



#NISTSCON2018

FEBRUARY 7-9, 2018
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

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A New World: Transfer Students as Immigrants at Receiving Institutions
Current Research, Orientation and Transition Programs

Practitioners and researchers often refer to first-time-in-college students as "native" to their home institutions, which begs the question: are transfer students, then, "immigrants"? The stigma of being non-native students, experienced and perceived exclusion and isolation, and pressure to "pass" as native are among the similarities transfer students share with those who have made the migration to a new country. This presentation explores how this framework influences transfer services, policies, and research.

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A New World: Transfer Students as Immigrants at Receiving Institutions

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February 9, 2018

Overview

The language we use

Immigration research

Transfer experience

Potential support systems and practices

How we talk about FTICs

Research

(p. 244). The main components are:

1. Students who enter junior colleges and transfer to four-year colleges typically experience an appreciable drop in college grades after transfer.
2. Usually the transfer's grades after transfer are lower than the average grades of the **native** students.
3. Often, but not always, the transfers' grades recover from the loss which occurs immediately after transfer, but the degree of recovery varies from a slight amount to complete recovery to their pretransfer level.
4. The transfer student seems to suffer most if he transfers into a curriculum which requires competence or training in mathematics, if he transfers into a major state university, or if he transfers from a junior college instead of from a four-year college.
5. The transfer will be less likely to survive to graduate than will the **native** student, on the average.
6. The transfer who does survive to graduate will probably take longer to reach graduation than will a comparable **native** student. (p. 244-245)

The theory of transfer shock is the premise for much of the research that followed in the years after Hills' inception of the theory.

Policy

Figure 1. 2008 Student Cohort¹: Average Completion Rate, Average Time-To-Degree, and Average Number of Semester Credit Hours Attempted, By Institution

INSTITUTION	Average Completion Rate		Average Time to Degree (in Years)		Average Number of SCH Attempted	
	University Native Students	Community College Transfer Students	University Native Students	Community College Transfer Students	University Native Students	Community College Transfer Students
(An asterisk by an institution's name means that it enrolled only junior and senior students in 2008 and had no equivalent to "native" freshmen or sophomore students.)						
Angelo State University	79.9%	57.6%	6	7	145	153
Lamar University	75.8%	54.0%	6	7	147	146
Midwestern State University	79.0%	70.1%	6	7	146	149
Prairie View A&M University	67.6%	77.8%	5	7	152	163
Sam Houston State University	86.8%	73.5%	5	7	138	150
Stephen F. Austin State University	86.2%	75.6%	5	7	140	146
Sul Ross State University	79.6%	66.7%	6	7	147	156

How we talk about FTICs

Transfer Students Are Less Likely to Take Part in 'High Impact' Activities

By Ben Terris | NOVEMBER 08, 2009

Not all transfer experiences are created equal.

Executive Summary

This report—in fulfillment of the requirements specified in the General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill 1 (SB 1), 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session, Section 55 (Article III- Section 250)—provides a comparative analysis of transfer goals and practices as reported by each general academic teaching institution, and specific performance data of both native and transfer students for each institution. The text of the Section, including the specific informational focus targets for the report, is available in Appendix A of the report.

The study, known as Nessie, found that both sets of transfer students tended to lag behind "native" students, as it calls those who did not transfer, in terms of campus engagement. But the horizontal-transfer students were likelier than their vertical-transfer counterparts to

Lanaan and Sojourner

“As applied to this study, for community college students, moving from the 2- to the 4-year is similar to the experience of sojourners. During the transition or movement of students, the place of origin is the community college; the foreign environment is the university. Given the unique institutional, faculty, and student culture at the 2- versus 4-year, students will be required to make numerous adjustments. For transfer students, possessing the coping mechanisms to deal with the stress, and the extent to which they have the skills to fit in and become involved highly impacts their successful cross-cultural relocation from the community college to the university” (Lanaan, 2007, p. 41).

