



Supporting Transfer Student Success:

FIVE KEY FACULTY PRACTICES

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ABOUT NISTS

Through education, research, and advocacy, the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS) unites practitioners, researchers, faculty, policy-makers, and administrators to explore and improve transfer student success. We bridge knowledge, policies, and practice and equip professionals with the skills they need to challenge the status quo and reach beyond specific roles to develop equitable and inclusive transfer student experiences for today's diverse, mobile learners.

For more information, please visit our website: www.nists.org

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HOW THIS GUIDE CAME TO BE



EMILY



PETER



LANCE



XUELI



JON

The idea behind this guide started when Emily noticed a lack of transfer resources for 4-year faculty. As she thought about how to address this gap, she stumbled upon the striking synergy between Xueli and Peter's work and invited them to develop a resource together. Along the way, they sought additional contributors to represent a greater diversity of experiences, organizational perspectives, and identities and recruited Lance and Jon to strengthen the collaboration.

Starting in May 2020, we met monthly to brainstorm and develop this guide. Though we came together with a common purpose, our personal and professional identities, perspectives, and experiences differ. Therefore, we open this resource by reflecting on the distinct elements that shaped and reshaped our approach to the work individually and collectively—and ultimately the guide itself.

Emily, a student affairs practitioner, identifies as a white woman. She previously assisted with transfer planning, enrollment, and onboarding at a 2-year campus of a hybrid institution, where she worked closely with campus partners to design and deliver student-centered programs and services. However, as neither a transfer student nor a faculty member, Emily acknowledges her inability to fully understand these groups' complex and multi-faceted lived experiences.

Peter identifies as a white man, the son of first-generation college graduates and transfer students who often spoke of the importance of education for individuals, families, and communities. He has served in various professional roles, including teaching, faculty development, and administration. As a teacher, Peter spent the first 5 years of his career at a community college. A belief in equity, justice, and the transformational power of education motivates Peter's work.

A native of Jamaica, **Lance** identifies as a Black man who has served as a community college STEM faculty member and leader for 16 years. As an undergraduate, Lance battled the stigma associated with his multiple identities: international student, Black male, and student-athlete. Those experiences drive his passion for helping transfer students from diverse backgrounds, particularly women and students of color, gain access to and complete baccalaureate studies in STEM fields.

Hailing from China, **Xueli** identifies as an international woman scholar of color. She firmly believes transfer support must start with dismantling ingrained, often unrecognized frictions in the current system that perpetuate inequities. She recognizes that her privileged role as a university-based professor without personal experiences studying or working at a community college requires her to constantly check her positionality

and power to fully support transfer students and practice reciprocal partnerships with colleagues in community colleges.

Jon identifies as a white man, raised by parents who were the first in their families to attend college and who continued their education, part-time, throughout their careers. He has worked as a full-time and part-time faculty member and educational developer in public universities, private liberal arts colleges, and a community college with urban and suburban campuses. These varied experiences have reinforced for him the critical importance of helping our educational institutions be engines of economic mobility.

Those elements of who we are, where we come from, and what we believe are our strengths, but they also represent potential sources of bias and blind spots. As a team, we aimed to engage in honest, reflective conversations that honored moments of disagreement—or occasionally agreement. These conversations allowed us to unpack assumptions and reaffirm the overarching purpose for writing this guide. We encountered three “sticky” points, which may resonate with some readers. We share these not to muddle the picture but to spark honest and generative reflections, ideas, and impactful approaches in our work with transfer students.

First, we had many discussions and sometimes disagreements around the audience for this guide. The guide emerged in response to a felt need to provide resources for faculty who teach in 4-year colleges or universities. Still, we kept returning to the idea that all faculty, including those at 2-year colleges, could benefit from such a resource. We also knew that ample research indicating the significance of community college faculty support during the transfer process existed and that faculty at 4-year institutions were absent from this work. So, our decision to maintain the focus on faculty in 4-year settings should not be viewed as a belief that these practices are not helpful for community college faculty.

Rather, we wanted to drive home the importance of those in the more privileged setting of 4-year institutions taking greater initiative in breaking down barriers on their own campuses and improving transfer access, experiences, and success.

Second, this guide centers on vertical transfer—transfer from community colleges to 4-year colleges and universities. This type of transfer continues to present challenges due to imperfect policies and structures that impede articulation, credit transfer, student mobility, among other facets of the transfer process. Nevertheless, the implications and takeaways from this guide apply to different types of transfer (e.g., horizontal transfer, reverse transfer).

