

PARTNERSHIPS THAT PROMOTE SUCCESS

LESSONS AND FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION OF THE JACK KENT COOKE FOUNDATION'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER INITIATIVE

College enrollment and completion gaps for underrepresented students in higher education have been a national concern in the United States for decades, and the role of transfer in furthering the nation's college completion goals has garnered increased attention over the last few years. Yet, while recent research highlights the continued challenges of matching high-achieving, low-income students with the right four-year institution,¹ little attention is paid to the need to foster transfer pathways for high-achieving, low- to moderate-income *community college* students. Indeed, although many community college students from low- to moderate-income backgrounds are prepared to excel at highly selective four-year institutions, considerable financial, cultural, and informational barriers limit their opportunities to do so. This matters because low- to moderate-income students who attend highly selective institutions are more likely to complete their four-year degree and enroll in graduate school than those enrolled elsewhere.²

Supporting the transfer of community college students to top four-year institutions helps to maximize individual accomplishment, increasing our national vitality. Yet little is known about the strategies institutions can employ to ease access or success of transfer students to selective institutions.

In response to these issues, between 2006 and 2014, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's Community College Transfer Initiative (CCTI) funded fourteen highly selective colleges and universities with the long-term goal of promoting sustainable increases in the number of *high-achieving low- to moderate-income community college students* who transfer to and succeed at the nation's selective four-year institutions. With the Foundation's support, four-year institutions developed programs, policies, and partnerships with community colleges to improve student preparation, assistance with admission and financial aid processes, orientation and "bridge" programs, and post-admission support. In addition to catalyzing change on these individual campuses, the Foundation supported an evaluation study of the

first eight CCTI institutions, in order to gain insights into institutional practices that best support transfer students. This report summarizes findings related to two questions:

Do community college students succeed at selective institutions?

How can institutions support transfer student success?

Low- to moderate-income students who attend highly selective institutions are more likely to complete their four-year degree and enroll in graduate school than those enrolled at less selective institutions. Unfortunately, significant barriers still prevent well-prepared community college students from transferring to selective institutions.

1. C. Hoxby & C. Avery, *The Missing "One-Offs": The Hidden Supply of High-Achieving, Low-Income Students* (2012).

2. A. Dowd, et al., *Threading the Needle of the American Dream* (2006); J. Wyner, J. Bridgeland, & J. Diulio, *The Achievement Trap* (2007).

COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS SUCCEED AT SELECTIVE INSTITUTIONS

From 2007 through 2010, almost 1,100 students matriculated to the eight CCTI schools because of the CCTI; many more received pre-enrollment outreach and support to transfer to other institutions. Overall, CCTI students were more ethnically and racially diverse, as well as older, than comparison group transfer students or native students (students who started as freshmen at the four-year institution).

On the whole, CCTI students were highly successful academically at the four-year institutions. Very few dropped or failed classes, and CCTI students consistently earned about 95 percent of the credits they attempted. Collectively, on average, they maintained grade point averages above 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale), and their grades were on par with those of other transfer and native students (see chart).

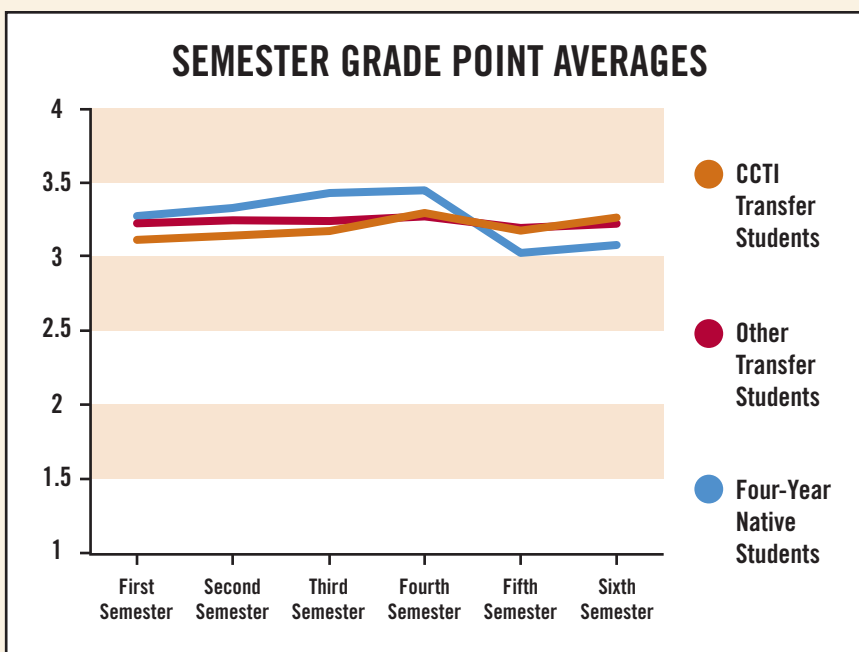
Faculty and administrators described CCTI students as disciplined and highly motivated. Indeed, some faculty members who were not very supportive at the beginning of the program later asked, “Can we get more CCTI students?” Most CCTI students said they felt academically prepared for the rigorous curriculum at the four-year campuses. The CCTI expanded students’ educational opportunities and enabled them, perhaps for the first time, to take part in what one called “intellectual feasting.” Student aspirations also increased. While one in five students reported that prior to transferring they initially planned to stop at an associate’s degree; after

transferring, 79 percent planned to attend graduate or professional school.

Both two-year and four-year institutions benefit from transfer student initiatives.

