lot of information in order to complete the transfer process successfully. Moreover, advisors uniformly agree that early advising of transfer

prospects is essential for a successful transfer experience, and that too few transfer students receive all the help they need. Prospective students use many different sources of information while they are deliberating about transferring and while they proceed through the process. Following is a brief review of some of the different sources.

Students may seek information through the institution in which they are enrolled while they consider transferring to UW-Madison. Our focus group investigations indicated that students from UW 2-year institutions often found advisors on those campuses very helpful. Of course, one of the goals of those campuses is to prepare their students for matriculation at 4-year institutions, including UW-Madison. Transfer Admissions has established strong connections with the Wisconsin two-year colleges, both the UW Colleges and Madison Area Technical College (MATC), to provide information about transferring to UW-Madison and to share information about students and curricula. Combined, these institutions account for about 20% of the new transfer students who enroll each year. Transfer Admissions hosts advisors from the UW Colleges and Madison, Milwaukee, and Nicolet Area Technical Colleges at an annual day-long advising workshop. In addition, individual schools and colleges have established direct contacts with the two-year public institutions in Wisconsin.

The situation is somewhat different for students coming from 4-year campuses of the University of Wisconsin. In general, recruitment, admission, and academic advising relationships are not established between UW-Madison and other four-year institutions. Such interactions could be misconstrued as recruiting efforts and it is inappropriate for one four-year institution to recruit, or be perceived as recruiting, from another four-year institution. One exception to the rule is when one institution has programs that another does not. For example, the College of Engineering has transfer agreements with some other four-year colleges that do not have engineering programs.

Many web-based sources of information serve prospective UW-Madison students. In Wisconsin, prospects can make use of the UW Transfer Information System (TIS) web site (www.uwsa.edu/tis). This web site, which has been developed over the past 15 years by UW System and the UW institutions in response to a legislated mandate to provide transfer information, includes course-by-course transfer equivalency information for the UW institutions and for the Wisconsin Technical College System.⁵ The next development for TIS web-based service is to provide students with an on-line “what-if” degree audit service – a service that is sometimes referred to as “TIS Phase IV”. This service would be available for all UW System students and also eventually, could serve students from any US sending institutions. This is a resource-intensive project and will need an infusion of financial support to get off the ground.

Of course, the Office of Admissions offers web-based information <http://www.admissions.wisc.edu/admission/transfer.html>, as do some colleges, for example, the College of Engineering <http://studentservices.engr.wisc.edu/transfer/> and the College of Letters and Science <http://www.ls.wisc.edu/Gened/Students/transfer.htm>.

No amount of written material can substitute for direct contact and especially, the advising interview. Prospective students make contact with many different offices and personnel at the campus, college, and department levels, and these different units and people recognize and fulfill their roles as gateways in different ways. Students who made contact with the Admissions Office and advisors in general found these contacts very helpful. But areas for concern did arise. Transfer prospects are likely to require lengthy one-on-one advising consultation to help them prepare for transfer. Continuing students, similarly, have needs for lengthy one-on-one consultations and, as a group, receive priority in overstretched advising offices given the

⁵ Improving TIS is the focus of a System-wide effort and goes beyond the scope of this report. Examples of some of the issues being considered as part of this effort include the lack of access to data across institutions, missing equivalencies for upper-level courses, and systematizing the updating of course requirements.

established mutual commitment between those students and the university. The difficulties associated with these competing needs are especially acute during the time period when continuing students are seeking advising for selection of their courses for the next term. The tension between these competing needs is resolved differentially across advising units on campus.

Prospects also get information and advice from friends who are already UW-Madison students and from family members who may live in the local community, work on campus, or have other connections. Many of the students in our focus groups specifically cited their parents and/or friends as among the most helpful sources of information.

A lot of information is available for students who are considering transferring to UW-Madison. However, there are some gaps in that information (more about that in the following sections). One approach to make this information more accessible to prospective transfer students and their advisors at sending institutions would be to review the UW-Madison web presence, and deliberately assemble this information into a coherent package with an obvious entry point for prospective transfer students.

2C. The Admissions Process – Applying For Transfer, Being Admitted.

Having made the decision to apply for admission as a transfer student, the student completes and submits a formal paper application or web-based application which is then reviewed by Transfer Admissions. The students we talked with in focus groups were very positive about this experience on the whole; they didn't report any difficulties with the admissions process. Some of those who had originally applied to enter as freshmen wondered why they had to apply all over again, and asked about the possibility of expediting the transfer admission process for those who had been admitted to UW-Madison as freshmen. This perspective suggests that transfer applicants should be informed more clearly that the transfer admission decision is based on their *full* academic experience, including their work since high school.

The details of the transfer admission process differ some depending on the intended major. Issues associated with the differences in the process for different majors and programs are discussed in the section of this report on academic majors and programs.

Transfer admission at UW-Madison is governed by a transfer admissions policy that applies to the entire UW System (www.uwsa.edu/acadaff/acis/acis6-0.htm). Consequently, the application process differs somewhat for students who are transferring from other UW System institutions and for transfers from sending institutions outside the UW System. For example, students transferring from the UW Colleges via the Guaranteed Transfer Program are guaranteed admission to UW-Madison if they complete an associate's degree with a GPA of 2.6 or higher. For students transferring from any UW, they are permitted to register with their cohort of continuing students who are at the same academic level (sophomore, junior, senior). New transfer students from other sending institutions register according to their SOAR date, or when classes begin. More details about this two-tiered policy and its confounding impact are provided in the following sections.