Third, all five of us see transfer as an equity issue, but we approach it from distinct yet complementary perspectives. For instance, **Emily** views transfer through the lenses of student development and systems thinking and regards the transfer journey as a comprehensive and coordinated experience with many key players. **Peter** views intentional, quality relationships as central to equity and transfer, while **Lance** illuminates barriers through transfer student voices and engages institutional agents to effect change. **Xueli** perceives equity in transfer as both an inward, reflective process among individuals in higher education and a broader institutional responsibility for calling out inequities and removing them. Finally, **Jon** sees the need for educators and institutions to engage in equity-focused collaborations that elevate the importance of transfer student success and the significance of leadership support for faculty to take up the practices shared in this guide.

These moments of disagreement, convergence, and reflection eventually yielded more fruitful, actionable, and contextualized ideas on improving transfer. We invite you to join us as we move closer to making impactful, tangible change for transfer student success.



INTRODUCTION

Nearly 40% of all college students will transfer at least once during their academic career, moving between community colleges, from one 4-year institution to another, from a 4-year to a 2-year institution, from a community college to a 4-year college or university, or any number of other possibilities. Many students will make multiple moves or enroll in more than one institution simultaneously. Ultimately, the pathways to a college credential are highly varied, representing individual educational and career goals and shaped by larger social, cultural, geographic, economic, and institutional factors.

Some students navigate this maze of transfer pathways successfully, persisting in college and earning bachelor's degrees at rates comparable to direct-entry students with similar characteristics. Other students find themselves derailed. In fact, fewer than half of community college transfer students entering a 4-year institution complete their bachelor's degree within six years. That community college students who are Black, Latinx, or low-income are much less likely than their peers to transfer at all is especially troubling. The inequities in the 2-year-to-4-year pathway particularly demand our attention.

Yet, transfer success has less to do with the individual student than it does with the policies of institutions and the practices of educators. When state systems of higher education and individual institutions prioritize the educational experience of transfer students, policies and programs align in ways that support students at various points of their educational journeys.

Institutions and systems are important for transfer student success, but so are faculty. For many students, the classroom (whether virtual or physical) is the primary site for interacting with an institution and its agents. And a range of research suggests that faculty attitudes and behaviors are central to college student success. As such, college faculty—whether they are adjunct instructors or full-time, teaching general education or courses for the major—have a unique role to play in supporting transfer students.

How might faculty (and by extension their departments and institutions) benefit from engaging in this work? First, transfer student success is essential for equitable outcomes in courses, programs, and institutions. As such, faculty committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion



should attend to the transfer experience on their campus. Moreover, transfer students' diverse backgrounds and experiences mean they can enrich the learning environment for all when we intentionally invite their knowledge and perspectives into the classroom. Finally, supporting transfer student success is crucial in light of evolving demographics and enrollments in higher education. At some institutions, transfer students make up as much as half of the total undergraduate enrollment. And as the pool of high school graduates shrinks, colleges and universities may look increasingly to recruit transfer students to join their student body.

Supporting transfer student success is crucial in light of evolving demographics and enrollments in higher education:

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Here, we present five research-informed practices designed to help faculty reflect on and reframe the ways they think about, teach, advise, and mentor transfer students. Each section offers a brief introduction grounded in the research and practice literature on transfer, a series of suggested actions faculty can take, and questions to prompt personal reflection or guide conversations with colleagues.

These recommendations generally reflect what we know about creating inclusive learning environments and adopting effective pedagogies. The goal is not to ask faculty to add another "obligation" to an already full teaching, research, and service agenda. Rather, we hope faculty will examine their current methods with an eye toward identifying some possible new approaches, amplifying effective strategies, and abandoning attitudes and behaviors that result in student disengagement.

We have been intentionally concise in our presentation of the research on transfer and in our discussion of teaching and classroom design strategies. For those who might like to take a deeper dive, we have included a brief list of additional readings where you can learn more about policies and practices that have proven effective in supporting transfer student success and strategies for designing inclusive learning environments.





PRACTICE 1

CONFRONT FALSE ASSUMPTIONS AND DEFICIT THINKING

Without a doubt, readers of this guide are strongly committed to supporting transfer students on an individual basis. At the same time, deeply ingrained, false assumptions about transfer students can implicitly and negatively impact the ways in which we perceive and interact with them. Indeed, the assumption (or stigma) that transfer students are not up to par with those who have attended only one 4-year college or university prevails on many campuses. Yet, students who transfer are as likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree or enroll in graduate school as direct-entry students. They

are also among the most motivated and resilient of college students, having navigated the transfer process that often requires them to work through numerous structural barriers.