Native Def:

Belonging to a person's character from birth rather than acquired; innate; found in a pure or uncombined state.

**Are transfer students seen as
immigrants in an institution's
student population?**

**Does the idea of transfer as
immigrant resonate with you?**

**Are there ways in which FTICs and
transfer students are made distinct? -**

Components to the immigration experience

- Stigma of being non-native
 - Pre/Post-transition stress
 - Experiences and perceptions of social exclusion and isolation
 - Pressure to “pass” as native or assimilate
-

Stigma of Being Non-Native

“Without being able to get into special classes or programs, these students were separated from scarce resources, such as access to counselors and information about college” (Gonzalez, 2010, p.476).

“While friends begin driving, taking their first jobs, and receiving financial aid for college, undocumented youth are legally **excluded from these important rites of passage...**The primary experience is that of **stigmatization and shame...**undocumented youth both **disengage from critical networks of support and opt out of activities and potential opportunities**” (Gonzalez, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013, p. 1177).

“[Immigrant] Students may also have to answer questions from peers about why they attend a community college instead of a four-year institution...or why they took a term off from school....Abrego (2008) explained that ‘**their status is a constant reminder that they [are] different, vulnerable, and considered suspect**’ within their local and national communities” (Garcia & Tierney, 2011, p. 2723).

Pre/Post-Transition Stress

“For the longest time I thought I was going one way. You know, we all have a sense of what we hope our future will look like. **But all of a sudden I was going the other way, and I couldn't do anything about it...**The internalization of such messages left respondents feeling scared, alone, distrustful, without solid footing” (Gonzalez, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013, p. 1183).

“I know more resources, and I know where to find the resources, but here it takes me a lot of time to find the resources; I don't know how the system works or where to ask” (Stebbleton, Rost-Banik, Greene, & DeAngelo, 2017, p. 363).

“[I had] gotten to a place where **I lost hope**” (Gonzalez, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013, p. 1187).

Experiences and Perceptions of Exclusion and Isolation

“I felt really alone and didn’t know what to do. I felt like giving up. Just giving up on everything. I mean, why should I try? What good was it going to do?” (Gonzalez, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013, p. 1184).

“Usually people are not aware of 1079 or they don’t know. There is no specific place where you could go and find out information unless you do it yourself on the Internet” (Contreras, 2009, p. 622).

Pressure to pass as “native” or assimilate

“In the United States, individuals who **value competition** and believe that success comes as a **reward for tireless work** may be most likely to be hired for prestigious jobs, elected to political office, and earn high salaries. In contrast, individuals who hold **different ideals, such as immigrant people from collectivist cultural backgrounds**, may receive little or no support from social institutions in the new receiving society unless they adopt a bicultural identity (which comes with its own challenges...)” (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006, p. 17).

“I didn’t want to be seen as different. I mean, I wasn’t different. **But I felt like I had a big sign above my head**” (Gonzalez, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013, p. 1182).

Student Voices on the Transfer Experience

- Stigma of being non-native
 - Pre/Post-transition stress
 - Experiences and perceptions of social exclusion and isolation
 - Pressure to “pass” as native or assimilate
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Stigma of Being Non-Native

“I wasn't told about any of these services, such as having a peer mentor, or career exploration, that UT supposedly offered. I was basically told by an advisor that it would be unrealistic for a transfer student to head towards the premed route then he wrongly advised for the classes I was supposed to take for my major. This was extremely discouraging and I felt stigmatized for being a transfer.”

“Honestly, I did not feel welcome when I first set foot on campus...when I arrived at orientation, there seemed to be an inescapable stigma attached to being a "transfer" student. I guess I felt like people looked down on us because we didn't get in "the first time". I still find that sentiment to be true even as a senior...My meeting with my advisor left me insulted after he insinuated that I might not be able to handle the rigor of UT courses and suggested taking only 12 hours. This offended me because I transferred in with a 3.8/4 and knew I was more than capable of handling difficult coursework...I was beyond excited to be a Longhorn and couldn't wait to get started but I always had the feeling I should "very grateful" I was "allowed" to attend, instead of being treated like I deserved to be admitted based on my proven academic success.”