About half of transfer applicants receive an offer of admission. Once admitted transfer applicants make the decision to accept the offer of admission, they receive additional information about advising, orientation, and the transfer equivalency of prior course work.

2D. Financial Aid

Transfer starts are more likely than freshman starts to have debt and to seek financial aid. They work more and work off campus more than their freshman start counterparts. To add to the complexity of their financial picture, they are more likely to be parents than freshman starts.

One implication of this pattern is that the campus should be attentive to the special demands the transfer start population makes on financial aid resources and on Financial Student Services, especially if we increase transfer start enrollments in the future.

Analysis of the Undergraduate Survey indicates that transfer starts are at least as satisfied with their interaction with the Financial Aids Office and their financial aid packages as freshman starts. Even so, financial vulnerability often translates to academic vulnerability, and transfer start students' more limited financial resources may place them at an educational disadvantage, especially at this institution where the median family income among freshman starts from Wisconsin is \$72,000⁶ while the median family income in Wisconsin is \$46,350.

Financial Aid – 2003 Undergraduate Survey Responses

	Percent of Respondents	
	Freshman Starts	Transfer Starts
Contacted the financial aid offices in the current academic year*	27	45
Rate the financial aid package they received as excellent or very good	45	49
Rate how the financial aid office treated them as excellent or very good	55	57
Rated the cost of attending in relation to the quality of education as excellent or very good	71	64

*Indicates statistically significant differences between freshman starts and transfer starts ($p \leq .05$).

Sample includes only juniors and seniors.

For more detail see "2003 Undergraduate Survey: Comparison of Responses for Freshman Starts and Transfer Starts." Yi Lu and Jocelyn Milner, 3/2004.

2E. Transfer Credit Equivalencies and Registration

Prospective and new transfer students need to know how their prior course work will transfer to UW-Madison in order to make informed academic decisions. Advisors require accurate transfer credit evaluation in order to provide the best possible advising. The advising community has long expressed concerns that transfer credit equivalencies are not provided in a timely manner and these delays cause problems for students. Because of these concerns, the CTSE gave special attention to this issue.

New transfer students are the focus of this report, but they are not the only UW-Madison students who need transfer credits equated. Four out of five UW-Madison degree recipients have at least some transfer credit from a variety of sources – AP courses, college courses taken during high school, summer school courses taken elsewhere, transfer credits for stop-outs, and credits from a study abroad program are some examples. In addition, Transfer Admissions evaluates courses that continuing students are thinking about taking at a different institution over the summer for potential transfer equivalency. All of this demand for transfer equivalency translates into the processing of approximately 55,000 transfer credit equivalency transactions a year, a rate that is about 6 times what it was in the late 1990's.

The Office of Undergraduate Admissions and the Academic Administrative Council appointed a joint sub-committee in 2002-03 to investigate the problems related to transfer credit equivalency processes, and a follow-up sub-committee in Fall 2003 that submitted its report in April 2004. In order not to duplicate the work of these sub-committees, we simply note the key recommendations. (See the committee reports for more detail.) The first sub-committee recommended increasing staffing levels (both to reinstate staff reassigned during the ISIS implementation and to accommodate increased demand for transfer credit) and supporting

⁶ UW System OPAR analysis, January 2004.

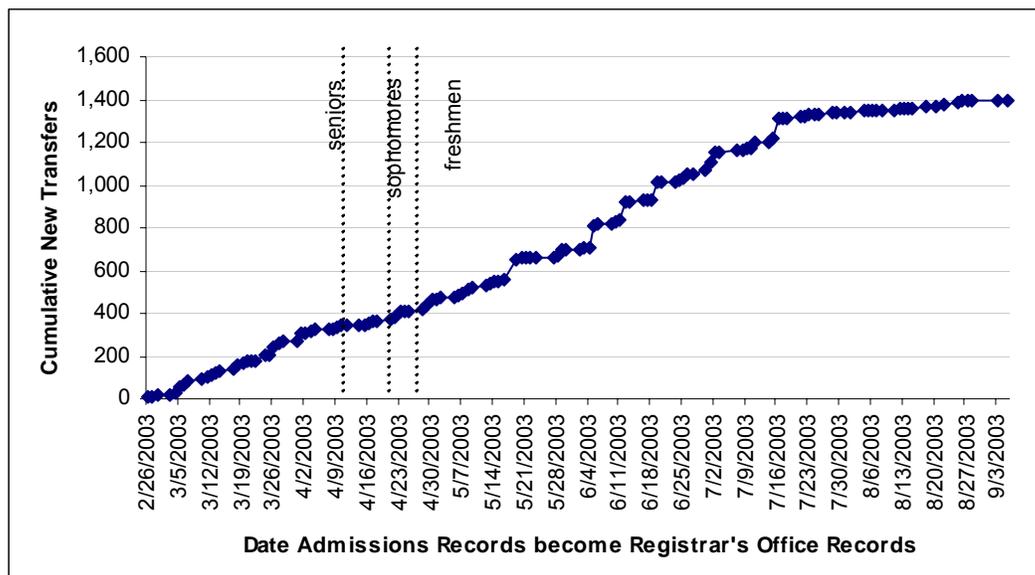
improvements to the information systems used for transfer credit equivalencies. The staffing issue has been addressed in part by adding two staff positions to Transfer Admissions, which would restore staffing to nearly pre-ISIS levels. These positions likely will be filled by July 2004. The second subcommittee specifically addressed the information system issue, and recommended specific enhancements to the ISIS/PS transfer module in their April 2004 report. The subcommittee also endorsed the service goals of Transfer Admissions, which are focused on timely transfer credit evaluations, and endorsed the plan of Transfer Admissions to work toward implementing self-service technology for at least some transfer credit equivalencies. The AAC requested more cost information before endorsing the subcommittee's recommendations.