So, Practice 1 begins with looking inward—honestly and critically checking in with ourselves and our institutions on a few key points. This reflective practice will allow us, individually and collectively, to work toward challenging and eventually eliminating transfer stigma.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Stop viewing transfer or transfer students as a problem to fix.

As faculty working with transfer students, we should challenge our assumptions about their level of “readiness” and (re)think what it means for us to be ready for transfer students. Students who complete foundational coursework at community colleges have typically engaged with faculty who are deeply dedicated to the teaching and learning process. We should approach transfer students as experts, collaborators, and partners in building supports and activities that amplify their success. We can do this by communicating literally and in practice: “The invaluable experiences and insights you have gained as a transfer student bring a lot to this place.” That kind of messaging helps transfer students see us as allies and their transfer experience as a strength. We also need to interrogate whether the learning experiences and classroom environments we create truly value and are inclusive of transfer students’ prior education.

Facilitate meaningful connections between transfer students’ learning and their community.

Transfer students often feel strong connections to their communities, but those personal touchstones are frequently overlooked or discounted in the classroom. We can facilitate meaningful connections between transfer students’ learning and their community by contextualizing the curriculum within community needs. Engage students in conversations like “What about your field makes you passionate and fulfilled? How can we work together to translate that into your community? How can you use the knowledge and skills you learned to give back?”

Service-learning, internships, public research, and other community-based projects are excellent venues to engage students in contextualized learning opportunities. Such approaches reflect elements of culturally responsive pedagogy when they recognize the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning. They appeal to transfer students and their community college education as assets, and empower students to take their growth to the next level.

Take an equity-minded approach.

There is no doubt that transfer students are highly adept and motivated, but they shouldn’t have to do it all by themselves. As one student said: “I’ve always had this mentality that I’m going to do it on my own...but as I am reaching these precipices and making decisions about my future, I’m thinking, ‘I can’t make this decision on my own. I need more information.’” Transfer students’ agency alone cannot overcome the inequities that persist in transfer supports and information. An equity-minded approach allows us to critically reassess and undo practices and mindsets that may not serve all transfer students. It emboldens us to take responsibility, individually and collectively, to enact positive change and close equity gaps. We can hold space especially for first-generation, low-income, students of color, and other minoritized transfers to feel okay about asking for the support they need. At the same time, we can clearly convey: “I know you are capable of figuring out lots of things by yourself, but I am here for you as you settle in here. Is there anything in my capacity as your instructor that I could do or do differently to best support your experience as a student here?” Being a safe and accessible resource helps level the playing field for transfer students.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What attributes come to mind when I think of transfer students? Are those attributes framed as deficits or strengths? How do those preconceived notions shape the way I interact with transfer students?
- What intentional efforts am I making to shift the mindset and practices related to transfer students—my own or those of my colleagues—away from deficit-thinking and toward viewing transfer students as assets and success stories?
- How do I balance support with respect for individual agency? How am I communicating my openness to questions that transfer students might have?
- How can I invite transfer students to share their rich knowledge and experiences to enhance learning in the classroom? How can I incorporate their prior knowledge and experiences to make connections across course concepts and activities?
- When I think about the courses and programs I teach in, how much of a community focus do they entail? How can I incorporate more community-based options to help transfer students make meaningful connections with their field of study?





PRACTICE 2

KNOW WHO YOUR TRANSFER STUDENTS ARE

Every new college student—whether at a 2-year or 4-year institution—makes a series of adjustments to find their path to success. Yet, transfer students must navigate an additional layer of complexity to reach their goals. At many institutions, they are more likely to be from low-income families and to be students of color, first-generation, single parents, and commuter students. However, they are less likely to have experienced the kinds of academic and social activities designed to support these identities that first-year students at their current institution have. They may also struggle to make sense of the transfer process due to a lack of access to clear, consistent, and correct information and

support. Although transfer information may be available online, it may not have the specificity or depth transfer students need.

So, in addition to the typical adjustments to a new learning environment, transfer students may encounter bureaucratic, curricular, and other hurdles at each step in the transfer process. For example, [one student](#) shared the challenges and concerns he experienced related to changing schools:

During the summer before my fall transfer, I researched...and thought I had everything I needed to go into that space as best as I could. However, the culture and lack of transfer resources made it difficult for me to acclimate to the campus, and I had to develop my own “figure it out yourself” mentality. It seemed like all the guidance, support, and direction was only given to the freshman class, so me and other transfers had to make our own way. The culture also made it hard to figure out our place in the campus community; if you weren’t set on what you wanted to do after graduation, you were stuck trying to “figure it out yourself.”

