

THE TRANSFER EXPERIENCE

**A Handbook for Creating a More Equitable and
Successful Postsecondary System**



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LOOKING BACK TO SEE THE FUTURE

The Transfer Pathway as Historical Mirage

Stephen J. Handel

Democracy, if it continue, must include the masses and maintain their sympathy and interest.

—William Rainey Harper (1905, p. 12)

The conflict between open-door admission and performance of high quality often means a wide discrepancy between the hopes of entering students and the means of their realization ... As a result, while some students of low promise are successful, for large numbers failure is inevitable and structured.

—Burton R. Clark (1960, p. 571)

The transfer pathway between community colleges and 4-year universities was an extraordinary educational leap of faith when it was first seriously contemplated at the start of the last century. Although legislation that precipitated the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 (Lucas, 1994) had opened opportunities for more individuals to attend higher education, authentic access to a college degree remained limited to individuals with the means or the standing to take full advantage of this opportunity. The transfer pathway was built on an emerging consensus, however, that the nation would need a better educated citizenry; that the economic and cultural future of America was at least partially dependent on providing opportunities for individuals to earn additional skills offered only in higher education. Students interested in a college degree who were otherwise unable to attend a 4-year institution directly from high school could, if they successfully completed a program of study at a community college, transfer to one of America's storied public or private 4-year institutions.

Today, over 100 years later, the idea of transfer remains a remarkably progressive ideal, a fashioning of democratic opportunity and egalitarian aspiration, as in tune with the nation's consciousness in the current day as it was in the last century. During the past 100 years, authentic access to higher education via a community college has become a reality beyond what its original framers had in mind—visionary leaders such as Harry Tappan, William Rainey Harper, Alexis Lange, and David Gordon Starr (Winter, 1964). Today, a community college is within driving distance of most Americans (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018). Moreover, the fact that these institutions are open access—an admissions policy unaddressed by the originators of these colleges—means, in theory at least, that anyone in the United States can go to college and transfer to the nation's best 4-year colleges and universities. In a country where admission to the most selective institutions has become increasingly fraught at the first-year level, the access offered by the transfer pathway, by comparison, remains astonishingly progressive.

Simply put, the transfer pathway is one of the most extraordinary educational innovations in the history of U.S. higher education. But transfer—as an innovation or as a practice—is largely a mirage in traditional histories of American collegiate life.

Despite the uniqueness of transfer pathway and its potential for authentic change in the way we serve students in postsecondary education, it is rarely treated separately from the broader fortunes of community colleges. This is surely an important perspective, but it is not the entire story. Moreover, the transfer idea must, by definition, include a robust partnership with 4-year institutions. This partnership, such as it is, is rarely addressed in histories of 4-year institutions. When policymakers and others cite failures in the transfer pathway—and they have—the fault is usually laid at the door of the community college. Although 4-year institutions are criticized occasionally regarding the acceptance of community college credit, for example, their role as full partners in the transfer process, is rarely noted (Handel, 2010).

This short treatment will not balance the scales for an updated and comprehensive historical analysis of transfer as an educational innovation of its own. If you are interested in more information along those lines, there are several general, but excellent histories of community colleges. Besides Brint and Karabel (1989) and Dougherty (1994) described earlier, see treatments by Beach (2012), Cohen and Brawer (2008), and Witt et al. (1994).

My modest purpose here is to demonstrate that the transfer pathway remains critical in this century as surely as it was in the last one. We appreciate that both the foundational narrative of the transfer pathway and its legacy are debated (Handel, 2013a). However, for those of us who see transfer as a pivotal educational pathway for students who might not otherwise have access to higher education, we insist that students' attempts to transfer from a 2- to 4-year institution is something more than a prosaic transactional reality; that is, it represents—whether the originators of the junior college intended this or not—a radical investment in the intellectual potential of everyday Americans. We would also insist that the necessity of transfer, and its optimism in the transformative potential of higher education, is more important today than ever.

The Public Promise and the Private Calculation: Transfer's Creation Story

Before there could be transfer, there had to be a place for students to transfer *from*, namely the junior college. Henry P. Tappan, president of the University Minnesota in the 1870s, is credited with first proposing a collegiate-like institution separate from high schools and universities (or, in another version, extending high school by two additional years) that would ultimately be called a community college (Witt et al., 1994). However, William Rainey Harper at the University of Chicago turned this idea into reality. In a short paper published in 1901, Harper proposed that high school graduates be admitted to a “lower division” or a general education curriculum, which would be separate from an “upper division” curriculum offered at a university (Harper, 1901). Under his plan, students who successfully completed the course of study in the lower-division would be qualified to transfer to the university to earn the baccalaureate degree. Students uninterested in continuing their studies or who did not perform well enough to be admitted as transfer students, would earn a 2-year “associate degree” and enter the workforce.

