

Partnerships that Promote Success:

Lessons from the Evaluation of the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's Community College Transfer Initiative

September 2010
[revised 9/21/2010]

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Executive Summary

From 2006-2010, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's Community College Transfer Initiative (CCTI) provided support to eight selective colleges and universities to increase their enrollment of high-achieving, low- to moderate-income community college transfer students. The eight institutions were Amherst College, Bucknell University, Cornell University, Mount Holyoke College, University of California, Berkeley, University of Michigan, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and University of Southern California. To evaluate the CCTI, the Foundation selected the Center for Youth and Communities (CYC) at Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy and Management. This report highlights selected findings from the evaluation, focusing on promising practices and lessons learned, with a goal of conveying information that institutions interested in similar efforts will find useful.

The initiative recognized both the importance of attendance at selective colleges and universities on students' future success, particularly for those from lower income families, and the contributions that the students could make to the four-year campuses. Despite many challenges, all eight campuses improved their ability to systematically recruit qualified CCTI students and support their success. From 2007 (when the first "official" CCTI students enrolled) through 2010, almost one thousand students matriculated because of the CCTI to these eight schools. Six out of eight campuses seem to be on track to continue their efforts. And, in fact, the CCTI has transformed students' lives and the students have made significant contributions to the institutions where they matriculated.

The evaluation team found that:

- The CCTI benefited four-year campuses, with CCTI students increasing diversity, making intellectual contributions to the campuses and classrooms, and becoming deeply engaged on campus. It has also improved collaboration and communication among schools, departments, and administrative offices on the campuses.
- The CCTI also benefited students, at times truly transforming their lives. Many had not envisioned themselves even finishing community college, let alone succeeding at an elite four-year institution and (for many) planning to attend graduate school.
- Institutional readiness and institutional buy-in at the outset of the CCTI were critical to program effectiveness and sustainability.
- Meaningful partnerships with community colleges made recruiting and preparing the right students easier.
- Promoting the CCTI students' academic and social integration while using data to improve and sustain programs were factors in supporting student success at the four-year institutions.

The report includes several examples from the eight campuses in each of these areas.

A final, comprehensive report on the evaluation will be available in December 2010.



I. INTRODUCTION

From 2006-2010, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation’s Community College Transfer Initiative (CCTI) provided support to eight selective colleges and universities to increase their enrollment of high-achieving, low- to moderate-income community college transfer students, many of whom were nontraditional with respect to age, life experience, and personal circumstances. The eight institutions were Amherst College, Bucknell University, Cornell University, Mount Holyoke College, University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley), University of Michigan (U-M), University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), and University of Southern California (USC). To evaluate the CCTI, the Foundation selected the Center for Youth and Communities (CYC) at Brandeis University’s Heller School for Social Policy and Management. This report highlights selected findings from the evaluation.

The initiative recognized both the importance of attendance at selective colleges and universities on students’ future success, particularly for those from lower income families, and the contributions that the students could make to the four-year campuses. Despite many challenges, all eight campuses improved their ability to systematically recruit qualified CCTI students and support their success. Six out of eight campuses seem to be on track to continue their efforts. And, in fact, the CCTI has transformed students’ lives and the students have made significant contributions to the institutions where they matriculated. From 2007 (when the first “official” CCTI students enrolled) through 2010, almost one thousand students matriculated because of the CCTI to these eight schools (see Table 1.1). Among CCTI students completing baseline surveys, 57% had worked between high school and community college, 42% had gone directly to community college, and about 20% had done something else (including AmeriCorps, travelling, having children, recovering from surgery or illness, or attending another college or university).

Table 1.1
Number of CCTI Students Enrolled by Year and by Institution

	2007- 2008	2008- 2009	2009- 2010	Total # CCTI Students (no repeats)
Amherst College	5	24	31	43
Bucknell University	18	24	17	59
Cornell University	26	55	89	113
Mount Holyoke College	46	111	180	275
University of California, Berkeley	36	125	185	245
University of Michigan	75	85	127	TBD
University of North Carolina	27	56	99	99
University of Southern California	17	20	18	55
Totals	259	490	704	889

Source: Compiled school record data.

Note: Annual numbers include all CCTI students enrolled that year, and does not include those receiving pre-enrollment support.