While faculty may find it difficult to relate to these experiences if they have not been a transfer student themselves, they are nevertheless well-positioned to support transfer students on their journey toward

success because they interact with them regularly. But to be effective in this work, we must know who transfer students are. This means investing time and energy in learning about and relating to their experience.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Ask students to share their stories.

In many courses, faculty ask students to share a little bit about themselves (e.g., hometown, intended major, what they are looking forward to about the course, challenges they anticipate) on the first day of class. But we should also engage students with questions related to their transfer experiences or intentions. For example, faculty can ask students to write an [informal, ungraded “autobiography”](#) in which students share their identities, past experiences, hopes and interests, motivations for college, their strengths, and their areas for growth in the coming academic term. Faculty at transfer-receiving institutions might ask, “What has your college experience been like so far? Did you begin here or at another college or university? What has that journey been like for you?”

Asking these kinds of questions—whether in an assignment or an informal conversation with a student—sends a clear message that we are interested in knowing who our transfer students are and that it is safe for them to engage actively in the experience of learning in our

courses. Equally important, such engagement suggests that students’ lived reality matters and is relevant to the learning relationship we wish to build with them. Finally, asking about transfer intentions and experiences normalizes the transfer process and, to the extent that many faculty embrace this practice, will support the creation of a transfer-inclusive culture at our institutions.

Become familiar with institutional data about transfer.

Colleges and universities typically create an annual profile of the incoming class, but oftentimes, robust transfer data are not included. Asking our institutional research office (or equivalent) for the incoming [transfer student profile](#) can help us understand the percentage of new students who are transfers, as well as other demographic information, such as top colleges or universities attended and associate degree completion rates prior to entry. Being able to disaggregate these data by race/ethnicity, gender, and income level can provide a more nuanced understanding of who our transfer students are. Finally, we may want to look at our

programs or departments and ask how transfer students compare to non-transfer students in terms of key demographics.

Educate yourself about the main barriers transfer students face.

The transfer process begins long before a student enrolls on our campus and isn't complete until the student earns a baccalaureate degree (which may not happen on our campus). [A number of barriers](#) can complicate the journey, such as limited access to information, curricular complexity, muddy articulation policies, inadequate advising, and vexing financial aid policies. Students

often experience the cumulative effect of multiple hurdles, impacting their connection to the institution and the overall time to and cost of their degree. And, transfer students frequently feel like they are alone on this journey without clear signposts to guide them. By learning more about articulation policies related to the majors in our departments, credit loss, and courses that seem to be roadblocks to degree progression for transfers, we can more effectively fill in information gaps, mitigate negative experiences, and work to remove systemic barriers to success.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What am I currently doing in my courses to understand the complexity of students' transfer journeys and the assets these students bring to my courses? How can I strengthen my approach to learning about my students? Even if I currently learn about transfer students through informal interactions, how might I also formalize it in my course design and class meetings to ensure I learn about all of my students?
- Does my institutional research office or program area provide disaggregated data for the transfer population? If not, what are the barriers to getting this information?
- What do my students' stories tell me, both about each of them as individuals and also about the transfer student experience at my institution? How can I learn more about the barriers to and opportunities for transfer student success in my specific context?





PRACTICE 3

OFFER RELENTLESS WELCOME

All college students benefit from “[relentless welcome](#),” frequent and positive interactions with faculty, staff, and peers. As noted in Practice 2, transfer students are more likely to be first-generation and students of color. When these students perceive faculty to be approachable, helpful, and encouraging, they are much more likely to thrive in higher education. The research on transfer students confirms this point, suggesting that they [benefit from early welcoming interactions](#) with faculty and advisors at receiving institutions.

Transfer students may benefit from significant support from orientation programs, advisors, and others, but the classroom—whether face-to-face or virtual—is the heart of their daily educational experience. And because

transfer students often enroll in upper-level classes when they enter a new college or university, they may not be familiar with the institution’s academic practices and terminology regarding everything from accessing online course materials to making sense of the final exam schedule. Each class meeting is an opportunity for faculty to help transfer students build their sense of belonging and, alongside their peers, cultivate the academic skills all students need to succeed.

Feeling connected to the educational environment can be particularly significant for students in their first semester at a new institution when they are most likely to experience “[transfer shock](#),” the disorientation that can accompany encounters with many new people, places,

practices, and expectations after transfer. Faculty can mitigate the effects of transfer shock by affirming that students belong at the institution and are capable of success despite adversity. One transfer student recalled

how powerful an instructor's encouragement was in calming her anxiety about being in a new learning environment:

*One day he said to the whole class, 'Near the end of the semester, one of my best students is going to stop coming to class because they feel overwhelmed with all of the pressure, and they are really scared that they are going to do poorly. I want to assure that student to **keep coming to class**, even if you missed an assignment or feel like you didn't do well on an essay, because it's going to be okay. **Don't just disappear.***



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Show an interest in transfer students as individuals.