In this early incarnation, Harper's (1901) notion about a transfer pathway is not much more than a necessary transaction for students to advance from a small, 2-year institution, he calls (“for the lack of a better term” p. 34) a junior college, to the larger and better resourced university. Harper's rationale for creating the junior college is premised almost entirely on his strategy to establish a new higher education system that would privilege emerging U.S. research universities, while supporting the expansion of the free comprehensive public high school system. To accomplish this, Harper stressed the need to thin the number of small, mostly denominational, colleges dotting the U.S. landscape at that time. His position was that these institutions, while having numerous virtues, lacked the resources to provide the advanced education that would be needed to train a growing intellectual and professional class in the United States. In his writings on this topic (see Harper 1901, 1905), Harper takes considerable pains to demonstrate that small colleges were in no position financially to grow the necessary libraries, laboratories, and faculty that would allow them to adequately train students at the highest levels of scholarship, and any attempt to do so would necessarily detract from the education these institutions should provide to students in the lower division. Harper emphasized that many of these small colleges could ensure their survival by becoming either 2-year institutions or aligning themselves to public high schools by offering 2 additional years of schooling.

Harper devotes little attention to the practical matter of how and why students might transfer from a junior college to a 4-year institution, yet he was not oblivious that his proposal advances a fundamental reordering of American higher education in the first years of the 20th century:

The change of certain colleges into junior colleges ... and the close association of such colleges with the universities—all this contributes toward a system of higher education (something which does not now exist in America), the lack of which is sadly felt in every sphere of educational activity. (Harper, 1901, pp. 44–45)

As other historians have noted, Harper's beliefs were aligned with a broader progressive movement in the United States that sought new avenues for individuals to achieve greater levels of economic opportunity (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994). As noted earlier, some states had begun to capitalize on the opportunities inherent in the Morrill Land Grant Acts, which sowed the seeds for the establishment of America's greatest public research universities, including those in Michigan, Wisconsin, and California. The free public high school was also educating greater numbers of students throughout the United States, fueling a belief that the industrial might of the nation would be bolstered when citizens had additional opportunities to climb "ladders of ascent" based on individual drive and initiative as opposed to limited opportunities offered through wealth, status, and position alone (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

Harper's prescience in seeing the value of a new higher education structure was not unique. Progressive leaders at several of the nation's most prestigious institutions were enthusiastic supporters of this higher education reordering. In addition, local political leaders were interested in realizing the advantages that a publicly funded college might provide to the local community (Dougherty 1994). As Brint and Karabel note, the community college movement was aided by

the support and encouragement of the nation's great universities—among them, Chicago, Stanford, Michigan, and Berkeley—which, far from opposing the rise of the junior college as a potential competitor for students and resources, enthusiastically supported its growth. (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 23)

The Limits of Aspiration

Although there was a genuine enthusiasm for the creation of junior colleges—or some variant in high schools that might provide students with increased educational options—there was also an implicit limit on the extent to which a student could take advantage of these new opportunities. While transfer from a junior college to a 4-year university was understood to be one of the major advantages of attending these colleges in the first place, access was constrained by the economic necessities and expectations of the age.

Identifying the reasons for these aspirational limits is not complicated, even if they are not immediately apparent. For university leaders, the growth of junior colleges would be beneficial for two reasons. First, it would unburden them of having to teach lower-division, general education courses, a responsibility that Harper indicated, for example, was akin to the aims of the high school, preparatory school, or academy rather than the university:

The work of the freshman and sophomore years is only a continuation of the academy or high school work. It is a continuation, not only of the subject-matter studied, but of the methods employed. It is not until the end of the sophomore year that university methods of instruction may be employed to advantage. (Harper, 1901, p. 34)

Second, diverting most college-bound students to junior colleges rather than to universities would provide 4-year institutions with the ability to select students for further postsecondary education. University leaders very much coveted the opportunity to admit only the very best of students since that was viewed as necessary to strengthen the standards of scholarship and prestige for their institutions. Although junior colleges offered an opportunity for individuals to participate in higher education, the universities would nonetheless retain the authority for who might receive advanced training.

