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Transfer Student Analysis and Retention: A Collaborative Endeavor

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Abstract

Purpose: This article describes a multi-faceted campus-wide initiative to retain transfer students that was undertaken when it was recognized that their retention rates were lower than those of first time, full-time students.

Design/methodology/approach: The Enhancing Student Experience (ESE) Working Group at the University at Albany (UAlbany) brought together key parties from Student Affairs and academic units, including the University Libraries, and provided an energizing arena in which existing student engagement and retention endeavors were discussed and coordinated, and new initiatives were inspired.

Findings: This article reflects the work of a subcommittee of the ESE group that focused on (a) developing strategies to increase the retention rate of students who transferred *to* UAlbany, and (b) identifying characteristics of those first time, full time students who transferred *from* UAlbany. The efforts discussed in this article, which were guided by professional experiences, institutional data, and published reports, resulted in a 2% increase in the student retention-rate in the past two years.

Research Limitations: The data collection and analysis, and the initiatives, are specific to one public research university. Additional data collection and analysis after all of the initiatives are implemented would enhance the full picture.

Practical Implications: Initiatives undertaken to address the retention of transfer students have begun to have an impact.

Originality/value: The "all-hands-on-deck" approach described in this article demonstrates how strategic collaborations among the many institutional stakeholders at a public research university were marshalled to have a significant and positive impact on student retention.

Keywords: Transfer students, retention, transfer orientation, transfer seminars, living learning communities, information literacy

Article Classification: Research Paper

Introduction

The University at Albany, like many institutions of higher education in the United States, is concerned about student enrollment (Hoover, 2016). Shortly after his appointment in February 2015, our new Provost announced his enrollment management strategy. Along with the appointment of a Vice-Provost for Enrollment Management, the formation of a Strategic Enrollment Management Council, and the initiation of a study of how parents and prospective students view the University, the Provost focused on the retention of students who had already made a commitment to the University. Initially, this retention effort targeted first year students, but soon encompassed transfer students when data were presented showing that transfer students had significantly lower retention rates than first time, full-time students.

This paper describes a multi-faceted approach to transfer student retention undertaken on our campus that included library involvement in the form of a librarian co-chair of an Enhancing Student Experience (ESE) working group. This

article not only describes initiatives undertaken by the library to enhance the transfer student experience, but also allied efforts by other academic and administrative units that places them in the larger context of how the campus addressed the needs of transfer students. These efforts included research to inform campus initiatives carried out by the Dean's Office of the College of Arts & Sciences (CAS), where the largest number of undergraduates are enrolled. In addition, endeavors undertaken by the Office of Undergraduate Education, Student Affairs, and the University Libraries are all chronicled. This article highlights these concerted efforts around transfer students, which strengthened cross-campus partnerships.

Creation and Mission of the Enhancing Student Experience Working Group
Concern about student retention, informed by data from the Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness (IRPE), led the new Provost and the new Vice President for Student Affairs to form the ESE Working Group in April 2015. The members are leaders from within Student Affairs, the Assistant Vice President of IRPE, academic administrators from Undergraduate Education, and several faculty members, including a librarian.

Four subcommittees were formed early in the existence of ESE: At-risk Students, Careers, Classroom Experience, Undergraduate Research, with a Transfer Students subcommittee added approximately six months later. The co-authors of this article either chair or serve on the Transfer Students subcommittee.

Through her membership on ESE, and her role on the Transfer Students subcommittee, the librarian co-author has gained insight into campus priorities, projects, and key players that have been invaluable in helping to shape new library initiatives to assist students, and to fine-tune existing ones. Some of the programs described in this article, and indeed, the existence of the article itself, are the result of new connections, knowledge, and awareness about the transfer student population.

Description of the University at Albany

The University at Albany (UAlbany), located in the capital city of New York State, is one of the four public research universities (Binghamton, Buffalo, and Stony Brook) in the State University of New York (SUNY) system. The SUNY system consists of 64-campuses that also includes 2-year community colleges, 4-year comprehensive colleges, and technical institutes. UAlbany has 675 full-time faculty and a total enrollment of 17,300 undergraduate (~13,000) and graduate (~4,300) students who have selected from 120 undergraduate majors and minors and 125 graduate programs. Nearly half (47%) of the typical graduating class at UAlbany entered the University as transfer students.