Benefits to CCTI Campuses

Most administrators and faculty who were interviewed for the evaluation said that the CCTI benefited both the campuses and the CCTI students. Following are some of the benefits reported across the CCTI campuses:

- CCTI students increase campus diversity in ways that freshman admissions don't always do.
- The CCTI itself improved cross-campus collaboration and communication between campus units.
- Focused and mature, the CCTI students have made intellectual contributions to the four-year campuses and even transform classroom discussions.
 - Faculty on several campuses said that CCTI students often do supplemental reading and asked for extra reading. They have insights and “edgy” questions that enrich class discussions.
 - Some faculty members who were not the most supportive at the beginning of the program now say, “Can we get more CCTI students?”
 - The CCTI students affect and even inspire administrators, faculty, and other students through their “appreciation for resources that other students might take for granted,” as one administrator said.
 - Some schools and departments that had originally said they would not accept CCTI students are now doing so.
- CCTI students have contributed to campus life by becoming deeply engaged on campus.
 - CCTI students formed transfer student organizations at three campuses, improving life for all transfer students by raising awareness of, and helping to address, transfer students' concerns.
 - On all campuses, the CCTI students have provided significant constructive feedback to improve the campus programs.
 - Many CCTI students have won awards and honors and assumed campus leadership roles. Several won competitive scholarships that were open to all students, and many conducted research with faculty. One taught a summer course that had previously only been taught by faculty; another was awarded a prestigious fellowship shortly after transferring; another was elected student body president; and another helped to create a transfer honors program.
 - Many CCTI students are formal or informal peer mentors and ambassadors to potential applicants who are still at community college and to more recent CCTI students. They take on this role because they want to “give back” and to offer the kind of information that professional staff can't necessarily provide.

Benefits to CCTI Students

The CYC researchers heard about and observed the CCTI's positive effects on CCTI students on all eight campuses. They talked with students who had known about “intellectual feasting,” as one put it, but never thought it was for them – previously incarcerated students (at different colleges) who had rediscovered themselves and their talents at community college and were on a path toward graduate school; students whose families actively opposed their attendance at community college, let alone at a four-year institution; single mothers or fathers who wanted to provide a better life

and role model for their children and who in some cases would be graduating college as their children were graduating high school; students who had thought they might stop at an associate's degree were planning for graduate school; high school dropouts who started "just taking a course or two" at community college, but found a professor who recognized their potential and were now doing well at an elite four-year institution; and students who had never before traveled outside of their state but were now studying abroad. Following are illustrative student comments:

- "I had never dared dream this big."
- "I didn't expect to succeed at community college, let alone at a university."
- "I wasn't even sure I'd go to community college – now I'm doing well at a selective school and seeing a very different future than I'd imagined."
- "This program saved me."
- "It's about more than getting a good grade – it's about thinking bigger."
- "My community college advisors recommended against applying to schools like this. They thought I was shooting too high."
- "I thought the letter I got inviting me to a meeting about transferring was a scam. I couldn't believe that a selective university would invite community college students like me to apply."
- "It has expanded the things I thought I could do. I see that doors are not locked."

As noted, many CCTI students were already giving back, helping other students formally (as peer mentors or in transfer student organizations) or informally. On several campuses, the potential for the CCTI to create enthusiastic alumni who will want to give back financially seemed clear. One student said, "If I ever get some money, I'll definitely donate it to this program." Another said, "What can we do to help other community college students? In my opinion, this is the best program in the world."

The Evaluation Design

The evaluation design included multiple types of data and sources. Interviews with students, faculty, and staff during annual site visits yielded qualitative data about the initiative's impact on the campuses, the extent to which the initiative was being institutionalized, and campus-specific practices. The evaluation used several sources of quantitative data to answer questions about CCTI student performance, academic success, social integration, and financial aid compared to their non-CCTI peers; and, at the three smaller institutions, faculty attitudes. With considerable assistance from the eight campuses, the CYC team collected the following types of quantitative data:

Students (CCTI students, other transfer students, "native" students)

1. Baseline survey upon matriculation, followed by annual end-of-year survey
2. Student academic transcript/record data (annual)
3. Student financial aid data (annual)

Faculty (Amherst, Bucknell, Mount Holyoke)

1. Baseline survey Fall 2007
2. Follow-up survey Spring 2010

Data collection followed the CCTI cohorts over time in order to evaluate their experiences at the four-year institution and to report on both retention and graduation rates and time to degree.

About this Report

This report highlights selected findings based on analysis of the student survey and qualitative data. It focuses on promising practices and lessons learned, with a goal of conveying information that institutions interested in similar efforts will find useful, including institutional readiness and institutional buy-in; recruiting and preparing the right students through partnerships with community colleges; and supporting students at the four-year institutions. A final, comprehensive report, including more specific information on findings, further analyses of the data included in this report, and analyses of faculty survey and student record data, will be available in December 2010.

Setting the Report in Context

The college enrollment gap for underrepresented students in higher education has been a national concern in the United States for decades. Educators, policy makers, private foundations, and other intermediary organizations have repeatedly called for improving college access, especially for first generation and low- to moderate-income students. In recent years, several high-profile national initiatives have focused new attention and resources on the enrollment gap. The focus of these initiatives has expanded from college access to include college success and the role of community colleges in preparing students for transfer to four-year institutions.