For local political leaders, the transfer pathway was also seen as one of the characteristics that would enhance the reputation of these new junior colleges. Those students who successfully transferred to the university would be justly celebrated. But the junior college would also offer something of value to students who did not transfer: terminal degrees that would serve as vocational training for local workforce needs (Dougherty, 1994; Eells, 1941). A better educated citizenry, especially in communities located far away from state or research universities, was one of the bets placed by local boosters interested in establishing a community college in their hometown. Dougherty (1994) concludes that “Local business strongly supported the community college in part because it shared the general interest in educational opportunity. But three other interests were as or more important: securing publicly subsidized employee training, fostering local economic development, and burnishing local pride” (p. 134.).

The creation of a transfer pathway that, in effect, was limited to students who qualified to attend a 4-year institution was neither a secret nor a cynical ploy to subvert the intentions of students who wished to earn a 4-year degree. Surely institutional self-interest was at play: universities wishing to unload the teaching of lower-division courses elsewhere and maintain their prerogative to select only the best students, and community colleges wishing to establish a unique mission that was not dependent upon the willingness of universities to admit their students via transfer. But one need not vilify either higher education segment for its institutional provincialism; it was merely an outgrowth of the times. The proportion of the U.S. population attending college in the early decades of the 20th century was a fraction of what it is today (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). More importantly, there was no college-going culture of national prominence at the beginning of the junior college movement. Earning a high school diploma was sufficient for most individuals who, after graduation, were able to secure stable jobs. To say that universal transfer for all community college students was unsupported is to presume that such an ideal was even contemplated in the first place. This position is hardly countenanced even today.

Nevertheless, what Harper and other political and educational leaders could not have foreseen was the extraordinarily attractive claim the transfer pathway had on the minds of prospective students (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994). It was a narrative perfectly embodied in an often-recited American cultural narrative: the idea that individuals with ambition and opportunity could create the life they wished to live by simply working diligently to achieve it. As postsecondary education became increasingly important for full economic and cultural participation in American life,

the transfer pathway was to become the avenue of presumed access to the baccalaureate degree and all that it promised for working class students who had few comparable avenues for advancement. That the transfer pathway did not—and does not to this day—live up to this expectation is not the fault of community college students writ large; it is, rather, a failure of the imagination in all of us who are advocates for this transformative educational pathway.

Transfer and Student Aspirations

The original boosters of the community college and transfer pathway, especially William Rainey Harper, could not have foreseen the extraordinary growth of American higher education in the 20th century. Today, community colleges enroll about 43% of all undergraduates, making it the largest segment in U.S. higher education with nearly 1,200 campuses spread across the country (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018). For their part, 4-year institutions, public and private, are lauded for their scholarship and productivity, and regularly rated as among the best institutions in the world (Cole, 2009). Two- and 4-year institutions have made it possible for more Americans to earn postsecondary certificates and degrees than any other industrialized country. Although 4-year institutions are better resourced, more generally praised for their academic accomplishments, and typically viewed as places for students to experience stereotypical college life, the presence of the community college—and its open-door access enrollment policy—embody higher education's greatest aim to make postsecondary life possible for any person in the United States.

Students who attend college for the first time at a 2-year institution typically enter with a goal to transfer and earn the baccalaureate degree. This goal has not wavered in the entire history of the community college movement. Surveys of student intentions conducted in the 1920s to today verify the constancy of this goal is to transfer to a 4-year institution and earn the baccalaureate degree (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994; Handel, 2010, 2013b; Handel & Williams, 2012). More recently, in a 2009 survey by the U.S. Department of Education, 80% of all new, first-time community-college students aspired to earn bachelor's degrees. The desire was especially strong among students from groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education, such as Latinx Americans, African Americans, and those in the lowest income quartile (see Handel, 2013b). Between 1966 and 1999, when the University of California Los Angeles Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveyed the educational aspirations of community college students separately from those entering 4-year institutions, the proportion of 2-year-college students whose educational goal was a bachelor's degree (or higher) never dropped below 70% (Handel 2013b).

Still, one could reasonably argue that such intentions are, as one colleague expressed to me, “merely aspirational,” implying that most students have inflated goals and unrealistic expectations. I do not think this premise unfair; I would only argue that it is irrelevant. It is certainly true that students in 2- and 4-year institutions often find themselves facing an unconsidered reality as they pursue their educational

goals at 17 or 18 years of age. Yet we never question the goals of students who enter the 4-year institution; we rarely question that a desire to “complete” a degree is disingenuous or “merely aspirational.” Indeed, as colleges and universities scramble to increase the degree completion rates at their institutions in response to government and public pressure, one might argue that students with substantive aspirations for a 4-year degree are precisely the kinds of students one would encourage to finish a degree.