CTSE used both the focus group findings and the undergraduate survey data to understand student perspectives on transfer credit equivalency issues more systematically, especially to detect transfer starts' reactions to the process itself. One of our most surprising findings, and contrary to the observations of advisors, was that focus group participants did not have much to say about the transfer credit equivalency process – not good or bad. When asked specifically about problems with transfer credit equivalencies, only in isolated cases did they remember much about that aspect of the admissions and registration process, or have any memory that it posed particular difficulties. We conclude that the perspectives of both students and advisors are accurate: the interventions of advisors protect many new transfer students from the impact of delayed transfer credit equivalencies.

The student focus groups and discussions with advisors did identify one set of issues associated with the first registration experience for new transfer students – the relative timing of registration and the admissions process including transfer credit evaluation. Two inextricably related problems emerge. First, the registration appointment times for new (non-UW) transfer students come later than those for continuing students at the same level, so many course sections are filled by the time new transfer students get to register. And secondly, UW System policy requires that new transfer students within the System be allowed to have the same registration appointment times as continuing students at the same level, even though the transfer credit equivalencies cannot be completed by that time. Brief elaboration of both issues follows.

Most new transfer students register through SOAR, or else do not become eligible to register until just before classes begin. Thus, they register weeks after continuing juniors and seniors are eligible. Only about 28% of new transfers are eligible to register by mid-April, when continuing juniors and sophomores first become eligible to register. It is mid-July before 90% of new transfer students have completed the application process, have their records moved to the Registrar's Office, and become eligible to register.

Fall 2003 Cumulative New Transfers, by the Date the Student Record Transitioned from Admissions, to the Registrar's Office



Source: Undergraduate Applicant Dataviews. Counts include some applicants who intended to enroll but did not actually enroll. Academic Planning and Analysis, Office of the Provost, Clare Huhn, 2/5/2004

The UW System policy requiring that transfers within the System have the same registration appointment times as continuing students at the same level has some benefits – ideally all new transfer students would register at the same time as the corresponding continuing students so that they would all have the same access to courses. But the policy has some big drawbacks. The overlapping timing of the application process, of the completion of course work that the student may be enrolled in at the sending institution, and of the UW-Madison registration period make it difficult to provide new transfer students from other UW institutions with a transfer credit evaluation by the mandated registration period. These students are permitted to register, under the policy, without their credit evaluations and without UW-Madison advising. This policy does not serve students well. The CTSE recommends that a dialog about the adverse impacts of the current policy on students be opened with UW System.

2F. Orientation and Registration

Effective and informative advising and orientation is critical to students' progress to degree and the quality of their academic experience. Advising and orientation of new transfer students on this campus has largely been organized as an extension of services and programs designed for new freshmen, which historically has been the focus of SOAR. As noted above, new transfer students bring a wide range of prior academic and life experiences. Developing orientation events, advising services and communication efforts that reflect these needs, expectations and experiences is critical for the success of our new transfer students.

The two-tiered process of registration for UW System transfers and others discussed above limits the effectiveness of our advising services, creates fragmentation among transfer student populations, limits agility in responding to the needs of UW-Madison students, and hinders efforts to design more comprehensive and effective advising and orientation programs. Moreover, a two-tiered process creates a higher potential for students to fall through the cracks.

The focus group findings indicate that students who did not attend SOAR, whether they were from another UW System institution, technical college, or out-of-state institution, are often confused and feel the most isolated when they arrive on campus because they do not know

where to go or who to consult with for advising. A majority of students who reported they had major problems did not attend SOAR, and some admitted that perhaps they ought to have done so. The data from the undergraduate survey indicate that significantly more transfer starts (17%) than freshman starts (12%) are unsure of where to go when they need advising although the numbers in general are relatively low.

What were the motivations of the students who avoided SOAR? The reason we heard most often was that they had already been to a freshman orientation somewhere and did not need to go to one again. Many students assumed that as people who were experienced at “college,” they would not need orientation. Some of these students later discovered they had more to learn than they thought. Further, students told us that the \$70 fee required to attend SOAR was a disincentive. One consistent recommendation we heard from focus group respondents was to provide orientation opportunities soon after the semester begins when students would have more thoughtful questions, and be more open to learning about campus resources and activities. [See Appendix E, Summary of Focus Groups with Transfer Starts.]

Overall, new transfer students who attended SOAR and consulted with advisors early on described an easier time registering for the courses they needed. Moreover, these students were less likely to feel lost and isolated when they arrived on campus. Although transfer starts want their differential experiences and knowledge respected, they recognize that as new students they have concerns and needs similar to those of other new students. Creating developmentally appropriate orientation programs---programs that recognize the variability of transfer students’ educational and life experiences--- is critical to improving the orientation experience of transfer students when they arrive on campus.