Since 2001, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation has supported the educational success of high-achieving, low-income community college students by awarding the most generous private scholarships in the nation to students transferring from two-year colleges to four-year colleges and universities to complete their bachelor's degrees. Prior to awarding the CCTI grants, the Foundation, in collaboration with the Lumina Foundation and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, commissioned research to examine opportunities for and barriers to transfer to highly selective academic settings for low-income community college students. Among the key themes identified by the research (Dowd et al., 2006)¹ are the importance of: (1) institutional readiness to support community college transfer students at the four-year institution, (2) partnerships between four-year and two-year campuses in facilitating successful transfer, and (3) pre- and post-admission academic, social, and personal support. These themes are reflected in the CCTI evaluation findings and supported by extant research on college success for underserved community college transfer students.

¹ Dowd, A., Bensimon, E., Gabbard, G., Singleton, S., Macias, E., Dee, J., Melguizo, T., Cheslock, J. Giles, D. (2006). *Transfer Access to Elite Colleges and Universities in the United States: Threading the Needle of the American Dream*. The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation.

II. Paving the Way at the Four-Year Institution: Readiness and Buy-In

Mount Holyoke College administrators and faculty reported a smooth transition to the CCTI. One administrator said, "It's so in line with the college mission – it seems so natural." A faculty member said, "Mount Holyoke is fortunate that this program aligns so closely with its mission – it's really clear why the program is here."

How did the campuses prepare to implement the CCTI, and what can other institutions learn from their experience? Two areas that emerged as critical for program success were institutional readiness to undertake the initiative and significant institutional buy-in and commitment. The CCTI experience suggests that paving the way is as important as program design. The CCTI campuses with the highest levels of institutional readiness and buy-in are most likely to have both effective and sustainable programs. These programs are embedded in campus networks and have developed momentum – administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community college partners will find it hard to let them go.

Institutional Readiness

Some CCTI sites made relatively rapid progress in recruiting and supporting high achieving, low-income community college transfer students due in part to a high level of institutional readiness. Although this statement may seem self-evident, paying explicit attention to readiness before implementing a transfer program is a critical first step. Four-year institutions that want to undertake similar efforts should thus assess their readiness level and take steps toward raising it.

A key element of readiness was alignment of the CCTI with the institutional mission and/or strategic plan, often accompanied by at least some experience with community college transfer students. (Additional readiness elements will be discussed in the December report, including a learner-centered campus culture and a plan for sustainability.) When the CCTI was aligned with an institution's mission or strategic plan, it was easier to articulate goals and benchmarks, give people across campus a way to understand and discuss the undertaking, and generate passion. Following are examples of such alignment from the CCTI campuses:

- The CCTI aligned well with Bucknell's strategic plan. The campus was also able to apply lessons from an earlier program to recruit and retain community college transfer students.
- As described above, the CCTI was closely aligned with Mount Holyoke's mission. Mount Holyoke also built on its Frances Perkins program, a program for nontraditional students that predated the CCTI, and affiliations with area community colleges. An administrator said that "the biggest factor [in the CCTI's success] was the existing Frances Perkins network and support system." In addition, its campus culture enhanced CCTI success: one faculty member called Mount Holyoke "a welcoming community that values diversity." An administrator said, "The faculty are tremendous student advocates." A student described the college's message as "What can we do to help you succeed?" instead of what she had heard at other selective colleges: "You're good, but we expect you to prove it."
- UC Berkeley began the CCTI with the foundation of state policy that facilitated transfer from community college to the state university system as well as existing access programs on which the CCTI could build.
- The CCTI reflected U-M's mission and history of promoting opportunity and equity.
- At UNC-CH, the CCTI coincided with a drive to support all transfer students. Recently created faculty positions were designed to combine teaching and advising responsibilities

to help transfer students select courses. The CCTI also aligns with the “Carolina Covenant,” a program to enroll students who come from families with incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty guideline.

- The Amherst CCTI is aligned with an institutional effort to enroll more low-income students; campus support for the CCTI reflects support for Amherst’s direction toward becoming “much more representative of the broader spectrum of the population.”

Institutional Buy-In

Institutional buy-in was another critical element in the CCTI’s success. CCTI leaders or “champions” on the eight campuses used various strategies to obtain institutional buy-in. They generally agreed that the key is a critical mass of support, with both high-level and broad-based commitment, ideally including: senior administrators (preferably with meaningful involvement by the president and/or provost), faculty advisors, representatives of all major administrative offices (admissions, financial aid, student affairs, academic affairs, development, enrollment management), trustees, and alumni.

While CCTI leaders generally thought that many different strategies could be effective in achieving buy-in (one said, “The best strategy is whatever works on your campus”), common strategies on the eight campuses included the following:

- Making a plan for buy-in, including a communication plan.
- Ensuring transparency about the initiative in communications on campus, with the community colleges, and with students.
- Assigning one senior-level, hands-on point person for overall project coordination.
- Ensuring that there is a point person in each administrative office (e.g., admissions, financial aid, student services, and career services).
- Disseminating the positive profiles of prospective CCTI students and providing information to counter negative stereotypes about community colleges. Some faculty and staff did not know that community colleges often have honors programs and Phi Theta Kappa (the community college students’ honor society) chapters. A few even wrongly believed that community colleges are exclusively technical schools.
- Using an inclusive, empowering leadership style (one administrator called it a “facilitative” style) that encourages meaningful roles for a wide range of people.
- Recruiting people on campus with community college connections (e.g., former community college students or faculty) to be part of the initiative.