Literature Review

The published literature was examined regarding transfer student demographics, enrollment trends, and educational challenges from institutions throughout the United States. Those results provided an essential context for not only interpreting the data specific to UAlbany transfer students, but for also developing initiatives to enhance the recruitment and retention of students.

 As colleges and universities in many areas of the United States (e.g., Northeastern states; Hussar and Bailey, 2013) are challenged to meet enrollment targets amidst a continuing decline in the annual number of high school graduates (Joncich and Henderson, 2014), transfer students are an increasingly important source of undergraduate students (Handel, 2013; Strempel, 2014). In addition, the increasing level of debt (currently $1.31 trillion; Federal Reserve Bank, 2017) being carried by students and their families in the United States has made 2-year community colleges a financially attractive option not only for students to begin their college education (e.g., Handel and Strempel, 2016; Jenkins and Fink, 2016), but also from the point-of-view of the states' education budgets (Handel and Strempel, 2016).

Transfer students are often more diverse than first-time, full-time students. Transfer students also tend to be (i) older, (ii) married, (iii) working full-or-part time, and (iv) less likely to have been in the top 10% of their high school graduating class (e.g., Cohen & Brawer, 1987; Jacobs *et al.*, 1992; Miville & Sedlacek, 1995; Piekarski, 2004; Richman, 1979). Since many of these students have come from smaller institutions (e.g., community colleges) where classes are also comparatively small and instructors have a clear mandate to provide a close student-instructor learning environment, transfer students arriving at large research institutions can be negatively affected by the culture change where the professors have the competing mandates of classroom instruction, scholarly productivity (i.e., publications, external funding, and graduate student mentoring), and academic service (e.g., Laanan, 2001; Tinto, 1993; Tobolowsky and Cox, 2012; Townsend and Wilson, 2006). This culture change results in the phenomenon known as "transfer shock," a phrase originally coined by Hills (1965), that is characterized by a transient drop in GPA after transferring to a research university (e.g., Allen *et al.*, 2008, 2014; Bennett and Okinada, 1990; Cejda, 1997; Glass and Harrington, 2002; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Ishitani, 2008; Ishitani and McKitrick, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 1993; Laanan, 2001; Martorana and Williams, 1954; Townsend and Wilson, 2006). Transfer students have reported feelings of alienation, anonymity, and isolation at their new institution (e.g., Allen *et al.*, 2014; Laanan, 2001; Townsend and Wilson, 2006). Since the phenomenon of transfer shock has not generally been communicated to faculty at the receiving institution, transfer students as a group are often regarded by those faculty as being inadequately prepared for college work (e.g., Diaz, 1992). However, while transfer shock is most commonly reflected among transfer students with majors in the sciences, mathematics, and business, "transfer ecstasy" involving an increase in GPA has been reported among transfer students majoring in the social sciences, arts, and humanities (Cejda, 1997). Institutions that are not effective in addressing the real challenges associated with transfer shock risk significantly lower retention and degree-completion rates (e.g., Alfonso, 2006; Lee *et al.*, 1993; Townsend and Wilson, 2006).

According to Jenkins and Fink (2016), the rate that community college students in New York State transfer to four-year institutions is significantly ***above*** the national average, especially among those students who transferred after earning either an associate's degree or certificate. However, that same study showed that the average six-year completion-rate for bachelor's degrees among those transfer students in New York State was significantly ***below*** the national average.

Description of UAlbany Transfer Students

Institutional data on transfer students at UAlbany were examined principally from two perspectives. First, what are the characteristics of students transferring *to* UAlbany? Second, what are the characteristics of first-time, full-time students who transfer *from* UAlbany? This approach (i) provided a better understanding of factors that contribute to lower first-year retention rates among transfer students to UAlbany, and (ii) identified characteristics of first-time, full-time students who became transfer students from UAlbany to another institution. Both perspectives guided initiatives that led to increased undergraduate retention-rates.

Among the four SUNY research universities, UAlbany is the most ethnically diverse and has the largest percentage of Pell recipients (~42%) as well as the lowest first-year retention rate. The six-year graduation-rate is 68%, which is significantly higher than the average rate for all public institutions in New York State (Jenkins and Fink, 2016).. Retention- and graduation-rates are known to be correlated with socioeconomic status of students and their families (e.g., Carnevale and Strohl, 2010; Jenkins and Fink, 2016; Tough, 2014).