2G. Course Access and Registration

The previous section identified several potential barriers to course access. The timing of registration for new transfer students falls later than for continuing students. UW System transfers who were admitted in time for registration and are eligible for timely registration may be unaware of advising options or may choose not to avail themselves of these opportunities. In the undergraduate survey, transfer starts and freshman starts report similar experiences with the registration process and their ability to get into both upper level and introductory level courses (2003 Undergraduate Survey). Further, when most students were asked specifically about any problems they might have experienced registering for courses, a number of focus group respondents indicated that they had little, if any, problem getting into the courses that they wanted.

Registration – 2003 Undergraduate Survey Responses

	Percent of Respondents	
	Freshman Starts	Transfer Starts
Rated the following excellent or very good:		
Registration process and ability to register for desired courses.	55	59
Registration process, in terms of the mechanics of how the process worked.	62	61
Were able to get into upper level courses required for their major.	68	71
Were able to get into introductory courses they wanted to take.	70	72

No statistically significant differences between freshman and transfer starts appear in this table.

Sample includes only juniors and seniors.

For more detail see “2003 Undergraduate Survey: Comparison of Responses for Freshman Starts and Transfer Starts.” Yi Lu and Jocelyn Milner, 3/2004.

During the focus groups, students who transferred from the 4-year UW System institutions (especially as compared with transfers from the 2-year UW campuses) seemed more likely to find the registration process confusing and to report more difficulty getting the courses they wanted. They reported more difficulty finding information, offices or individuals who could assist them. Interestingly, students who transferred from 2-year UW institutions reported a very different, very positive, experience. Our conversations with the students suggested that the difference was attributable to the extensive advising students from 2-year colleges received by their sending institution prior to transfer. These students began planning early in their college career for transfer to UW-Madison and came to campus knowing which courses would transfer, which courses they needed, and often had contacted a UW-Madison advisor while still enrolled at their sending institution. Students from the 4-year UW's did not plan so thoroughly for transfer. Students who transferred in from other major research universities also reported few difficulties with course access or the transition to UW-Madison; however, unlike their 4-year UW counterparts, these students are required to attend SOAR.

Thus, on the whole, research indicates that transfer starts do not have experiences that color their view of access to courses in a way that distinguishes them from freshman starts. How do we rationalize this observation with the observations of student services staff described above? Perhaps the registration frustrations of new transfer students are highly visible examples of the kinds of experience of all students. Because transfer starts are more academically and socially heterogeneous, they may be more likely to require complex and idiosyncratic advising interventions. We know that the timing of the registration process does lead to course access problems and we conclude that it is the hard work of advisors and other student services staff that protects new transfer students from many of the difficult situations they would otherwise face.

2H. Social Integration

Having successfully navigated the admission and registration process, how do new transfer students integrate socially into the university? The undergraduate survey provides some information about satisfaction with many aspects of life on campus. Overall, the vast majority of freshman starts and transfer starts are satisfied with their experience at UW-Madison, although there is a significant difference; 92% of freshman starts are extremely satisfied or satisfied, while the same is true of 87% of transfer starts.

When we asked transfer starts specifically about adjusting to campus and making friends, we heard mixed reactions. Some students had difficulty feeling a part of the campus, particularly meeting other students and finding friends. When social networks are already formed among other students, it was difficult to break into those networks and find other students with similar interests. As stated by one focus group respondent:

“I had no close friends for a whole year and I felt really isolated. I missed my friends and the outdoor activities I was so involved in at my other school.” I knew some of the issues of getting involved here were within myself so I finally began seeking resources and getting involved—but it was tough to know where to find information or how to meet other students.”

Other transfer students had existing social networks in Madison, which included other students with whom they went to high school, or family and friends. For these students the social transition was relatively smooth.

Transfer starts also reported varied and at times contradictory experiences with their own on- and off-campus housing experience. Compared to freshman starts, transfer starts are less likely ever to live in a University residence hall; according to the undergraduate survey, 88% of freshman starts and 18% transfer starts ever lived on campus. Transfer starts who lived either

in a private residence hall or off-campus as new students consistently reported that it was more difficult to meet other undergraduates, make friends, or get involved in campus life. Transfer students who lived in residence halls felt more connected with the campus, but the downside for them was that they were living mostly with freshmen, rather than with students at their same academic level. New students who live on campus, including new transfer students, appear to derive an academic benefit from experiences in the University residence halls; the first term grades are higher for on-campus students⁷.

Transfer starts had mixed experiences feeling a part of the campus, making friends and meeting other students with similar social and academic interests, particularly during their first semesters on campus. Improving connections between transfer starts and other students on campus, explicitly encouraging transfer starts to get involved in campus activities, and providing on-campus housing for transfer starts, will reduce some of the isolation and lack of social integration that transfer starts, especially those without prior social networks, experience when they first arrive on campus.

2I. Academic Integration

Freshman and transfer starts mostly reported similar academic experiences in the undergraduate survey. There were no significant differences in their ratings of the overall quality of instruction, how much their courses challenged them to think, the quality of teaching in the major, and the availability of faculty. Freshmen and transfer starts gave similar ratings to their overall satisfaction with opportunities for research, although freshman starts were more likely to have participated in research with a faculty member than transfer starts. This may be because some of the key undergraduate research programs aim at the freshman and sophomore years. Some students in the focus groups mentioned their research experiences and how that experience helped them feel more academically and socially integrated on campus.