Institutional buy-in examples:

- Most campuses formed university-wide committees early in the CCTI. Those at Bucknell, UNC-CH, and U-M were especially strong and included a broad range of senior administrators and school/department representatives. Mount Holyoke involved senior administration and faculty “allies” who already supported the Frances Perkins program.
- U-M’s initiative operated out of the Provost’s office, which lent credibility and heft.
- UC Berkeley’s Center for Educational Partnerships (CEP), which houses the CCTI program, is under the leadership of the Vice Chancellor of Equity and Inclusion, who reported that the program fits “superbly” within the University of California mission.

As the CCTI progressed, most campuses expanded buy-in by creating opportunities for CCTI students to speak about their experiences to groups such as trustees or faculty and disseminating data about student performance.

III. Finding and Preparing the Right Students through Partnerships with Community Colleges

A community college partner said, "The partnership is going great. Anything we've asked of them, they have responded to. Our working relationship is professional and personal, and I know our students love [the four-year point person]. They can call her, and they feel welcome."

An upfront investment of human and other resources in developing and sustaining partnerships between four- and two-year institutions pays off in terms of finding the right students for the transfer program and facilitating their transition from the two- to the four-year setting through pre-enrollment support and facilitating student readiness.

Partnerships between Community Colleges and Selective Four-Year Institutions to Identify and Recruit Students

An important part of the four-year institutions' CCTI strategy was establishing relationships with one or more community colleges. Such partnerships played a central role in identifying and recruiting community college transfer students, many of whom are first-generation and/or nontraditional students who would not, without encouragement and support, have considered applying for transfer to a selective four-year college or university.

Identifying prospective CCTI students early leaves more time for campus visits, program involvement, and better academic preparation, which lead to greater college success. While academically talented, some community college transfer students lack the repertoire of information and experiences that equip their middle-class counterparts to navigate a college setting with relative ease. Data from the survey of incoming CCTI students may be illustrative. Nearly 60% of these students reported having worked full- or part-time between high school graduation (or GED completion) and matriculating at the community college. Forty-one percent said they are the first person in their immediate family to attend a four-year college, and 13% have a GED rather than a high school diploma.

The most robust of the CCTI partnerships (1) focus attention on identifying and recruiting appropriate students for transfer, (2) employ structures that facilitate ongoing communication between partners, (3) involve key individuals and/or units that can facilitate community college student transfer, (4) provide opportunities to enhance community college student readiness for success at the four-year campus, and (5) are characterized by professional respect, mutuality, and trust, which leads to opportunities for shared learning and program improvement.

Structures such as advisory or oversight boards and planning committees provide durable links between partnering campuses and promote collaboration, information sharing, and knowledge creation.

- UNC-CH convened a planning team consisting of deans and transfer advisors from the community college partners, representatives from the UNC-CH College of Arts & Sciences, Student Affairs, and Student Aid, and the C-STEP director and coordinator. The goal was to improve understanding of the low- to moderate-income community college students' decision-making process and factors that contribute to their success. Follow-up meetings addressed funding, budget, and program changes and oriented new community college advisors to the program.

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- Cornell's Pathway to Success Advisory Committee, convened to guide the program and resolve policy-related issues, included admissions staff, deans, and other administrators as well as representatives from partnering community colleges.
 - Amherst hosted an annual Community College Collaborative Faculty Workshop which included a panel of Amherst CCTI students, workshops on teaching and learning for Amherst and community college faculty, and opportunities for community college advisors and students to learn more about the CCTI.

Identifying and Recruiting Students

As working relationships were established, the CCTI partners began work on identifying and recruiting high-achieving, low- to moderate-income transfer students. Key strategies were to develop point people at both the two-year and four-year campuses, establish and maintain good communication, and engage multiple offices on partnering campuses to help both partners learn more about each other's structure, culture, and opportunities for program improvement.

Personalized attention from trusted adults and peers is critical in recruitment. Generally, very little in the backgrounds of first-generation, low-income, or nontraditional community college transfer students has laid the groundwork for transfer to an elite college or university, except their own talent and motivation. CCTI student survey respondents indicated that the following groups and individuals offered the most guidance and support in their decision to transfer to a four-year college or university: family, friends, and/or religious leader (53%); community college faculty members/teaching assistants (49%); the community college advisor/counselor (45%); and representatives from a four-year college or university (34%).

Effective point people at the four-year campus represented offices and units that are central to the support of community college transfer students. In frequent phone and email contact with community college partners, they shared information about (and interpreted) policies, conveyed academic expectations, and provided technical advice.

The CCTI campuses found – or developed and even funded – many point people at the community colleges. Knowledgeable and accessible point people (regardless of role or title) can identify promising candidates for transfer, quickly get students into the loop, and develop trusting relationships with students that allow them to identify needs and link them with appropriate offices, individuals, and services on the four-year campus.