Perhaps the most direct way to show interest is to make an effort to call students by name. Research on very large enrollment courses finds that students feel more valued and motivated when they *perceive* the instructor cares to know their name. Using simple techniques like name tents in the classroom can have surprisingly positive effects for transfer students. As one said, "When I feel that personal connection with the instructor, it makes me want to do better in the class as well. It's almost as if I'm extra accountable."

Affirm their capacity to learn and succeed.

The ways we talk about coursework and the feedback we give students can shape their motivation and behaviors in our class and in college. By being transparent about the purposes of and assessment criteria for the work we assign, we can reduce persistent equity gaps between first-generation students and their peers. By expressing

high academic standards combined with fervent belief in each student's capacity to learn, instructors help students develop growth mindsets that are vital for their success. One student described her initial reaction to the quantity and depth of feedback she received from an instructor after she transferred: "I'll admit that when I received my first set of revisions, I struggled with imposter syndrome. I didn't know this type of feedback was...normal." She soon came to realize that the instructor's extensive comments revealed that he was taking her seriously as a learner, transforming her self-doubts into a firm belief that she belonged in her new academic community.

Normalize help-seeking behaviors.

Students often have misconceptions about how to do well in courses and may lack knowledge about academic support services on campus. Research suggests that many first-generation students may not understand what or who office hours are for, and students also commonly believe that the writing or tutoring centers are only for people who are failing. Frequently, first-year

programs are designed to address these knowledge gaps, but transfer students may not have had access to such programs. Instructors may unintentionally reinforce false assumptions about using academic support resources when they say things like, “If you’re struggling, the tutoring center can help you make it through the semester.”

We can provide both [positive social support](#) and concrete, practical guidance to students about how to succeed in class, by emphasizing the importance of

resources for all students. For example, we can invite someone from the writing center to visit class and explain what they do. Encouraging—or assigning—a writing center review of a draft of the first assignment before turning it in for a grade can reinforce this message. The value of the assignment might be communicated by telling students, “Over the years, I’ve noticed that students who succeed in this class consult with the writing center, so I am requiring each of you to do that on your first paper because I want each of you to succeed.”



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What am I already doing in my teaching and service to welcome all students, including transfers? How might I deepen or expand these efforts to reach more students more frequently and even earlier in the transfer process (e.g., bridge programs, orientation, open house)?
- How can my teaching, advising, and other interactions with transfer students affirm their capacities and encourage help-seeking behaviors? What new practices could I adopt to help transfer students feel they belong, that their success matters, and that academic resources are available to support them?
- How can I work with colleagues to make my department, the curriculum, and my institution a place of relentless welcome for transfer students?





PRACTICE 4

BUILD CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE INSTITUTION

We can build on the relentless welcome described in Practice 3 by helping transfer students feel that their college or university cares deeply about their success and that, as a [student-ready institution](#), we will help them make the connections they need to navigate their

journey. As faculty, we can implement strategies within the classroom to help minimize barriers to engagement and belonging. For example, one transfer student¹ described the struggle of leaving a small institution only to enroll in a large lecture course:

¹ This quote is from *Momentum and Collision: A Qualitative Case Study Understanding Pre- and Post-Transfer STEM Success by Exploring Gender and Racial Experiences Among Community College Transfer Students* (Gooden, 2021).

*I think one big challenge with transferring is being thrown into these massive classes. **You're so used to having a connection with your professor and your peers**, and it being so like one-on-one, if you have questions in class, they can come right up to you and answer it, or, you know, you feel comfortable raising your hand because there are 15 to 25 of you versus 300.*

Helping transfers connect to their peers will go a long way toward making large classes feel smaller and ensuring that transfers don't feel like outsiders in smaller classes. Peers are also an especially effective resource for supporting transfer integration into the institution's life and connecting students to resources critical to their academic performance and sense of belonging. We can

also connect transfer students in our classes to other faculty and staff who act as "[institutional agents](#)" for their success. Creating multiple opportunities for connection will help transfers overcome feelings of intimidation, doubt, and isolation that may impact their adjustment to the institution and opportunities for success.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Build purposeful peer-to-peer relationships in the classroom.