Despite the extraordinary esteem that first-time community college students have held for the transfer function, the number of students who transfer has always been relatively low. National figures place the proportion at around 12% (Century Foundation, 2013; Putnam, 2015). But this is an imperfect estimate, which includes only those students who attend community colleges on a full-time basis (most attend part-time). Still, it is almost impossible to derive a precise national transfer number since data are not compiled centrally. More generously, the actual transfer rate is probably somewhere between 25% and 35% of first-time community college students (Handel, 2013c).

Contemporary researchers and practitioners have a variety of theories as to why more community college students fail to transfer to a 4-year institution. They often point to such factors such as decreasing state support for higher education, insufficient financial aid, doubts about the value of higher education degrees in relation to its cost, and the increased need for remedial education in collegiate settings. Yet a brief look at the historical record is instructive, even if not definitive.

At the start of the community college movement, as noted above, leaders wished to establish their institutional identities separate from that of universities. Exemplifying this perspective, Eells (1941) quotes an unidentified junior college leader:

I wonder if the junior colleges are going to take over this program of fitting people to live, or are just preparatory institutions to the 4-year colleges and universities; whether we are going to assert our right to a “place in the sun” to serve men and women, fitting them for life at that level, or whether we are just going to be a tail for the universities to wag. (quoted in Eells, 1941, p. 17)

Moreover, local boosters saw early the value of workforce training as a way of enhancing the regional economy. Upon entry to the community college, a student was faced almost immediately with competing programmatic choices, most of which did not support moving along a transfer pathway. In addition, 4-year institutions, which were separate and in no small way competitors for the same students, rarely devoted the resources to articulate courses and programs for transfer students. This situation prevented students who were intent on transfer from gaining a clear idea about how the courses they completed at a community college might transfer to the receiving institution.

Institutional provincialism can only be a partial description of why the transfer function has not operated historically as well as perhaps students believe it should. Despite the egalitarian foundation inherent in the community college mission,

embodied perfectly by its own open access admissions policy, most higher education leaders (both 2-year and 4-year), along with their local, state, and national political leaders, believed in the transfer creation story as an educational abstraction; a utopian ideal unmoored from regular reality. Even today, any higher education leader can describe with uncanny familiarity how the transfer pathway provides access to any student who, regardless of personal background, may gain access to the baccalaureate degree through hard work and ambition. But believing that *any* student could achieve this goal is something quite different than believing *all* students should achieve it.

Early advocates of community colleges and transfer argue that the nation does not need so many well-educated individuals, that there were insufficient jobs for these students. What the economy needed, at best, was more workers with *some* college. Implicit in this concern was an appreciation that the driving force of a college education is to prepare students for the world of work. While earning a degree in philosophy or history might be fine for those of means and standing, others simply cannot afford to indulge in such intellectual luxuries.

Another familiar argument is that most students attending community colleges simply do not have the qualifications to earn a higher-level degree. This idea gained greater currency throughout the century as the community college's open-access policy become more widely applied. Open access created a curious contradiction for many higher education leaders. To presume that all students attending a community college could transfer to 4-year college or university was, on its face, not defensible since these students did nothing to *earn* their way into higher education. Ironically, such a position turns on its head the transformative rationale for transfer and why it was so greatly esteemed by students who might not otherwise have access to the baccalaureate degree.

Despite the failure of transfer thus far to accommodate the aspirations of students who might benefit from this opportunity, their plans have not changed. There is something quite remarkable about the strong and unwavering collegiate aspirations of students who, in another time or in another country, would not have had an opportunity to go to college. Although Harper may have viewed transfer as an aspirational goal befitting only a relatively few students, most community college students—then as now—*took him at his word*.

Cooling Out and Moving On

If Harper's 1901 essay represents the first, full embodiment of what we call the transfer pathway, Burton Clark's 1960 essay describing the "cooling out" function of the community college is an equally influential scholarly event contributing to transfer's creation story. Appearing as it does at almost the exact middle point of transfer's history is only convenient; yet Clark's essay remains essential reading not only for students in various fields, but also for career-long transfer advocates. Whether one agrees with Clark's conclusions or not, there can be no denying that his ideas frame the dialectic that has fueled the debate over the effectiveness of the transfer pathway for the past 6 decades.