- Using CCTI grant funds, Mount Holyoke funded a full-time transfer liaison to coordinate the Pathways Program at Holyoke Community College. An alumna of both Holyoke Community College and Mount Holyoke, the liaison identified, encouraged, and advised eligible students.
- Dedicated, funded advisors at UNC-CH's community college partners have identified students for the C-STEP program and advised students until they enroll at UNC-CH.
- Bucknell has maintained regular and close communications with the point people at its five community college partners, using its grant funds to help partners cover participation costs.
- The USC program liaison maintained close relationships with the community college partners' point people, providing not only support regarding USC admission, but also (in collaboration with the point people) on-site advising to students interested in other selective institutions.

Following are examples of outreach and recruitment strategies in the CCTI partnerships:

- UNC-CH admissions, advising, and financial aid staff conducted workshops and information sessions at partnering community colleges. Once students transferred to UNC-CH, the staff continued to support them. The UNC-CH advising liaison met with partner school advisors to let them know about UNC-CH curriculum changes and reinforced their connection through email and phone calls so that communication lines would remain open if questions arose.
- Cornell hired a Pathway to Success Program coordinator who conducted outreach to and informational sessions for community college partners. Individual college admissions officers work with representatives from partnering community colleges to help students stay on track with their applications.
- U-M teams from admissions, financial aid and other administrative and academic units met with students and staff at community colleges around the state, providing information and developing relationships. They also offered Community College Transfer Days for prospective transfer students and workshops for community college counselors. Recruitment coordinators from several U-M schools conducted additional visits and assisted community college students with planning coursework.
- UC Berkeley Transfer Alliance Project (TAP) advisors have worked with community college transfer counselors, student services programs, faculty, and students. Community colleges referred first-generation, low-income students with high GPAs to the TAP advisors, usually after one semester; students could also self-refer. TAP advisors have made presentations in classrooms, held office hours, and meet with staff.
- The Bucknell CCTI coordinator, a senior admissions administrator, not only met regularly with community college partner point people but also worked directly with interested community college students. Prospective transfer students were encouraged to visit Bucknell individually and/or on organized (free) trips.
- The USC Scholars program coordinator held regular office hours at each of the three community college partners where he advised students about transfer to USC.
- Amherst admissions staff, including staff who serve as CCTI point people, presented program information at community college transfer fairs across the nation and met with prospective students at a local community college to answer questions about the transfer process.
- As noted earlier, Mount Holyoke funded a transfer coordinator at its key partner, Holyoke Community College. Mount Holyoke staff also regularly visited other community colleges around the U.S. to establish limited partnerships and to recruit students.
- Several CCTI campuses reached out to community college faculty, who may recognize potential in a student's academic work or through advising. Faculty can particularly help locate "diamonds in the rough" - students with budding but not obvious academic potential – and be a powerful source of encouragement for students. For example, an Alamance Community College faculty member referred a student enrolled in a two-year computer program to UNC-CH's C-STEP program based on the quality of a story he had written for her class. A Merritt College faculty member encouraged two students to move from the paralegal training program to the arts and sciences track and apply for transfer to UC Berkeley, based on their writing and analytical skills.

In addition to staff and faculty, current CCTI students are powerful ambassadors to prospective CCTI students at their community college. Speaking from personal experience, peers can provide insight into the transfer process with a high level of credibility and contagious enthusiasm. Students at several CCTI campuses serve as ambassadors in this way.

Pre-Enrollment Support and Student Readiness

Along with partnerships, the CCTI campuses developed structures and policies to support and prepare prospective applicants in the early stages of the admissions and transfer process. As a four-year campus administrator put it, it's important to "invest dedicated people and resources to helping community college students start to acclimate BEFORE they arrive." Key elements were directly involving relevant offices, specifically admissions and financial aid, developing reasonable credit transfer policies, and enhancing student readiness through such strategies as customized orientations and summer programs.

Student survey respondents reported taking advantage of a number of pre-admission supports including (1) taking courses on the four-year campus, (2) getting information on financial aid from the four-year institution, (3) speaking to academic counselors about transferring and major requirements, (4) participating in research internships, (5) staying overnight on campus, (6) participating in a special orientation program, (7) talking with students at the four-year institution, and (8) taking courses taught by faculty from the four-year institution, either at the four-year or at the community college.