Peer interactions are among the most powerful drivers of a wide range of student outcomes. Small-group activities support student learning while creating a welcoming environment in the classroom. Moreover, research suggests that peer connections are key to helping transfer students find and use [informal learning resources](#), such as student organizations, mentoring programs, and transfer-focused networking events that help them adjust to the social, academic, and physical environments of the 4-year campus. We can harness the power of peer relationships in the classroom by using active-learning techniques and purposeful small-group activities. Heterogeneous grouping in classroom activities early in the semester provide low-stakes yet formalized introductions of transfers to their peers. Using the learning management system (LMS) to foster more authentic learner-to-learner interactions through groups or teams ensures access for students whose responsibilities frequently take them off campus. Finally, assigning transfer students leadership roles on group projects provides prime opportunities for them to demonstrate the rich skills they already possess.

Connect students to colleagues in student affairs and other departments.

As faculty, we should reach out to our student affairs colleagues and get to know them and how their work supports students. We can also invite student affairs professionals to department meetings to help our colleagues develop a deeper understanding of how to connect students with on-campus resources. Finally, we might consider building in brief visits from specific colleagues (e.g., an academic support specialist, the director of undergraduate research, or a career advisor, among others) during the first weeks of the semester. For all students, these visits can demystify and destigmatize the use of campus resources while communicating that everyone at the institution—full-time faculty, part-time faculty, student affairs educators—are invested in and committed to student success. Information shared during resource presentations can be reinforced by including it on the course syllabus or on the course website. We can also intentionally point transfers to social events or transfer-specific programming to help them adjust socially and academically to the institution.

Involve transfer students in high-impact practices like undergraduate research, service-learning, learning communities, internships, and study abroad.

We know that participation in high-impact practices (HIPs), such as learning communities, increases peer-to-peer interaction, both in and out of the classroom and in other activities related to learning, and may lead to higher levels of student persistence and grade point average. Yet, compared to students who enter the institution in their first year, transfer students often have fewer opportunities to participate in HIPs. While at the

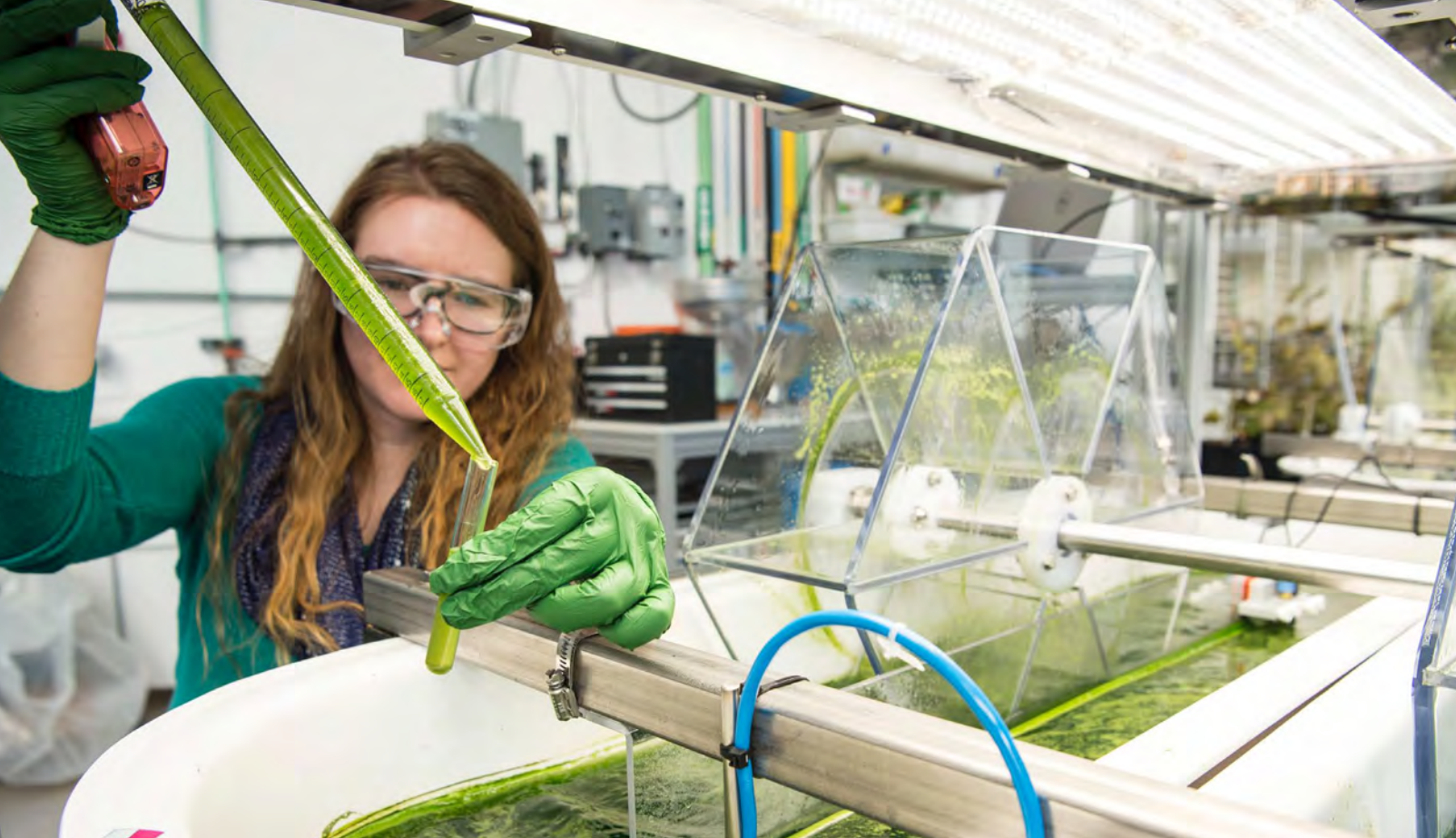
community college, opportunities for transfer-intending students to participate in HIPs, such as Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REUs), may be limited by small enrollment capacity or being offered at times that conflict with students' schedules due to family and community commitments. For others, the deadlines to apply for HIPs participation may occur before transfer students have matriculated to their new campus, thus automatically excluding them. To ensure transfers have equitable access to these learning experiences, institutions and individual faculty must be intentional about helping students integrate these experiences into their educational plans.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How can I (re)structure my classroom to be more inclusive of transfers and serve as a hub for purposeful peer-to-peer interactions?
- Which student affairs colleagues might serve as core partners as I work to build stronger collaborations in service of transfer students' success?
- How might I work with faculty/programs outside of my discipline to engage transfer students, particularly those who are low-income and students of color, in undergraduate research experiences, internships, and other HIPs? How can I expand these efforts to encourage collaboration between transfer and direct-entry students in these experiences?
- In what ways have I participated in or led HIPs that foster diversity and inclusion?