Some CTSE members wondered if faculty expressed biases against transfer starts and regarded them as not “our” students. Based on survey responses, transfer starts and freshman starts do not differ in their perception of how faculty treat them. Further, focus group participants consistently reported surprise at finding how welcoming and accessible faculty and staff are at UW-Madison, particularly when students were willing to seek their help. This evidence suggests that transfer starts don’t have an experience of the faculty and staff that reflects biases against them.

⁷ Clare Huhn, Academic Planning and Analysis, April 2004.

Academic Integration – 2003 Undergraduate Survey Responses

	Percent of Respondents	
	Freshman Starts	Transfer Starts
Overall quality of instruction is excellent or very good	65	66
Feedback on course work is excellent or very good	42	45
Faculty members sensitivity to needs as a student is excellent or very good	45	49
Availability of faculty to discuss course work is excellent or very good	63	59
Quality of teaching in the major is excellent or very good	73	70
Opportunities to do research, on your own or with faculty, is excellent or very good	56	56
Participated in a research project with a faculty member in the past academic year*	24	18
Instructors are clear in their expectations	95	93
Standards and expectations are too high	8	8
Standards and expectations are about right*	87	81
Standards and expectations are not high enough	6	11

* Indicates statistically significant differences between freshman starts and transfer starts ($p \leq .05$). Sample includes only juniors and seniors.

For more detail see "2003 Undergraduate Survey: Comparison of Responses for Freshman Starts and Transfer Starts." Yi Lu and Jocelyn Milner, 3/2004.

Students who transferred from all types of institutions, except from other research universities, indicated that the academic workload is higher at UW-Madison than at their previous institution. Focus group respondents often indicated the amount of work per course, particularly reading levels, is higher here. A few noted that they could take 18 credits at their sending institution and manage well, but that credit load would be too high at UW-Madison. Another interesting finding from the focus groups was that transfer starts, particularly those from the technical and UW colleges, notice that there is more competition to excel in their courses and programs here than there was at the institution they transferred from. The students reacted positively to this; they *wanted* the greater challenge and expectations, and many expressed pride that they were up to the challenge.

In summary, there are few important differences between freshman and transfer starts in terms of how they rate their overall academic experiences, including quality of instruction, research opportunities, availability and helpfulness of faculty, and breadth of academic choices. Transfer starts did find that the amount of work associated with courses was higher at UW-Madison and they welcomed the academic challenge.

2J. Academic Programs and Majors

Transfer starts who participated in the focus groups suggested that the broad array of academic programs at UW Madison was a key reason for transferring to and staying at UW Madison. The undergraduate survey, focus groups, and a by-program analysis allowed us to study differences in the academic choices of the two groups of students.

Advisors report that many students incorrectly believe that when they specify an intended major on their application, they are automatically registered in that major when they arrive.

Discussions in the student focus groups substantiated this belief. Student record data point in the same direction: analysis of data on juniors and seniors shows that a higher proportion of transfer starts (17%) than of all juniors and seniors (12%) did not have a declared major in Fall 2003. In contrast, only 7 % of surveyed junior and senior transfer starts reported that they hadn't declared a major. Students who are unintentionally "undeclared" are likely to encounter difficulties, including reduced access to courses and other resources associated with their intended programs. Undergraduate Admissions Office communications to newly admitted transfer students clearly say that admission to the University does not constitute admission to a program or major unless that is explicitly stated, but this issue needs to be underscored in additional ways with students.

Declaring an Academic Major – 2003 Undergraduate Survey Responses

	Percent of Respondents	
	Freshman Starts	Transfer Starts
2003 Undergraduate Survey Respondents		
Had declared a major	93	94
Had not declared a major	7	6
Student record data		
Had declared a major	88	83
Had not declared a major	12	17

Population includes only juniors and seniors.

For more detail see "2003 Undergraduate Survey: Comparison of Responses for Freshman Starts and Transfer Starts." Yi Lu and Jocelyn Milner, 3/2004.

The transfer admissions process varies across UW-Madison's academic programs. Each of the schools and colleges and many individual programs have distinctive admissions processes or requirements that are companions to and build on the university admissions process. The student who wants nursing, or engineering, or business has a different transfer experience from the student who wants L&S or CALS programs.

How many undergraduate academic programs have requirements for admission to the major or program beyond those for admission to the university? According to the Undergraduate Catalog, 83 out of 151 undergraduate programs (55%) have requirements for admission beyond those for admission to the university. The additional admission requirements vary in nature. Some examples include: stringent academic requirements for programs with a high demand for limited spaces, demonstration of talent and skills necessary to the given subject area, modest GPA requirements above the minimum GPA of 2.0 to continue in good academic standing, or the completion of a special form akin to the major declaration form.

Enrollments in Majors with Requirements for Admission beyond those Required for Admission to the University

	All Juniors and Seniors	Jr/Sr Transfer Starts	% of Transfer Starts
Total with declared majors or no major (duplicating headcount)	19,336	4,162	22
Enrolled in majors with additional requirements for admission	9,627	2,005	21
<i>% Enrolled in majors with additional requirements</i>	<i>49.8</i>	<i>48.1</i>	

Source: Retention data views; Undergraduate Catalog.