Admissions and Financial Aid

While no CCTI institution modified admissions standards or financial aid policies for CCTI students, most engaged in some fine tuning, including explicit efforts in the following areas:

- Helping community college students and advisors to understand that the admissions process may be more holistic, and the availability of financial aid greater, than they expect.
- Broadening perspectives to consider prospective students' unconventional backgrounds. In admissions, this involved understanding, for example, that potential and achievement may coexist with a history of having attended multiple community colleges or having a mediocre high school (or early community college) GPA. In financial aid, this required learning about CCTI students' challenges, including students who were technically considered dependent but were living independently (and sometimes unable to obtain financial documents from estranged parents); students with children; students who were veterans; and independent students who have already accumulated debt to finance their community college education and need help to find realistic ways to manage additional debt. Also, as one administrator said, "We can't look at their prior year's income in a vacuum. So many of them were working significant hours while attending community college."
- Demystifying processes, policies, and paperwork, including making forms and websites more transfer-friendly.
- Assigning staff to assist CCTI applicants with admissions and financial aid paperwork. Some CCTI campuses reported that paperwork is a bigger challenge than credit transfer for CCTI students. The eight campuses already had staff who helped prospective students in these areas – the "CCTI difference" was to ensure that a subgroup of staff had the knowledge needed to address CCTI students' questions and concerns. In some cases, this assistance went beyond completing forms to encouragement and emotional support while the students took a step that they may have thought impossible. As one UC Berkeley CCTI advisor explained, "We are the ones who say, 'Yes, you can!'"
- Promoting role flexibility, including encouraging staff to work and communication across divisions (e.g., between admissions and student affairs).
- Most campuses took steps to convey accurate information in a positive way to demystify the concept of transferring from a community college to a selective four-year institution. For example, in U-M's "road show," a core group of staff visited community colleges to inform students, faculty, and staff about U-M. Based on their experience, they developed a

marketing strategy focused on the feasibility of admissions success, affordability (emphasizing bottom line cost rather than “sticker price”), and the benefits of a U-M degree. They also developed a simplified financial aid brochure and found new sources of support specifically for community college transfer students to supplement financial aid packages.

Transfer Credits

Six of the CCTI campuses had to address the issue of granting community college transfer credits (UC Berkeley and UNC-CH had such policies in place before the CCTI). They took several approaches to facilitating credit transfer. Key elements were increased transparency and flexibility – as one administrator said, “Students want a road map.” Most campuses found that articulation agreements were less important than processes, systems, and a willingness to negotiate. Champions were often an important part of the process – a single champion or champions across departments or schools. Most campuses found that credit transfer determinations became more routine as experience and their “portfolio” built over time. Departments or schools were least willing to be flexible about courses required for the major; it has been much easier for CCTI students to transfer general education course credits. Following are transfer credit examples:

- Bucknell’s provost worked with the academic departments and the community colleges to evaluate courses for transfer credit. This began as a case-by-case analysis, but has become more standard with experience.
- A dedicated advisor at UNC-CH met with advisors at the partnering campuses to provide updates on curriculum changes and with individual CCTI students to discuss their credits and offer advice on course selection at both the community college and at the university.
- To assist student planning, U-M developed online course equivalency guides for every community college in Michigan, listing which community college courses will transfer for University credit.
- The transfer admissions coordinator at Cornell’s School of Engineering submitted syllabi from partnering community colleges to departments for course pre-approval, resulting in advising guides for CCTI students. Admissions staff at several Cornell colleges contacted CCTI students who had been identified as candidates for their programs and provided support throughout the application process.

Orientation

Typical transfer student and freshmen orientations fail to meet the needs of community college transfer students. Based on experience and student input, many sites adapted orientations to better address the circumstances and age of low- to moderate-income community college students. For example:

- At UNC-CH, an overnight orientation program provides prospective CCTI students with information about transfer, an introduction to campus, and social events aimed at group cohesion and cohort development. The Shadow Program, an individualized orientation activity, pairs a community college student with one who has transferred. Attendance at one class is required, but the rest of the plan is up to the host student. Prospective CCTI students gain confidence and assistance from those who have successfully negotiated the four-year schools’ social and academic environments.
- At Cornell, CCTI students participated in a two-day orientation program, with one day dedicated to the Pathway to Success students. The timing of the program allowed Pathway students to move into their residence halls early and meet other new residents.

Summer Programs

Some CCTI campuses offer academic summer residential programs in which students take part in classes, research, and co-curricular activities to increase their understanding of and comfort with campus structures and culture and help them make the best use of their abbreviated time on campus after transfer.

- Bucknell's Summer Academic Program offers credit-bearing classes; academic, extracurricular, and residential support; and campus experiences. Participating students, faculty, and administrators see the program as an excellent orientation to Bucknell academics and campus life. Classes are co-taught by Bucknell and community college faculty. Teaching assistants, beginning in summer 2008, were CCTI students who had participated in the prior summer's program and later enrolled at Bucknell. Accepted students attend at no cost.
- UC Berkeley offers a competitive, tuition free, six-week summer mentored research enrichment program for prospective CCTI students as well as the opportunity to take classes before applying for admission.
- UNC-CH offers two five-week condensed sessions during which C-STEP students have the option to finish community college requirements or take prerequisites prior to enrolling at UNC-CH. On-campus housing is available.
- U-M provides summer research fellowships to prospective CCTI students through the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program, which provides academic and professional experience as well as an opportunity to get to know the campus.
- USC offers an intensive summer writing course for newly accepted CCTI students, who refer to it as "writing boot camp."