The CCTI helped community college partners enrich their institutional transfer culture, make more information available for students interested in transferring to a four-year institution, and reach out to students who were not necessarily seeking to transfer. For several participants, the initiative enhanced community college efforts to develop more rigorous curricula, honors programs, and higher-quality advising systems.

At four-year institutions, CCTI programs increased student body diversity in terms of demographics, life experiences, and income; focused and typically more mature, the CCTI students contributed to the intellectual life on the campuses—often transforming classroom discussions with stimulating questions and impressive preparation. CCTI students contributed to campus life by becoming deeply engaged. They formed transfer student organizations, assumed campus leadership roles, won awards, honors, and competitive scholarships, and conducted research with faculty. The initiative also contributed to cross-campus collaboration and communication.



Community college students who transfer to selective institutions perform academically on par with native students. Increasing access for low-income community college transfer students benefits not only the students but also two- and four-year institutions.

FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS NEED TO FOSTER TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS

Organizational silos and lack of communication among faculty, administration, staff, and students additionally can impede an institution's efforts to implement a transfer program. Negative faculty preconceptions, often arising from lack of faculty engagement and experience with community college students, can hinder efforts to promote more transfers from community colleges. Lessons learned from CCTI institutions emphasize the importance of securing institutional cultural buy-in, collaborating with community colleges, and supporting transfer students once enrolled.

High levels of institutional readiness and buy-in are associated with more effective and sustainable programs. "Paving the way" may be as important as program design.

- Institutions whose mission and/or strategic plan aligned with recruiting transfer students and helping them to succeed were better positioned for this effort.
- Learner-centered campuses moved more quickly into successful partnerships with community colleges and a successful transfer program.
- Institutional buy-in is needed for smooth implementation. A critical mass of supporters can be formed by making a plan collaboratively, having transparent communications, and having point people from among faculty and key administrative units. Both senior-level and broad-based commitment support effectiveness.
- Faculty members play a key role. Exploratory data from the evaluation suggest that faculty support towards transfer policies and the presence of community college transfer students on their campuses increased as CCTI programs matured.

For maximum success, institutions must find and prepare the right students and support them through and after transfer.

PRE-TRANSFER SUPPORT

Community college students' belief that they are not "bachelor's degree material" coupled with a lack of advising support sometimes keeps students from applying for transfer, especially

to elite institutions. Other times unclear transfer policies that are often aimed at students transferring from other four-year institutions rather than community colleges further complicate the process. CCTI institutions utilized multiple strategies to increase the likelihood of transfer for well-prepared community college students:

- Most institutions worked to identify prospective students early, to leave more time for campus visits, program engagement, and better academic preparation.
- Campuses enhanced community college student readiness for success at the four-year campus in several ways: appointing a campus point person for community college transfer students; organizing peer and staff mentoring; providing joint classes and summer academic programs; working with community college faculty to align curricula; and providing workshops and other opportunities for students to learn about succeeding at the four-year institution.
- There was no one-size-fits-all program. Each of the eight CCTI campuses ended up with a somewhat different mix of practices that fit within their culture and structures.

POST-TRANSFER SUPPORT

Lower-income community college students tend to lack the information and experiences that equip their middle-class counterparts to navigate a college setting with relative ease. CCTI campuses supported students during and after transfer in many ways, including

- Improving credit transfer policies and working to make them as clear, transparent, and individualized as possible.
- Developing social integration strategies such as cohort activities and faculty, staff, or peer mentoring to help CCTI students feel like they belonged. According to student surveys, CCTI students who were mentored were nearly 5.5 times more likely to feel like they fit in than those who were not.
- Designating one or more "trusted agents" to help students navigate the transition, answer questions about everything from parking to advising, and trouble shoot.

The most effective and sustainable programs had the most robust partnerships between community colleges and four-year institutions.

- These partnerships identified key individuals (on both campuses) focused on facilitating student transfer; established structures to facilitate frequent communication; and were mutually respectful, stressing the importance of learning from each other.
- Involving students in the partnership is advantageous—they can help with outreach, support other students after transferring, increase the program’s visibility, and provide important feedback and recommendations.
- The most successful programs continually assessed how things were working and used data to improve programs and sustain success.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

The Foundation funded the Center for Youth and Communities at Brandeis University’s Heller School for Social Policy and Management to conduct a comprehensive, multi-site evaluation of the first eight grantees.³ This mixed method study sought to describe institutional climate and policies and documented the experiences of transfer students supported and not supported by CCTI. Multiple types of data and sources were included. Interviews with students, faculty, and staff during annual site visits yielded qualitative data about CCTI initiative strategies and implementation. Several sources of quantitative data were used to document CCTI student performance, academic success, social integration, and financial aid. Faculty attitudes at two of the three smaller institutions were captured with pre- and post-surveys. The full evaluation report can be downloaded from the Foundation’s website at www.jkcf.org.

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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 to four-year institutions. To date, the Foundation has awarded \$23 million in scholarships to 635 community college students to complete their bachelor’s degree.

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INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS LEAD TO TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS



LESSONS LEARNED FOR INSTITUTIONS

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1. Be ready: prepare the way for introducing a transfer initiative.
 2. Develop both broad and high-level buy-in.
 3. Develop strong partnerships with community colleges.
 4. Look for the “right” students, take steps to help them prepare for transfer, help them through the process, and support them during and after the transition.
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3. The eight four-year institutions participating in the evaluation were Amherst College, Bucknell University, Cornell University, Mount Holyoke College, University of California, Berkeley, University of Michigan, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and University of Southern California.