

Chapter 6: Experiences of Transfer Students

One focus of the assessment committee in 2013 was understanding the experiences of Transfer students. Nationwide, more than a third of students attend more than one institution. (National Student Clearinghouse, 2011). For Truman to be supportive of Transfer students, we must understand how current transfer students adapt and perform. Two separate student-led studies sought to investigate this. The first involved focus groups, and the second analyzed existing data on student learning.

Student-Led Focus Groups

The central theme of last year's student-led focus groups was the transfer student experiences at Truman. The goal in conducting these discussions was to generate information on how to potentially improve future transfers' experiences. We ran five focus groups: two were for students who had transferred from a four year institute, two were for students who had transferred from a community college, and the fifth session was a mix of all students. We divided students with the assumption that they might have unique transfer problems.

Based upon the aggregation of data from student-led focus group sessions, transfer students appear to be satisfied with Truman's overall transition process. Of the valuable resources provided by Truman, the New Student Advisor and orientation week were deemed as the most helpful. The New Student Advisor and orientation week provided transfers with essential information to enable them to be successful at Truman. Many students expressed that they would have liked to keep their New Student Advisor for an entire year, rather than a single semester. Many students admitted that they had skipped their orientation session for various reasons. Student with jobs, for example, could not lose a full day of work. Some of the other

useful tools include the register's office, writing center, career center, student success center, librarians, and student tutors.

Of the negative feedback received, the most prominent was in regards to the credit cost in transferring; however, despite the costs, no student regretted their decision. In addition, many reported little help from professors in understanding the transition process. Many professors assumed that all students took their prerequisite courses at Truman, assumed that they possessed certain skills and knowledge that they do not. Helpful suggestions included the creation of organizations specifically for transfer students, which would allow students to socialize and discuss their similar problems. In addition, the implementation of transfer mentors, in which prior transfers would advise new transfers, was suggested. Transfers desired more assistance in attaining scholarships and jobs on campus. Many reported struggling with being integrated in non-transfer social groups. Overall, feedback was relatively positive indicating that transfers feel well adapted and successful at Truman.

Those from other universities appeared to have adjusted better overall than those from community colleges. The biggest complaint on the part of those from community colleges was the lack of guidance provided by the university in comparison to community colleges. At a community college the professors understood students also had jobs and a life outside of school. Here at Truman, however, students' felt that teachers assume that all students have to do outside the classroom is schoolwork. In addition, community college transfers reported more problems with transferring credits. Many complained that Truman did not accept credits that were comparable to those offered here. They were forced to retake the same classes using the exact same books because Truman would not accept their community college credits. Overall, even

though the cost of transferring credits was huge for some students, not a single student regretted transferring to Truman.

Student-Led Archival Research

The purpose of our study was to compare the performance of transfer and non-transfer students at Truman. As the number of transfer students at 4-year institutions is continuously increasing, universities, including Truman will need to adapt and be welcoming to students. Thurmond (2007) states that transfer credit has increased considerably in recent years, in part due to increases in community college enrollment. Glass & Harrington (2002) found that even though most transfer students do experience transfer shock, non-transfer and transfer students tend to graduate with similar GPAs. Transfer shock is thus referred to as the noticeable decline in GPA during a transfer student's first semester, which may be due to the psychological shock the student endures. Research was also done at universities with smaller class sizes and/or the geographic isolation of campus, similar to that of Truman State. Fee et al. (2009) found that transfer students felt they were more successful with small class sizes. In addition, Laanan (2001) indicated that (1) transfer students should expect to suffer an appreciable drop in grades the first semester after transfer (2) transfer students' grades tend to improve in direct relations to their length of schooling, and (3) non-transfer students as a group are shown to perform better than the transfer students.

The hypothesis was that non-transfer students would out-perform transfer students in areas such as GPA, critical thinking and problem solving. To test our hypothesis, data on 6,335 non-transfer and transfer students between 2005 and 2011 was obtained from the university's files via request. In order to measure our data, we looked at multiple variables such as

undergraduate and senior GPA, senior tests done in a student's major, how students scored in critical thinking and student portfolios which measured senior interdisciplinary work and writing.

For portfolio data, we hypothesized that non-transfer students would score better on their portfolio project. When looking into the five subsets of the portfolio, non-transfer students scored significantly higher on two: "writing mechanics" and "writing style" with p-values of .000 and .006 respectively. Once we controlled for ACT however, "writing mechanics" became non-significant as well.

The results for senior tests were also different than what we hypothesized. We hypothesized that non-transfer Truman students would score higher on these tests than transfer students. A t-test concluded that on certain tests, non-transfer students did score higher. Such tests included Biology ($p=.006$), Computer Science ($p=.002$) and Spanish Word ($p=.015$). After controlling for ACT, a partial correlation showed that none of the senior test results were actually significantly different. It should therefore be noted that controlling for ACT takes away any pre-college differences that may have resulted between the two studied groups.

GPA was the last thing we looked at and provided the most intriguing of results. We hypothesized that non-transfer Truman students would have higher GPAs than transfer students. A t-test indicated no significant differences between the GPAs of non-transfer and transfer students as of junior year (3.3780 and 3.3650 respectively; $p=.488$), but by graduation transfer students were actually found to have higher GPAs when compared to that of non-transfer students (3.3753 and 3.3042 respectively; $p=.000$).

The results show that since GPAs were relatively similar for both groups during junior year, but different at the end of their college careers, transfer students may have actually brought in higher GPAs. Their incoming capability may also have also been a little different. Overall, however these few differences suggest that transfer students acclimate relatively well to our university.

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