Clark's essay advances a single question, but it is big and, by the standards of scholarship, shocking: Do community colleges fail students or do the students fail themselves? Simply put, he concludes that student failure in U.S. community colleges—and by failure he means a failure to transfer—is “structured” and largely inevitable. He presumes from the start that no nation so committed to universal collegiate access can fully absorb all students who wish to earn a 4-year degree. Nor can every student who wishes to earn such a degree have the intellectual wherewithal to do so. As a result, community colleges are complicit in a delicate process of “cooling out” students' intentions, redirecting them to programs of study or workforce training that might be better aligned either to explicit workforce needs or the intellectual abilities of the individual student.

Clark's position forced an historic shift in the way we view student performance in community colleges; in fact, it opened-up for debate the serious possibility that there *was* such a thing as failure in a 2-year college. Halfway through the community college movement no one really questioned what happened to students who chose to enter higher education by enrolling in their local 2-year institution. Founding fathers such as Harper would argue that a failure to transfer is not failure at all. It merely represents an outcome of a system that is, by design, elitist. Even today, Derek Bok (2017), former president of Harvard University, articulates a similar vision of 4-year institutions more generally:

Until late in the century, dropout rates were seldom even considered a responsibility of the college. If students failed to stay the course, their departure was largely attributed to their lack of ability or perseverance, not to any failing on the part of the institution. (p. 7).

Even if they failed to gain admission to the University of Chicago, they would leave with a terminal associate degree and get on with their lives. For other community college enthusiasts, completion of terminal degrees (absent transfer) was viewed as a success since a student's successful transfer was only an occasional celebration (perhaps in the same way we celebrate the very few student-athletes' who achieve their ambition to “go pro.”) (Eells, 1941). Although Clark's perspective does not vary from Harper and other community college boosters, he names what was heretofore unexpressed: The authentic function of the community college was not to ensure transfer to a 4-year institution but to manage and redirect over-earnest student expectations toward goals that were seen as more attainable, such as applied workforce credentials and degrees that would lead to gainful employment. There was little point in arguing about low transfer rates since the very structure of the community college was to “cool” aspirations rather than “warm” them.

Clark's perspective, often inappropriately viewed as *only* an assault on the mission of community college (it was also an assault on higher education broadly) has galvanized the work of dozens of researchers, spurred the publication of scores of research studies and focused the way in which policymakers have analyzed transfer. To this day, Clark delineates the rules of engagement for judging—usually

negatively—community colleges and transfer at almost the complete exclusion of 4-year institutions (If you believe this conclusion overbroad, consider how rarely 4-year institutions are blamed for low transfer rates, even though they are the institutions responsible for the number of transfer students who are admitted.)

Like Harper, I doubt Clark suspected that his sociological meta-analysis could have generated so much thinking and research on this topic. Clark's pronouncement did not alone galvanize opposition to the cooling out function, but it set the course alight. As the 1960s gained momentum, education leaders, but also students largely *unrepresented* in the nation's most elite institutions, began to question the increasing vocationalization of the community college as a strategy to "track" the powerless away from traditional higher education. Citing Clark's cooling-out schema, these constituencies understood what failure looked like in a country that offered mass access to higher education but did less to ensure the success of students who took advantage of this opportunity. This criticism plagued community colleges for most of the decades following the 1960s. Community college professionals viewed this criticism as especially harsh and unfair given their passion—then and now—to provide unparalleled access to the advantages of higher education degrees, certifications, and training (Dougherty, 1994; Handel, 2013a).

So, what *is* failure at a community college? That we lack an answer even today undermines the potential of the transfer pathway.

Transfer Nation: A Personal Perspective

Despite the extraordinary growth of community colleges in the US, the transfer pathway steadily languished through the later decades of the 20th century, despite students' stated preference to earn a 4-year degree (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). As noted earlier, this was due to competition for students' academic attention in other areas of the community college curriculum. It was also due to 4-year institutions' lackluster enthusiasm for transfer students. And it was part of sustained belief that too much education was probably a bad thing.

The start of the new century, however, presented some startling reminders of the need for an educated citizenry regardless of how and where individuals accessed higher education. As worldwide communications technologies grew more sophisticated, a far more interconnected global economy emerged. The unprecedented growth in new knowledge—and the skills needed to manage this "information age"—became increasingly clear. This global village promised economic advantages, but only to those who could enter its city limits. It also posed new dangers, as the unprecedented financial meltdown that came to be known as the Great Recession demonstrated. Our internet-connected lives keep us tethered to an astonishing amount of news and information, but we have little time to evaluate its importance or its potential influence on our lives. If there was ever a time in which the skills of a liberal arts education—critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, historical context, ethnical discernment—would be more important, it would be now.