See: "UW-Madison Undergraduate Majors that have Enrollment or Admission Requirements Beyond Those for Admission to the University". Jocelyn Milner, 3/2004

The analysis indicates that, overall, transfer starts and freshman starts have similar rates of access to programs with requirements for admission beyond those for admission to the university. Fifty percent of all juniors and seniors are enrolled in such programs. Similarly, 48%

of junior and senior transfer starts are enrolled in such programs. Moreover, junior and senior transfer starts constitute 22% of enrollments in all majors and programs, and 21% of enrollments in programs with additional admission requirements. There are, of course, program-specific differences in the balance of transfer starts and freshmen starts. Focus group respondents, particularly those who transferred from the technical and two-year colleges, indicated that they did not have difficulty enrolling in a major program or finding information about program requirements.

Transfer Admissions and the various school/college/program offices have established many different models of admissions-related communication and coordination. But Transfer Admissions does not have connections with every single program that has additional admission requirements. Although the Undergraduate Catalog is the official source for this kind of information, the information is dispersed and uneven in clarity and completeness. Furthermore, there is no systematic mechanism to assure that programs that establish special admission requirements communicate those requirements to the university community. Consequently, all constituencies on CTSE agree that communication and coordination among Admissions, schools/colleges/programs, advisors, and new students is inadequate. Efforts to communicate and coordinate the specific requirements for majors and programs in a systematic way through a central office should be explored. Colleges should review their program and major admissions requirements and procedures to determine if the requirements, especially when they are minimal, are necessary to achieve academic goals of the program. Where GPA cut offs are used solely as a way to restrict access to high demand programs, program faculty and staff might consider if other measures of potential contribution to a discipline are appropriate. With or without such reviews, establishing more coordination between programs and Admissions in the process would improve the process. Good practices, perhaps as identified by Admissions, would assist in this process.

Although there is a widespread view that we face challenges in providing parity of access to academic programs with additional admission requirements for new transfer students compared to those who first matriculated at UW-Madison, we did not find this to be the case, overall. We did find that the scattered nature of admission information for specific academic programs and the varying detail provided on specifics can make it difficult for all students to identify and, certainly, compare requirements, but this problem is not unique to transfer students. Efforts to enhance institutional communication, coordination, and collaboration across offices, programs and departments will create a more seamless experience for all of our students.

2K. Academic Success

Ultimately, the most important question is whether transfer starts and freshman starts have equal access to academic success in terms of persistence and other common measures. We begin our evaluation of this question with a review of the analysis offered in an earlier report on retention and graduation rates for fall entrance cohorts of new transfer students who entered from 1991 to 2000, and an analysis of first term academic progress (insert reference).

Progress in the first term enrolled is a measure of the ease of the academic transition for new transfer students. A review of first-term grades for selected cohorts of new transfer students showed that their grades dipped in comparison to their transfer GPA – the GPA calculated by Admissions and used as a basis for the admission decision. Conversely, cohorts of continuing freshman starts showed a slight increase in their GPA from the prior spring to the next fall term. As an example, data for students enrolled in fall 2001 is shown below.

Progress in Fall 2001 Term
Comparison of New Transfer Juniors and Continuing Freshman Starts who were also Juniors

	New Transfer Cohort - Juniors	Continuing Freshman Starts - Juniors
Cohort Headcount	435	3035
Average Transfer GPA or Average GPA in prior Spring Term	3.27	3.15
Average fall term GPA	3.02	3.22
Average fall term credits	12.3	13.8
Percent of cohort completing the fall term	97	97

See: "UW-Madison Undergraduate Transfer Students, Retention and Graduation Rates".
Jocelyn Milner, 10/2002

Transfer starts are retained and graduate at lower rates than freshman starts. For cohorts of transfer students from the late 1990's, about 86% were retained to the second year (sophomores or juniors as new transfers). By comparison, 92% of a comparison cohort of sophomore freshman starts and 96% of a comparison cohort of junior freshman starts were retained to the next year. The 4-year graduation rate for the 1997 new transfer junior cohort was 72%, 20 percentage points lower than the rate for the comparison junior cohort of freshman starts. The retention and graduation rates for cohorts of transfer starts are consistently lower than for cohorts of freshman starts when the two are compared from a similar starting point.

Trends in Retention and Graduation Rates

Fall Term	New Transfer Juniors			Continuing Freshman Start Juniors		
	Retained to next year	Graduated after 4 th year	Retained to 4 th year	Retained to next year	Graduated after 4 th year	Retained to 4 th year
1991	87.2	76.3	6.7	95.2	91.8	2.3
1992	88.4	76.3	6.7	95.8	92.1	2.5
1993	86.5	75.1	2.9	95.8	92.5	1.9
1994	87.5	76.5	5.1	95.4	91.6	1.7
1995	86.7	75.7	4.2	95.7	92.3	1.9
1996	84.3	72.4	3.0	96.2	92.6	1.5
1997	87.4	72.4	6.0	96.3	92.7	1.6
1998	87.4			97.4		
1999	84.1			96.3		
2000	85.0			96.2		

See: "UW-Madison Undergraduate Transfer Students, Retention and Graduation Rates". Jocelyn Milner, 10/2002

As we began our work, there were no available data that would provide faculty assessments of transfer students overall. Informal discussion with faculty indicated that for the most part, faculty have no idea which of their students arrived through transfer unless students specifically discuss their history. But the issue of faculty assessment of student preparation remains. CTSE therefore did a study in which faculty who were teaching capstone courses or other courses primarily aimed at senior majors during Fall 2003 were asked to evaluate senior undergraduates' communication skills by submitting a brief assessment of each student in the course. Faculty assessed student communication skills in a) reading, b) writing, c) information literacy, and d) student preparation in the disciplinary or interdisciplinary field in which the course was offered. Faculty rated each student from 1-5 with one representing a score of "well below the norm" and 5 representing a score "well above the norm" for students who would normally take that level course. They were not told that the study had anything to do with transfer status. After the surveys were collected, the transfer status of the student was merged into the data set of performance assessments for analysis.