The fall 2014 cohort of transfer students consisted of 1350 students who entered UAlbany with a median of 53 college-level credits (i.e., 46% sophomores; 41% juniors) and a median GPA of 3.1. Nearly 60% of those students had transferred from 2-year community colleges within the SUNY system. The second most common source (9%) of the transfer students was 4-year private colleges within

New York State. Slightly more than 41% of the transfer cohort had earned an Associate's degree (AA/AS/AAS), which was slightly higher than the average rate for all transfer students in New York State (Jenkins and Fink, 2016). The declared and intended majors of those students spanned 28 undergraduate programs with Biology and Psychology being the largest proportion (~20% total). In their first semester at UAlbany, they registered for a median of 15 credits (i.e., full load) and earned a median GPA of 2.8.

Comparison of GPAs between Transfer and First Time, Full-time Students Who Departed

The Description of the University at Albany section of this article notes that the median GPA of undergraduate students who transferred to UAlbany was 3.1 from their original institution, whereas the median GPA of those same students after one academic year at UAlbany was 2.8. The results are similar to those reported by Glass and Harrington (2002), and are indicative of the widely-noted effects from transfer shock. An especially noteworthy distinction between undergraduate students who left UAlbany prior to completion of their bachelor's degree is shown in Figure 1. The majority of transfer students who left UAlbany did so due to academic difficulty, specifically with cumulative GPA < 2.0 (Figure 1a). Transfer students with higher GPAs tended to be retained and ultimately to complete their undergraduate degree. In contrast, the majority of first-time, full-time students who left UAlbany had earned cumulative GPAs > 2.0 at the time of departure indicating that they did not leave due to academic failure (Figure 1b). The first-time, full-time students apparently departed for a variety of reasons (e.g., financial difficulty; home sickness; more prestigious institution).

Insert Figure 1 here

Contrasting Destinations of First Time, Full-time Students Who Departed

Figure 2 displays a strong systematic relationship among 435 first-time, full-time students (in a different cohort than shown in Figure 1b) who left UAlbany within

their first academic year. The destinations of those first-time, full-time students is highly dependent on the cumulative GPA at the time of their departure. Among the 166 first-time, full-time students with cumulative GPAs < 2.0 at the time of departure, the following occurred: 48% did not transfer to another academic institution; 13% transferred to public (9%) and private (4%) colleges/universities; and 38% transferred to 2-year community colleges. Among the 126 first-time, full-time students with cumulative GPAs of 2.0-2.99 at the time of departure, the following occurred: 24% did not transfer to another academic institution; 35% transferred to public (34%) and private (10%) colleges/universities; and 32% transferred to 2-year community colleges. Among the 143 first-time, full-time students with cumulative GPAs ≥ 3.0 at the time of departure, the following occurred: 11% did not transfer to another academic institution; 76% transferred to public (56%) and private (20%) colleges/universities; and 11% transferred to 2-year community colleges. The systematic relationships (Figure 2) among this cohort of 435 first-time, full-time who left UAlbany within their first academic year are not only conspicuous, but also seem intuitively predictable.

(a) With increasing GPA, increasing proportions of students enrolled in other academic institutions.

(b) With increasing GPA, decreasing proportions of students enrolled in 2-year community colleges.

(c) With increasing GPA, increasing proportions of students enrolled in colleges/universities, principally public institutions within New York State.

Insert Figure 2 here

Relative to Their Family Homes, Where Did the First Time, Full-time Students Transfer To?
The family homes of the 215 first-time, full-time students described in Figure 2 who transferred to another academic institution after departing UAlbany within their first academic year were commonly located about 150 miles from the UAlbany campus (Figure 3). The majority of those students were not within daily

commuting-range of their homes, and consequently were residents either on-campus or in the Albany area. That feature was similar for first-time, full-time students whether their cumulative GPAs at the time of departure were in the range of 2.00-2.99 or 3.00-4.00 (Figure 3). The locations of the academic institutions that they transferred to were noticeably different (Figure 4). Nearly 72% of the 92 first-time, full-time students with the lower GPAs transferred to academic institutions within 50 km (30 miles) of their family homes, which is a plausible maximum range for commuting from the family homes. In contrast, about 43% of the 123 first-time, full-time students with the higher GPAs transferred to academic institutions within commuting-range from their family homes. Figure 4 also shows that the nature of the institutions within that commuting-range differed as a function of these students' GPAs with 2-year community colleges having a larger fraction of the students with lower GPAs. This tendency for students to transfer to institutions closer to their family homes has been previously noted (Mattern *et al.*, 2013).