It is my belief—sheer speculation that historians only later will be able to verify—that this confluence of events will boost the popularity of the transfer pathway for several reasons. First, the bachelor’s degree has become the most important credential for economic life in America. Whether you believe it represents an excessive labor market credential or a well-documented constellation of invaluable intellectual skills, the baccalaureate is the ticket that must be punched to participate in American economic and cultural life (Baker, 2014).

Of course, as documented earlier, community college students’ pursuit of the 4-year degree has been sustained throughout the last century, despite economic upheavals and international crises. They also understand that the new economy will require them to retool and reeducate regularly. Since most graduate and professional programs require the bachelor’s degree as the price of admission, smart men and women will keep their options open, as they should, by earning a 4-year degree.

Second, if the Great Recession taught Americans anything, it was to be more skeptical of higher education’s value proposition. As the cost of higher education has increased, U.S. families are asking harder questions about its “payoff.” As tuition has moved upward faster than the cost of almost anything else in America, families are leveraging their limited higher education budgets by using community colleges more judiciously than ever before (Spencer, 2018).

Third, shifting demographics and a widening gap between the haves and have-nots will boost enrollment in community colleges. Demographer Nathan Grawe (2017) rather ominously predicts that in less than a decade, higher education will see 280,000 fewer high school graduates, the inexorably result of a “birth dearth” spurred by the economic instability of the Great Recession. With prospective college students participating in a higher education buyer’s market, Grawe and others argue that community colleges will likely lose in the competition for students to 4-year institutions. Perhaps this is true, but not if 4-year institutions continue to boost the price of admission via tuition and, more critically, if America’s current economic divide should grow wider. Moreover, those students who *are* graduating from high school in the next decade will be from groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in higher education and who have found community college to be far more welcoming than more traditional institutions.

Finally, this “transfer nation” is a place where there will be far fewer traditionally-aged high-school graduates to fill the nation’s college classrooms and a rapidly-increasing proportion of prospective college students from groups traditionally underrepresented in 4-year institutions, as well as a widening breach between the rich and poor. Thus, 4-year institutions will, for the first time in the history of the community college movement, need 2-year institutions more than the reverse. This transition may finally make it possible for the leaders of these institutions to see that they are owners too of the transfer pathway and are responsible for its effectiveness as surely as community college are. From this realization will come easier credit transfer, better transfer orientation programs, speedier credit evaluations, competitive tuition discounting, and all the other things that smooth the pathway to a baccalaureate degree.

Optimism has always been the heart of the transfer pathway. It will continue to propel our work to fulfill the transformative possibilities of U.S. higher education as perfectly embodied in the transfer pathway.

Recommendations

1. Review your institution's history regarding transfer. This historiography might include internal memoranda, catalog copy, or minutes from board of trustee meetings. What kind of historical record can be written about your institution's focus on or concern with transfer students? Keep in mind that a lack of recorded history also tells an important story.
2. Using the expertise of your institutional research department or faculty members skilled in survey design, develop a simple method of assessing the educational aspirations of transfer students on your campus. Compare those results with whatever extant data you possess about the aspirations of previous cohorts of transfer students. Have these aspirations changed over time?
3. Assess the extent to which Clark's "cooling out function" exists at your institution. Does your college or university see differential rates of success among some sets of students over others? What might be the structural barriers at your institution that impede the academic progress of some students?

Discussion Questions

1. The success of the transfer process is often assessed by counting the number of students who successfully transfer from a community college to a 4-year institution without reference to some external standard. Since community colleges also serve students with educational intentions other than transfer, what is a reasonable standard that educators can use to judge whether the transfer pathway is working well for students at a particular institution?
2. What is an institution's obligation to students who wish to transfer but do not? Do all students with transfer intentions deserve the chance to earn a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution?
3. Community colleges are often criticized for low student transfer rates, but what is the responsibility of 4-year institutions that set the requirements for admission? Is the responsibility for transfer students different for 2-year colleges versus the 4-year colleges or universities?
4. Given the historic difficulty of increasing the number of students who transfer from 2- to 4-year institutions, should community colleges revise their institutional missions to serve only students with associate degrees or certificate intentions?

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