PRACTICE 5

WORK TO IMPROVE THE SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES THAT MATTER TO TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS

Through no fault of their own, transfer students' experiences are powerfully shaped by systems and structures in and beyond higher education, such as inadequate financial support, unclear curricular pathways, and under-resourced advising models. These structures are frequently outside the control of individual faculty,

yet institutions cannot create truly transfer-inclusive cultures without strong faculty advocates. We can work to mitigate institutional barriers by identifying allies in our departments, across campus, and at the institutions from which our transfer students come.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Explore programmatic transfer data to see the transfer “system” in context.

Because individual faculty interact with only a small fraction of an institution’s students, it can be hard to know which experiences are idiosyncratic or systemic. Looking critically at the transfer data within our own majors and degree programs helps to identify patterns of success or common barriers students face. As noted in Practice 2, accessing the institution’s transfer student profile is a good place to start, but we should also attend to factors that impact degree attainment, such as credits earned vs. applied to a degree, the average time to degree, and program-specific transfer acceptance rates. These data can illustrate whether students are (or aren’t) progressing toward a degree. We can interrogate the data to identify if specific courses—including ours—or program policies seem to create obstacles for transfer students and then consider ways to lessen such barriers. To the extent that we are able to disaggregate transfer data by race/ethnicity, gender, and income, we have the opportunity to explore and create greater equity in the baccalaureate pipeline.

Learn with colleagues.

Transfer students interact with a wide variety of individuals at sending and receiving institutions, and thus many people hold insights that are important to understanding the full picture of the transfer success puzzle. We can talk with colleagues in or beyond our departments to learn what they know about transfer. Perhaps we can share what we learned through transfer students’ autobiographies or similar assignments, as well as campus and program data. Such conversations allow us to leverage our collective wisdom to advocate for change. We can also participate in professional development programs designed to help us become aware of institutional resources for transfer students

and to increase our skill and confidence implementing culturally responsive and other evidence-based pedagogies. Acquiring this knowledge will help us unlearn inequitable practices and address implicit biases about who should and can succeed in the classroom. It will also help us be effective advisors to all students. Such efforts may also open the door to other important collaborations, such as enhancing transfer onboarding; offering transfer mentorships and bridge programs; preparing students to engage in HIPs; and possibly even broader—and crucially important—discussions about curriculum alignment between institutions.