    (a) As noted in the published literature, there is a tendency for students to move closer to home.

    (b) The tendency to move closer to home is stronger in the lower achieving group of students, especially since 37% of that group enrolled in 2-year community colleges.

    (c) About 30-35% of students in both groups enrolled in 4-year institutions within 50 km (30 miles; commuting distance) of their homes.

Insert Figures 3-4 here

As a further description of that cohort of 215 first-time, full-time students who left UAlbany within their first academic year, their SUNY selectivity groups (Figure 5) were compared. It is interesting to note, but perhaps not surprising, that the academic destinations of those students who transferred from UAlbany was dependent more on the GPAs that they had earned at UAlbany than their selectivity group that was based on their high school averages and composite SAT scores (Figure 6). The intended majors among those groups of students were also similar.

Insert Figures 5-6 here

Discussion

Our campus-wide conversations allowed our Assistant Vice Provost for Student Engagement, as part of the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, to articulate the following goals for our transfer strategies and initiatives. Implicit in these goals is the desire to retain those students who chose to attend this institution.

1. Encourage outstanding new transfer students to choose UAlbany over other options.
2. Support new transfer students choosing to come to UAlbany through enhanced academic support.
3. Support new transfer students choosing to come to UAlbany through enhanced engagement activities to help them connect and succeed.

To address the goal of increasing the retention-rate among transfer students, the underlying factors that contribute to lower academic success needed to be identified and understood. The ESE working group was guided by a Japanese proverb (anonymous): "*Vision without action is a daydream; Action without vision is a nightmare.*" The published literature and institutional data were systematically examined to identify the challenges and characteristics that would guide initiatives by the ESE working group.

From the onset of the study of incoming and outgoing transfer students described below, it was evident that a major disconnect existed at UAlbany between faculty in academic departments (especially in the natural sciences, social sciences, mathematics, and business; as noted by Cejda, 1997) and upper level administrators. Based on their individual experiences in the classroom, faculty observed that transfer students often had lower levels of academic performance in their first year than the first-time, full-time students. This lower academic

performance by transfer students was *assumed* to be a result of their inferior preparation at the prior institution. In contrast, the upper level administration at UAlbany, who had organized the ESE working group, *assumed* that transfer students (in contrast to first-time, full-time students who enter the university directly from high school) were already experienced with, and adapted to, the challenges and cultures of higher education and should, therefore, be less in need of institutional support. As a result, the administrative design for the membership and efforts of the ESE working group was initially focused on first-time, full-time students. However, when data were later presented showing that the first-year attrition rate among transfer students was often double that of the first-year, full-time students, the efforts of the ESE working group were expanded.

Initiatives

The following sections describe the breadth of the initiatives the University at Albany developed in response to the data analysis, results from transfer student surveys and focus groups, findings from the published literature, and the use of information from best practices gleaned from national and state workshops. It is notable that all are the result of collaboration among offices including: Advising Services Center, Campus Center Management, Office of Student Affairs, Office of Orientation, Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, Residential Life, University Libraries, University Undergraduate Admissions, and all our academic departments, schools and colleges (e.g., Noel Levitz, 2013). Since it is well-known that transfer students are a diverse population where a "one size fits all" approach is not appropriate, the University has opted for an "all-hands-on-deck" approach (e.g., Piekarski, 2004; Townsend and Wilson, 2006).

The initiatives discussed here are grouped by the coordinating entity:

University Libraries
- At-Risk Transfer Student Emails

Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

- Academic Support and Applied Learning Fair
- Challenges for the 21st Century General Education Classes
- Fall Fridays for First Year Students
- Living-Learning Communities
- Transfer Student Seminars
- Transfer Transition Leader Program
- Transfer Social Events, Academic Support, and Communication
- Tau Sigma Honor Society
- Transfer Peer Mentor Program

Student Affairs

- Transfer Orientation
- Transfer Student Housing

University Libraries

At-Risk Transfer Student Emails

Because most of the initiatives undertaken by the University Libraries are in conjunction with other programs on campus, they are placed within the appropriate sections below. However, one outreach effort arose directly from an ESE discussion about possible interventions with at-risk transfer students (those with a GPA below 2.0). The librarian co-author offered assistance from the University Libraries to these students. With support from IRPE, several graphically appealing email messages that described various services and resources were sent at strategic points throughout the semester. The mailing dates and content have been shared with IRPE for potential analysis.

Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

Academic Support and Applied Learning Fair

UAlbany has a variety of campus fairs to encourage all students to become involved in campus life (join clubs) and engage in their studies (study abroad fair, internship fair, etc.). In addition, the Transfer Coordinator provides several fairs on the downtown campus residential quad (where the majority of transfer students reside), including an event just for transfer students to which various academic support offices (writing center, tutors, math drop-in help, review classes, etc.) are invited. Applied learning opportunities are also highlighted. This allows transfer students to engage with these support offices in an environment separate from freshmen and seems to encourage more participation.

Challenges for the 21st Century General Education Classes

 While many transfer students bring in credits that align with SUNY's general education curriculum (e.g., Hockey, 2016), UAlbany has one, unique requirement, "Challenges for the 21st Century." Since nearly all transfer students need to fulfill this requirement, new transfer-only discussion sections were created and attached to classes that fulfill this requirement. Faculty receive training on the types of issues new transfer students have and the transfer coordinator supports these students and classes with brief visits and engagement opportunities. As an example, she will email the students in the discussion section and invite them all for coffee immediately following their common discussion class time. This provides them with an informal chance to get to know one another and to ask questions.

Fall Fridays for First Year Students

A series of workshops was developed for all incoming students (transfer and freshmen), who are most prominent in the fall, and scheduled for Friday afternoons to reduce class conflicts. Topics include financial literacy for students, academic support services, counseling, health, and stress relief tips, information literacy and library research tips, and an overview of applied learning opportunities (study abroad, research, internships, community service). Faculty teaching new students in many of the programs discussed in this article include attendance at these workshops on their syllabi (e.g. extra credit, part of an exploratory or writing

assignment) and this provides an opportunity to extend resource and orientation information into the first semester for new students.

Librarians participate in this program upon request. During fall 2016, two librarians offered an interactive overview of library services, which included a Family Feud-style introduction to the presentation topics, and a concluding gameshow quiz using Kahoot.

Living-Learning Communities
Since Living-Learning Communities (L-LCs) have been shown (e.g., Zhao and Kuh, 2004) to increase students' engagement and retention, UAlbany has developed an extensive array of offerings that combine (i) a housing assignment based on a common interest, theme, or intended academic major, (ii) two or three common classes in the fall and spring, (iii) a faculty mentor who shares lunch or dinner weekly with the community, and (iv) an upper class or graduate student "Community Assistant" responsible for academic support and co-curricular events. The L-LCs show enhanced freshman-to-sophomore retention rates (between +5 and +10 percentages points over students in no community) along with modest but significant gains in freshman GPA. The University has now invested in transfer student L-LCs modified to meet their different needs. In general, fewer classes are included to reflect the prior academic work of transfer students, and engagement/co-curricular events are built around the students' interests rather than the more defined co-curricular program in freshmen L-LCs.

- *The World of Transfer Excellence* is an option for transfer students who earned at least a 3.4 at their prior institution. Although Figure 1a shows that that transfer students with high GPAs have high retention-rates, this L-LC is not only intended to retain but also to attract high-performing transfer students to UAlbany. Students live together on our uptown campus (perceived to be a significant benefit), take one transfer seminar together in the fall, participate in study sessions and events with their assigned

community assistant (who is a prior transfer student) and have lunch together weekly with their faculty mentor.

- *Discipline specific L-LCs.* Many transfers come to UAlbany for degrees in biology, criminal justice, business, accounting, political science, psychology, and public policy. Many of these popular majors are "restricted majors," meaning that students need to achieve high grades in certain pre-requisite classes or a specific, minimum GPA before being admitted to the major. L-LCs were created for transfer students to support those wanting these majors (World of Business and Accounting for Transfers, World of New York Politics and Policies for Transfers, World of Criminal Justice for Transfers.) These L-LCs have faculty mentors, include a weekly lunch, and a Community Assistant (who is typically a former transfer student and is majoring in the associated field.)

- *Engagement L-LCs.* The World of Transfer Engagement was created to provide a small community for transfer students wanting a traditional residential experience. These engagement L-LCs do not have specific classes associated and are open to all new transfer students, regardless of their prior academic studies or intended major. Each has a faculty or staff mentor and each includes a scheduled weekly lunch or dinner to meet as a community with that mentor. Each is also supported by a Community Assistant to develop study sessions and co-curricular engagement opportunities around the interests of the students on the hall.