There were no significant differences between the average scores of the two groups on reading, writing, information literacy, or competence in the field. Overall, then, the judgments faculty made of academic competence in the final stage of the students' career did not differ across the two groups of students. Nevertheless, a closer look displays a notable difference at the top end of the scale, with respect to those judged "well above the norm" by faculty. In each case, the percentage of students judged well above the norm is at least twice as high among freshman start students compared with transfer start students. The issue is not being *unprepared* for the final stage of the undergraduate education, but in who seems to be excelling at the point of departure.

Assessment of Communication Skills in Capstone Courses, Fall 2003

	Frequency Distribution of Scores - Percent of Scores					Average Score
	1 - Well below the norm	2 - Somewhat below the norm	3 - About Average	4 - Somewhat above the norm	5 - Well above the norm	
Reading						
Freshman Starts	2	6	31	31	29	3.8 ± 1.0
Transfer Starts	0	3	38	44	14	3.7 ± 0.6
Writing						
Freshman Starts	3	10	29	30	28	3.7 ± 1.2
Transfer Starts	3	5	40	38	14	3.6 ± 0.8
Info. Literacy						
Freshman Starts	2	10	30	30	28	3.7 ± 1.1
Transfer Starts	2	2	42	44	11	3.6 ± 0.6
Field/Discipline						
Freshman Starts	2	13	30	27	28	3.7 ± 1.2
Transfer Starts	2	10	38	38	12	3.5 ± 0.8

The gap between the grades of new transfer students and freshman starts at the same stage is an indicator that the transition between colleges presents challenges for students and argues for more support for new transfer students at the transition point. The lower retention and graduation rates may be a magnification of the stress of the transition and attention to new transfer students is likely to narrow the gap. The capstone assessment illustrated that, for those students who persist to the senior year, both transfer starts and freshmen starts in capstone courses met faculty expectations to a similar degree.

Our mission and the resources we have available do not allow us to determine the weights of different factors in creating differences between the academic success of freshman- and transfer-start students. The differences are likely to be a combination of many factors, including the different pool from which these students are drawn; their prior preparation; financial, social integration, and other challenges they face; factors that may have contributed to their motivation to transfer in the first place, and disruptions caused by moving from one institution and location to another.

2L. Conclusion

The CTSE's work focused on gaining a better understanding of the experiences of transfer students on campus -- including the transfer process itself, advising, and academic and student life issues -- to identify areas of special concern, and make recommendations regarding what

steps should be taken and by whom. Our findings indicate that the transfer student experience, overall, is not as difficult as some people have suggested. At the same time, the experience is difficult for some transfer starts. In the 2003 undergraduate survey, 24% of transfer students were “very satisfied” with how UW-Madison assisted them with making their transition, 43% were somewhat satisfied, 26% were somewhat dissatisfied, and 7% were very dissatisfied. We cannot generalize about transfer students’ prior education or life experiences. However, by recognizing and valuing these differences, we can improve the integration of transfer students into campus life and enhance their success as UW-Madison students. There are clearly opportunities for improvement; many of our students believe we could do better. In the next section of this report we present the recommendations of the Committee on the Transfer Student Experience.

Part 3. Recommendations

The following recommendations are derived from the evidence of the transfer student experience we gathered and described above. Once again, we make note of the work of the AAC/Admissions subcommittees on transfer credit equivalencies and transfer credit software (Section 2E). In keeping with the decentralized nature of the campus, we recommend that strategies and solutions be implemented at the most local level possible that assures effectiveness and coherence.

1. Build an infrastructure for communication on issues related to transfer students, including communication outward from the institution to prospective transfers and their sending institutions, applicants, and transfer starts and intra-institutional communication among Admissions and the schools and colleges.
 - a. Develop information that is more accessible to prospective transfer students and their advisors at sending institutions, and deliberately assemble this information into a coherent package with an obvious entry point for prospective transfer students (Section 2B).
 - b. Reinforce the communication with prospective and new transfer students that there is a specific requirement to declare a major (Section 2J), and that indicating interest in a major during the admissions process is not a declaration.
 - c. Improve communication between Admissions and the schools and colleges, especially as it relates to notifying selective programs about projected numbers of new transfer students. Improve communication between programs and Admissions about the level of competitiveness and requirements for admission to the major.
 - d. Explore ways to communicate and coordinate the specific requirements for entry to majors and programs across the University community, for example through the Undergraduate Catalog.
 - e. Build a one-stop front door for transfers, either on-line or in physical space.
2. Develop orientation programming for transfer students early in the semester after transfer students have enrolled. Address transfer student needs in a developmentally appropriate way. For example, at SOAR improve connections between transfer starts and other students on campus and explicitly encourage transfer starts to get involved in campus activities early on. (Section 2F and 2H).
3. Expand new student and student welcome activities, alumni receptions, etc. to *all* new students, ensuring that the activities are specifically appropriate for students transferring from other institutions. This helps support the norm that students who arrive through the transfer process are as much “our” students as are those who arrive straight out of high school. With respect to campus academic and student development programs available

to incoming first year students, consider whether these programs or others like them should actively recruit transfer students as well.