IV. Sustaining the Success of Community College Transfer at the Four-year Institution

A CCTI student said, "The monthly dinners and activities have been really good. We have our own community, but we're not necessarily separate from other students [on campus]. It helps with adjustment to have a group you can click with."

An administrator on a four-year CCTI campus said, "Unless we're able to keep them, it's not a successful access program."

Pre-enrollment support can go a long way towards preparing community college transfer students to negotiate an academically rigorous institution. However, for a successful transition, many community college transfer students need developmentally appropriate academic, social, personal, and other support. Administrators and faculty from the CCTI campuses repeatedly pointed out that these students are similar to freshmen in some ways, but are both more mature and usually from different backgrounds. They need some of the same supports, as well as specialized support that take these differences into account. For example, colleges and universities report that, overall, students enrolling as freshmen are less prepared to meet college-level writing and quantitative expectations than were previous generations (Swail 2006²). It is not surprising, then, that community college transfer students need help to refine their academic skills. In addition, they need assistance to develop strategies to manage the academic work load, including the increased quantity of reading, at the four-year level.

Ensuring that CCTI students were able to do their best academic work involved early identification of those who were struggling academically and targeted use of academic supports, especially advising. Linked to academic success is the degree to which students feel that they "belong" on the four-year campus. The use of cohort models and peer mentoring helped CCTI students find their place on campus. Another important part of sustaining student and program success is effectively using data to inform program improvement. Such efforts can result in customized and more effective support systems to facilitate student success and transformation.

Academic Integration

For low- to moderate-income, first-generation, and often nontraditional community college transfer students, adjusting academically to the four-year institution is especially complicated; however, by all accounts, CCTI students generally were as academically successful as their counterparts who enrolled as freshmen. CCTI campuses reported that CCTI students tended to be highly motivated to tackle academic work and made the most of their experience at the four-year campus. The vast majority (70%) of CCTI student survey respondents reported that they were either well prepared or very-well prepared for academics at the four-year institution. Only a little over one in four (28%) reported having serious academic difficulties during the previous academic year, and even fewer (19%) reported having thought about dropping out.

Still, CCTI students reported that (1) keeping up with reading, papers, and exams, (2) motivation and staying focused, and (3) time management were more challenging at the four-year campus, compared to their prior community college experience.

² Swail, W. S. (March 2006). Barriers to student retention and success on college campuses. *Student Success: A Publication of the Educational Policy Institute*.

CCTI campuses used several strategies to help CCTI students integrate academically. Several CCTI campuses have made concerted efforts to change students' perception of academic support centers: they want students to think about them as places where successful students go to refine their skills and enhance their success instead of places where only struggling students go for remediation. In addition, most CCTI campuses instituted some type of system to identify CCTI students who were struggling academically. For instance, the USC Scholars Club tracked the academic progress of community college transfers and, using mid-semester grades, identified students in need of academic assistance such as tutoring or increased use of faculty office hours. Other campuses relied on institutional "early warning" systems and on the observations of key people involved with the CCTI students. Many also gave CCTI students priority access to institutional academic supports.

Advising has also played a central role in helping CCTI students to adapt to a rigorous academic setting. CCTI students may need foundational information about campus advising, including the role of faculty and professional advisors and how to register for and drop classes. Advisors who are knowledgeable about community college transfer student needs can be particularly effective.

- A professional UNC-CH advisor served as a pre- and post-admissions point person for C-STEP students. Within individual departments, C-STEP students are assigned to advisors who have experience with the transfer advising committee.
- Advisors are trained on transfer issues, resources, and support at U-M.
- Mount Holyoke has set up a system to create better student-advisor matches.

The survey data show that students who experienced higher levels of difficulty were likely to use available support services, and took advantage of academic tutoring, study groups, mentoring, counseling, and writing centers. Academic advisors were a highly significant source of support among these students. Mentoring from faculty, staff, or older students was reported to have helped "a great deal" (36%) or "some" (40%) by respondents to end-of-year surveys. Family and friends, bosses, and others were also sources of support.

Social Integration

Community college transfer students – particularly those who are first-generation and/or nontraditional – may experience cultural dissonance at a selective four-year college or university. Student surveys suggest a complicated picture of social integration. When students were asked to compare challenges experienced at the four-year and two-year institutions, they reported that only social challenges were significantly greater at the four-year institution. At the same time, 80% of the end-of-year survey respondents reported that they "fit in" or belong at their college/university.

Many campuses used a "cohort model" for CCTI students, in which the students are identified as a group and participate in activities together. (On some campuses the cohort model was especially strong, with activities beginning even before enrollment.) A cohort model facilitates ongoing communication with and support for community college transfer students. Cohorts can be the source of friendships and room- or house-mates. Bonds formed through cohort activities, such as monthly meetings, speakers' series, and recreational activities, can promote identity formation and generate a sense of community. Cohorts can function as leadership testing grounds to prepare CCTI students for campus-wide leadership roles. The cohort model can also foster identification with the culture of the institution. For example, several CCTI students credited UNC-CH's C-STEP program with providing entrée into the institutional culture, known as "the Carolina Way." Students on other campuses made similar reports.