- *A new L-LC for non-traditional students* who want a residential college experience but who are older than our traditionally aged college-going students is under consideration.

Transfer Student Seminars

Transfer student seminars are described in the literature (Grites and Farina, 2012; Cuseo, 1995) and while it is noted that they may not be required, they are recommended in order to help with the transition to a new institution (Grites and

Farina, 2012). Cuseo (1995, pp. 16-17) provides a list of reasons for offering transfer seminars at 4-year institutions, including:

1. Familiarizing transfer students to a new institution and campus culture;
2. Introducing students who arrive with a declared major to the academic discipline and department, as well as the institution;
3. Preparing junior transfer/rising junior students (possibly native as well as transfer) for the last year of college, with information about postgraduate education and employment; and
4. Introducing undeclared sophomores to majors, minors, and associated careers, and to issues related to "sophomore slump."

Course descriptions and syllabi provide details of specific components deemed important in addressing the needs of transfer students (Cody and Cudia, n.d.; Curtis, 2014; Estrada, 2003).

University at Albany transfer students, however, often resist taking one-credit transfer student seminars because: (1) They are more likely to be part time students and do not want the additional cost of taking a transfer seminar; (2) They frequently do not need additional credits towards graduation but do need credits that count towards their major or general education requirements; (3) Transfer seminars carry academic credit but do not count toward any major or minor requirement (4) Transfer students are more likely to be non-traditional students who have work and/or family requirements outside their classes; and (5) they are less likely to want the additional class time during the week.

Therefore, four year institutions that receive large numbers of transfer students need a variety of ways to help transfer students engage and succeed. The L-LC model described above is one way to meet their needs (though its impact is limited to residential students), but the University also offers discipline-based transfer seminars.

Each semester, 1-credit classes on a variety of topics are available to all new transfer students. While these classes are discipline-based, they are open to all majors. The Office of Student Engagement provides faculty interested in teaching these courses both training and a list of suggested class components, and encourages them to embed some transitional support into course topics. As an example, students might be assigned a short research paper and to support this assignment, a librarian would provide information literacy instruction tailored to their needs. The Transfer Coordinator comes to these seminar classes periodically to answer questions and provide engagement opportunities.

Librarians not only provide course-related instruction in first year and transfers seminars, but have also taught first year seminars for some time. One librarian will now inaugurate teaching transfer student seminars in the spring 2017 semester. The course, Information Proudly Created by…Me!, will focus on metaliteracy, and will allow transfer students to take a role in creating information for fellow transfers. The course description is:

> With social media, we no longer are simply consumers of information, but we can also create information to assist or inform others. Each time you post on Facebook, create or add to a Pinterest board, or share visual information via Instagram, you are creating or curating information. What about in the academic sphere—might you create information there, too (and not just a research paper)? In this course, we will be exploring our roles and responsibilities as information producers. We will also be creating information sources to help fellow transfer students. As a part of this course, you will have the opportunity to earn a digital badge that attests to your increased expertise.

Transfer Transition Leader Program

The Transfer Transition Leader (TTL) program is a peer mentor program specifically designed to support new transfer students. TTLs were themselves transfer students and most come from Tau Sigma, the University's chapter of the national honor society for transfer students. TTLs are assigned a group of incoming transfers students as soon as they are admitted. They reach out via email and Facebook to connect and answer questions, help during transfer orientations, and provide programs throughout the semester to help new transfer students connect and excel. Some of the TTLs take on Community Assistant roles for transfer Living-Learning Communities.

Librarians are involved in the preparation of TTLs for their support role, and offer a session that expands the knowledge of the TTLs about the University Libraries. The interactive session includes a discussion of library resources and services already valued by the TTLs, an overview of the top 11 things about the library to pass on to new transfer students, a tour, and a challenge for the TTLs to come up with true/false questions to ask each other at the end of the sessions. This allows librarians to check informally for understanding. TTLs who have attended this session have followed up with the presenting librarians, requesting similar sessions for the new transfer students they work with.

Transfer Social Events, Academic Support, and Communication
The Transfer Coordinator and TTLs provide a variety of social and academic programs aimed at new transfer students each semester. These include academic services fairs, bowling nights, stress reduction events, and local community college transfer lunches. The latter are popular since UAlbany has a large transfer population from two, local community colleges. These students share a similar history and often enjoy finding a study partner with whom they can share their new UAlbany experiences.