4. Encourage deans and college APC's to initiate a review of requirements for admission to their programs that exceed requirements for admission to the University, and evaluate if those requirements are necessary to achieve academic goals of the program. Where GPA cut-offs are used solely as a way to restrict access to high demand programs, consider if other measures of potential contribution to a discipline are more appropriate. Review the Undergraduate Catalog description to see if it is clear and accurate (Section 2J).
5. Convene discussions with UW System about the adverse impact of the current UW System policy—a policy that differentiates the admissions and registration processes of UW System transfers students and transfer students from other institutions. Specifically consider the impact on all students with regard to course access, transfer credit evaluation, advising, particularly prior to enrollment, orientation, and communication across institutions and with students (UW System transfer admissions policy (www.uwsa.edu/acadaff/acis/acis6-0.htm) and Sections 2C, 2E and 2F).
6. Encourage collaboration between student affairs and student academic services units to provide a more seamless support network and out-of-classroom engagement and learning opportunities.
7. Explore ways to improve the transition to campus of transfer starts to close the existing gap in progress in the first term enrolled and the retention and graduation rates of transfer starts (Section 2K).
8. Provide more on-campus housing opportunities for transfer students, particularly housing with students at their same academic level (Section 2H).
9. Be attentive to the demands on financial aid resources and on Financial Student Services for transfer starts, given transfer students have more limited financial resources that may place them at an educational disadvantage, (Section 2D).
10. Urge the Council on Academic Advising or other appropriate advising bodies to develop advising strategies and assistance designed to strengthen the academic success of transfer starts based on specific understanding of the issues facing transfer start students.
11. Establish a Transfer Student Issues working group with a point-person from each school/college and from Admissions to coordinate communication and cooperation across units and programs, and to follow-up on the recommendations set forth from this report. Use this group as a resource in future discussions of policies on transfer students and transfer student admissions.
12. Circulate this report for information and consideration widely across campus including to the colleges with undergraduate programs, the Office of Admissions, the Council on Academic Advising, and elsewhere as appropriate.

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

<http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/obpa/CTSE> Userid: ccttssee; Password: tr@nsf3r

Committee on the Transfer Student Experience (CTSE)

Final Report

- Complete Final Report
- Executive Summary and Recommendations Only
- Committee Membership and Process

Supporting Materials, Reports, and Analyses

**Materials given to the CTSE as the Committee began its work. **Reports or analyses prepared for CTSE.*

- Index to Beginning Packet of Materials Provided to CTSE, November 2003.
- [Trends in Transfer Applications, Admits, and Enrollments](#). Clare Huhn, Academic Planning and Analysis, 1/2004.
- [Trends in New Freshman Applications, Admits, and Enrollments](#). Clare Huhn, Academic Planning and Analysis, 1/2004.
- **2003 Undergraduate Survey: [Comparison of Responses for Freshman Starts and Transfer Starts](#). Yi Lu and Jocelyn Milner, Academic Planning and Analysis, 3/2004.
- **Summary Report of [Findings from Focus Groups](#) with Transfer Students. Mo Noonan-Bischof. 3/2004.
- **Assessment of Performance in Capstone Courses - Project Design. Virginia Sapiro, 12/2003. See committee final report.
- **Assessment of Performance in Capstone Courses - [Summary of Findings](#). Jocelyn Milner, 2/2004.
- **UW-Madison New Transfer Students: [When do they become eligible to register and how does that compare with registration appointment times for continuing students?](#) Clare Huhn and Jocelyn Milner, APA, 3/2004.
- **[UW-Madison Undergraduate Majors that have Enrollment or Admission Requirements Beyond Those for Admission to the University](#). Jocelyn Milner, APA, 3/2004.
- *Transfer Advising - UW-Madison Self- Reports by Schools and Colleges, Committee on Academic Advising (CAA), Spring 2003.
- *Associative Administrative Council (AAC)/Admissions Sub-committee on Transfer Credit Evaluation. [Final Report](#) and [Appendices](#). 3/2003.
- Associative Administrative Council (AAC)/Admissions Sub-committee on Transfer Credit Software. [Final Report](#) and [Appendices](#). 4/2004.
- *UW-Madison Undergraduate Transfer Students, [Retention and Graduation Rates](#). Jocelyn Milner, Academic Planning and Analysis, 10/2002.
- *UW-Madison Undergraduate Transfer Students, [Retention and Graduation Rates - By Public Sending Institution in Wisconsin](#). Jocelyn Milner, Academic Planning and Analysis, 10/2002.
- *Transfer and Traditional Students: [Patterns of Course Taking and Participation in Academic Programs](#). Jocelyn Milner, Academic Planning and Analysis. AIR paper. 6/2002.
- *National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) - [NSSE Overview](#).
- *NSSE 2001 Summary Report: [An Overview of the NSSE 2001 Results for UW-Madison](#). Academic Planning and Analysis, 2002.
- [UW System Transfer Admissions Policy](#).
- [Transfer Information System \(TIS\)](#)

Some Subcommittee Reports

- Preparing for Transfer - Communication with Potential Transfer Students and Their Advisors. Point-person: Jo Meier. [Report](#)
- Preparing for Transfer - Communication among Admissions, the Schools and Colleges, Programs, Departments, Faculty, and Other Campus Groups. Point-person: Jocelyn Milner. [Report](#)
- Literature Review - Research on Transfer Student Success. Point-person: Mo Noonan-Bischof. Report