Pre/Post-Transition Stress

“The competition and the pressure to stay above average in all my classes [has been the greatest challenge]. I felt I was constantly stressed and my stomach was always in knots.”

“Making connections and building friendships really helps decrease feelings of feeling completely lost in such a huge school...Too many transfer students I have talked to feel lost, depressed, and overwhelmed. UT needs to do more to combat this.”

“We get last choice and pretty much get screwed over. Like I feel like a second class citizens.”

“All my math classes at ACC had tests in the testing center with unlimited time. Having the added stress of a ticking clock to a Diff Eq test is a lot harder to deal with than I expected. My test anxiety is through the roof now.”

“The transition to UT was a very difficult and trying experience. I broke down mentally and emotionally many times because the rigor that my classes required of me was a completely new experience. I also chose to live off-campus, I felt socially isolated and found it harder integrate myself at UT.”

Transfer Students' Mental Health

“Demographically, the **most stressed, anxious, and depressed** students were transfers, upperclassmen, and those living off-campus (Beiter et al., 2015).” -

Experiences and Perceptions of Exclusion and Isolation

“UT Austin can greet transfers with a lit tower just like they do with the incoming freshman. I feel like I missed out on a few of these traditions because I was a transfer.”

“Give them a darn *Gone to Texas* sign.”

“Make the *Gone to Texas* experience for us the same as the experience for freshmen. You roll out the red carpet for them, but ask us to enter through the service entrance.”

“Because I'm a non-traditional student, I've experienced social isolation and feelings of inferiority. Although, I've overcome most of this through hard work.”

“It was hard feeling like I was a part of the longhorn community as I knew no one and there weren't any programs like FIG that could help me meet other transfers and get situated. I felt almost abandoned by this school. I learned about resources on campus by trial and error.”

Pressure to pass as “native” or assimilate

“Trying to assimilate into the student body/ life was a challenge. Being a transfer student is like repeating your freshman year. In a way, it's like no progress was made in "growing up". I identified more as a freshman than as a sophomore my 1st semester at UT (the intro level classes reinforced this idea).”

““I did get some credits done, but UT is a whole different world and I felt that if I had just started here from the beginning I would have been much better off. Now I am struggling with my GPA due to the course load I was not expecting.”

“Everyone already has friends, clubs, and you aren't sure where to go. It's hard to fit in on a giant campus like UT anyway, I always felt segregated from the "first time" admits and I always felt less worthy than them in my first year here. Doing anything to help a transfer student not feel that way, and to make them feel like they really are part of the community (which they absolutely are).”

“More thorough information on UT traditions, songs, pride, etc.”

**Which of these experiences have
you seen
on your campus?**

Recommendations Adapted from Immigration Literature

- Immigrant Receptive communities → transfer receptive campus culture; peer networks; encouragement, validation
- Immersion courses → orientation sessions on spirit, tradition, culture; first-year seminars
- Less restrictive eligibility for aid → Less restrictive policies on credit and its applicability
- Physical space to connect with immigrant peers (Stebbleton, 2014)
- Access to mental health resources
- Financial assistance → Financial aid

Recommendations Adapted from Immigration Literature

- *Advocacy*
 - “I want to work with others like me to help us have an optimistic view.”
 - “There was no club whatsoever that could help students who were undocumented, they felt alone. And now, like that I have helped create that club, I see the students and they are like, happier, they are more outgoing, they’re like – they’re not so into themselves, they’re like, into campus life, they’re like, very—like, more optimistic about the future.”

Impact

What impact might this lens have on transfer student services?

On transfer policy?

On research?

Questions?

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