Tau Sigma (National Honor Society for Transfer Students)

UAlbany has an active chapter of the Tau Sigma national honor society. Transfer students who earn at least a 3.5 GPA in their first semester at UAlbany are invited to join. The Transfer Coordinator is the advisor and members staff tables at transfer orientation events and engage with new transfers as Peer Mentors and TTLs. This group sponsors fun activities for transfers and has been important in raising the visibility of our transfer population across campus.

Transfer Peer Mentor Program

All new transfers are offered a peer mentor through a program developed in collaboration with the University's chapter of Tau Sigma. Any transfer student who is placed on academic probation after their first semester is strongly encouraged in their probation letter to take advantage of this program and work with a mentor.

Student Affairs

Transfer Orientation

For many years, UAlbany Transfer Orientation was a one-day program in the summer, focused on state-mandated sessions, academic advising, and administrative tasks such as obtaining a student ID card and a parking pass. The Office of Orientation also offered optional tours and information sessions. This program helped students finalize their class schedule, but did not allow them to explore additional opportunities on campus. The optional information sessions and social gatherings were not widely attended because, at that time in the summer, transfer students were focused on the administrative items more so than getting involved on campus.

In the fall of 2015, Office of Orientation staff began working with campus partners to transform orientation for transfer students, based in part on published accounts of successful efforts (e.g., Townsend and Wilson, 2006). Research on peer institutional practices was used to develop a model that best served the unique needs of transfer students. The results of this research indicated that transfer students are looking for opportunities to get involved – but only *after* they feel secure with their class

schedule, housing and financial aid. Therefore, it was determined that a new model was needed that provided transfer students the information and services they were looking for at the appropriate time in their transition.

In the development of the new Transfer Orientation, feedback from focus groups led the Office of Orientation and Academic Affairs to develop a two-part model consisting of five Transfer Advisement sessions offered throughout the summer (students choose one), and one full-day Transfer Orientation immediately before the start of classes. The rationale behind the two part model was to provide transfer students with a common orientation experience and demonstrate the strength in their numbers. Transfer Advisement ensures that students are academically and administratively prepared to begin classes, and Transfer Orientation provides students with the opportunity to engage with their entire cohort and learn about all of the resources available at UAlbany.

During the inaugural Transfer Orientation on August 26, 2016, nearly 1,000 new transfer students chose from 52 sessions during five different time blocks throughout the day. Each session provided an introduction to information, services, and opportunities and then offered resources to access additional information. Examples of Transfer Orientation sessions:

- A Green Shade of Purple: Discover one's impact on the environment and steps that can be taken to lessen this impact and follow a healthier lifestyle.
- Learning by Doing: Applied Learning at UAlbany: Experience internships, service-learning, study abroad, research, creative activities, and on-campus leadership opportunities.
- Life of a Transfer Student: Roundtable discussion to meet other transfer students and hear about their experiences.

The Libraries were able to express an interest in participating early in the process due to the enhanced collaboration with the Office of Orientation stemming from the Enhancing the Student Experience subcommittee. The Libraries were allotted two different time blocks. Members of the Information Literacy Department discussed a number of content options for these blocks, including a welcome reception. They concluded that at this stage in their introduction to the campus, transfer students would be most interested in library tours.

Transfer Student Housing

UAlbany houses approximately 500 of our transfer students on Alumni Quad, a complex approximately two miles from the main campus. The staff works closely with the Transfer Coordinator to support the Transfer Living-Learning Communities on Alumni Quad. In addition, the Alumni Quad staff is specifically trained on how to support transfer students and recognize some of the transitional milestones a transfer student may face. Programming is developed to reduce the risk that these transitional milestones become obstacles to transfer student success. Alumni Quad specifically recruits transfer students to serve as Resident Assistants to support incoming transfers, and to facilitate a smooth transition to the University community. Librarians participate in information fairs hosted on this housing complex.

Moving Forward

The current participation in transfer student initiatives by the University Libraries is mostly reactive. However, the close connections between the librarian co-author and the Assistant Vice Provost for Student Engagement, as well as the Director of the Office of Orientation, have provided opportunities to learn about new initiatives, express early interest, and provide a forum to determine best approaches. Existing programs may be reconsidered in order to determine their applicability to transfer students. For example, the University Libraries have a large and enthusiastic student advisory board, and its membership will be assessed to determine if this might be a forum to discuss transfer student issues.