Identify whether a clear transfer pathway into the institution or the department exists.

Although most institutional websites provide detailed instructions for applying for transfer admission, few include comprehensive information about planning for the transfer timeline, assessing institutional fit, and adjusting to a new campus. Similarly, programs of study that detail the classes students should take for their major may be readily available, yet information about preferred course sequencing, transferability, and availability may be hard to find. We can search the institution’s website through the lens of a prospective transfer student to see what information is readily available or reach out to a colleague in academic advising to see if a formal transfer guide exists. If detailed transfer guidance is sparse, we have an opportunity to create a transfer roadmap so that we and our colleagues can use it during pre-transfer advising appointments or reference it in our course syllabi.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What do my institution or program's disaggregated data suggest about transfer student outcomes and experiences? How can these data be used to ensure equitable opportunities and support for transfer students across programs and the institution? If this information is not provided, what steps can I take to make it happen?
- With whom can I talk about removing barriers and improving the systems that impact transfer students at my institution? Who is already working on this? How could I partner with them?
- How easy or difficult is it to access and navigate transfer policies and information in my program, department, and institution? How might we improve information access, structures, and processes so that students can transfer more seamlessly into their desired majors or programs?
- What transfer initiatives are already happening at my institution? How can I become involved?



CONCLUSION

Reframing our relationships and interactions with transfer students places the responsibility for transfer readiness on faculty, rather than on the students. The five key practices outlined in this guide serve as a framework to support educators in pursuing this work. We have focused on practices within faculty control, but we have also highlighted larger structural issues of which faculty need to be aware even if they do not have an immediate role in addressing those issues. These are places where individuals who want to have a larger impact on transfer student success might seek to engage.

Ensuring transfer success will not be easy, nor will it be quick. However, systemic work has the potential to be transformative for many transfer students. Our persistence and creative problem-solving, both as transfer advocates and in our traditional faculty roles, will make a big difference.

Interactions with transfers both in and out of the classroom create a deep well of insights about their experiences and needs. Using this knowledge, we need

to advocate on their behalf whenever we can. In addition to obvious areas like transfer course equivalencies, many opportunities exist to insert transfer success into campus conversations, whether informally with colleagues or in regularly scheduled faculty meetings. Challenging transfer stigma when we hear it, seeking and sharing transfer student stories and insights, and pushing for more transfer-focused orientation, advising, and mentoring programs at the department level are just a few important examples.

In this guide, we have highlighted 15 specific recommendations for faculty to improve the learning experiences and opportunities for success for transfer students in their classrooms. We encourage you to identify one or two that you can implement immediately and to create a plan for how you will assess the impact of those efforts on the students within your sphere of influence.

Our persistence and creative
problem-solving, both as transfer
advocates and in our traditional faculty
roles, will make a **big difference**.

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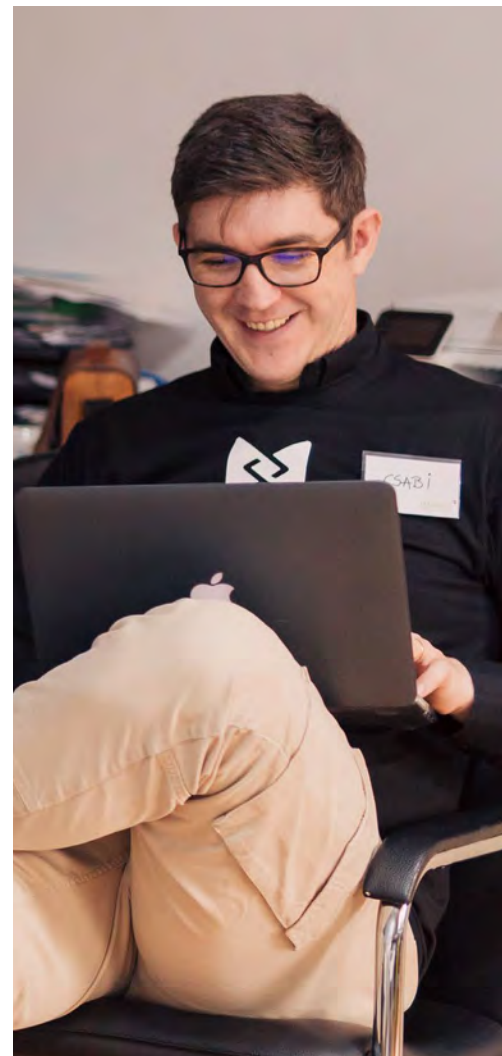
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