Examples of CCTI cohort activities:

- UNC-CH C-STEP students attend monthly dinners to share experiences, socialize, and often listen to speakers on timely issues, such as studying for exams or career planning.
- Bucknell built on the cohort created during their summer program and organized a number of group activities during the academic year.
- Mount Holyoke and the Frances Perkins Program fostered the development of a cohort of students supported by activities and services.
- USC Scholars met regularly, shared meals, and had a designated room (with computers and comfortable seating) on campus for their use.
- Cornell Pathway to Success students met regularly, started a Facebook page, and referred to themselves as “Pathies.”

Personal Support

Community college transfer students, needing to quickly understand the workings of the four-year campus, require assistance on where to go for answers to both small and large questions. CCTI program coordinators or directors have functioned as information clearinghouses that connect students to institutional resources, key offices, and individuals who can provide needed information. They have also served as troubleshooters and problem solvers.

Another strategy utilized on all campuses is peer support. Informal peer support was available to some extent on all CCTI campuses; many campuses also organized more formal peer mentor programs. Students who have “been there” have a level of credibility that no campus representative can provide and have served as role models to recently enrolled CCTI students. Peer mentors benefit too from new skills, new information about campus that they can use for themselves, and the gratification derived from giving back. Following are examples:

- A paid C-STEP peer mentoring program, part of the existing UNC-CH peer mentoring program, addresses issues ranging from parking and scheduling classes to family and other personal issues.
- At U-M, peer mentoring is available within several colleges and through the Center for the Education of Women.
- Mount Holyoke and the Transfer Re-Entry and Student Parent Center at UC Berkeley provided paid, trained, and supervised peer mentors.
- At Bucknell, peer support is available through the organized cohort model; also, its summer program employs CCTI students to work with the participating community college students.

Another element of personal support is targeted financial support. Community college transfer students may need “nontraditional” support like commuting expenses, expenses related to off-campus residences, and child care. Students may benefit from education on financial literacy and on institutional policies regarding emergency funding for students with special circumstances.

- Financial Aid staff at UNC-CH advised CCTI students of the appeals process for obtaining funds to cover special costs, such as child care, that are not covered by the usual financial aid package. In addition, they provided workshops on budgeting.
- Amherst utilized special funds to pay for graduate school fees and travel to interviews for community college transfer students.

Creative financial support can ease financial burdens while furthering academic aims.

- Some institutions earmarked research assistantships for low-income community college transfer students.
- Cornell provided financial assistance for enrolling students who pursue an unpaid internship, as well as for support for child care.

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- USC provided funding to help defray costs associated with academic pursuits such as memberships and conference registrations.

Incoming CCTI students who completed both pre and post surveys at first expected that paying for tuition, books, and other supplies would be challenging, but found it less of a challenge by the end of the year. Program responsiveness may have helped alleviate this stress.

Using Data to Sustain Success

All eight CCTI campuses used data at least to some extent, to both improve and sustain their programs. Ongoing data collection helped them to identify needs and opportunities for program improvements, provided evidence of student success, and helped them to publicize powerful stories of student transformation to a wider audience.

The CCTI campuses made many program changes based on quantitative data, experience, and student feedback. Campuses used student record data, student surveys and focus groups, and other methods of soliciting feedback from students, administrators, and faculty. Following are some of the data-driven changes the campuses made:

- Changed recruitment processes after learning more about how to identify the best student-institution matches.
- Made student orientations both more useful and developmentally appropriate.
- Changed the timing of acceptance letters, financial aid offers, and credit transfer determinations to enable students to make better-informed decisions.
- Changed advising systems to improve access and student-advisor “fit.”
- Changed categories in the application review process to better consider a broad array of life experiences (e.g., military service, providing care for one’s parents).

They also made changes in activities and programming for community college transfer students, including developing common space for them, installing lockers for commuter students, and creating housing alternatives.³

The key strategy for using data to promote sustainability and enhance development options amounted to telling the story, especially to audiences whose buy-in could make a difference, such as trustees and legislators. As one administrator said, “You have to be able to say what you’re doing. You need data to do this.” Among the most common ways of telling the story were the following:

- Articles in higher education and other publications and in institutional annual reports.
- Fundraising brochures focusing on success stories, what the program means to the institution, and what it means to students.
- Tracking and reporting on how community college transfer students are doing, including compared to first-years (campuses already tracked and reported on first-years).
- CCTI students, administrators, and faculty presenting to boards, trustees, and state legislatures.

³ Community college transfer students who have been participating in a world of adult responsibilities may not be enthusiastic about dormitory living. Some may prefer quiet housing that is removed from campus activity centers. Students who already know each other through having attended a partnering community college may prefer to live together. Students who are married or have dependents should have priority access to married student housing.