The units involved continue to evaluate the efficacy of the portfolio of transfer programs. Analyses via survey data and focus groups of students involved in the above aforementioned programs show high satisfaction from students who participated. However, it remains a challenge to provide transfer students with the help they need when they perceive they need it.

As mentioned, there are many real objections expressed and resistance to taking transfer seminars. Yet students who enroll find them very beneficial. The Challenges for the 21st Century transfer-only discussion sections pose fewer objections from transfer students. However, they also provide less transitional support, since they are aligned with discipline-based content that allows less time for transitional and university-readiness activities. All transfer students are more likely to reach out for a mentor after they received lower-than-expected grades, making this more of a reactionary strategy than a proactive one. Success of the new orientation model is encouraging, yet participation in the Fall Friday series attracts few transfer students, many of whom do not or cannot be on campus on a Friday afternoon due to family and work responsibilities. An investigation has begun into the possibility of making some of this content available in an on-line format.

UAlbany has found that any type of generalization about what transfer students need, when they need it, and when they are willing to accept it is problematic. Therefore, as a public university that accepts many transfer students (over 1500 each year) we must continue to (a) offer a wide portfolio of transitional support options and (b) offer them throughout the entire academic year to all transfer students. Concentrating on new transfers during their first few weeks does not meet the needs of this highly diverse student population.

In order to continue the work of the Transfer Students subcommittee of ESE, the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, under the aegis of the Office of Student Engagement, has created a standing Transfer Advisory Group. Members

of the subcommittee are now standing members, and the advisory group includes broad representation from across campus, including faculty members. Indeed, several faculty members were particularly interested in serving because they themselves had been transfer students.

Conclusion

Analysis of transfer student demographics, needs, and academic preparation showed they have unique strengths and challenges. By working together, by starting with a clear understanding of best practices for supporting the academic and co-curricular needs of transfer students, and by analyzing and understanding our own transfer data, UAlbany has made significant strides (e.g., 2% increase in first-year retention-rate) to create a culture where transfers students succeed.

A study undertaken of UAlbany transfer students revealed that important misconceptions existed among key stakeholders of the institution (e.g., faculty; administrators) prior to institutional data and published literature having been consulted. Subsequent efforts by the ESE working group developed strategies to address these issues, three of which are listed here.

(a) Overconfidence among many transfer students *to* UAlbany resulted in the well-documented phenomenon of transfer shock. In addition, overconfidence among some high-level administrators on the ability of transfer students to swiftly adapt to the academic setting at a large research university caused transfer services to be inadequately aligned with students' needs.

(b) The academic destinations of students who transferred *from* UAlbany were highly dependent on their cumulative GPAs at the time of departure. However, as noted in published literature and institutional data, over the full range of GPAs, students who transferred from UAlbany tended to (i) move closer to their family homes, and (ii) to enroll in other public institutions,

(esp. other campuses within the State University of New York system) within commuting range of their family homes.

(c) Attrition among transfer students *to* UAlbany was generally due to low academic performance. However, this was less often the case among those students who transferred *from* UAlbany.

The University at Albany's model suggests that a portfolio of options and strategic collaborations among university stakeholders can best support this important population. The librarian co-author had an awareness of some campus initiatives prior to the formation of the Transfer Student working group, and knew several of the individuals involved. However, she found that addressing this issue together, with an eye to the results not of any one unit, but the campus as a whole, changed the conversation in a number of important ways. Researching, brainstorming, conceptualizing and enhancing programs and initiatives, and actively seeking points of congruence and collaboration as a group committed to a particular goal led to a better understanding of the strengths of units and of individuals. Misaligned assumptions have been corrected, and there is a heightened awareness of potential partners as new plans are made, or even that outside-the-box ideas might flourish due to new collaborations.

Additional research is needed to better understand the preparation, performance, and motivation of transfer students, both those who elect to remain at their transfer institutions, and those who depart. In addition, analyses of departing first time full time students provide data that sheds light on students who may then be transfer students elsewhere. Results from such research can be used to enhance curricular and co-curricular initiatives to enhance transfer student retention.   Analysis of UAlbany students in both transfer and first time full time cohorts provided data that led to student success efforts that increased the retention rate.

While the University at Albany's particular approach, as described in this article, is unique, the impetus for the work, the campus units involved, and the strength

generated by collaborative initiatives are not. It is the authors' hope that others may gain ideas from our collaborative approach, and find ways to create strong cross-campus ventures with a strong library presence.

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