

GIA INSIGHTS:

Identifying and Overcoming Barriers to Inland Empire Community College Transfer Achievement



GIA TOGETHER



*Working Together for Inland
Educational & Economic Success*





TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3 Executive Summary
- 5 Introduction
- 7 Preparing for Success in Community College
- 11 Successfully Maneuvering the Community College System
- 19 Managing External Factors
- 26 Actualizing Transfer
- 30 Conclusions & Key Takeaways
- 33 Appendix





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Inland Empire / Desert community college students who successfully transferred to a public or private university share their experiences about navigating this process. During in-depth conversations, the students highlight the challenges they faced and the strategies they used to overcome them at various stages of their transfer journey. They share experiences about preparing for community college, maneuvering the community college system, managing external factors, and actualizing transfer. One-on-one interviews provide insights from the student perspective about ways to strengthen student advising and supports. If implemented, these student suggestions for straightforward and actionable interventions could have a transformative effect on educational outcomes in the Inland Empire.

	Challenges	Strategies
<p>Preparing for Success</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students lacked information in high school about community college and the transfer process • Students enrolled in community college without direction regarding a major or plans to transfer, accumulated unnecessary units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have community college students talk to prospective students in high school to convey benefits and reduce stigma • Students should meet with career counselors and advisor upon enrollment to choose a path and make a plan
<p>Maneuvering the Community College System</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students could not register for the classes they needed, so took too few/unnecessary courses • Students did not obtain effective academic advising services • Students did not use academic support services like tutoring or supplemental instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalize on priority registration opportunities • Strategically schedule classes based on timing and difficulty • Seek faculty mentors and find support through enrichment programs, peer groups, or learning centers • Schools should increase awareness of these services



<p>Managing External Factors</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students cited financial challenges: paying out of pocket, struggling with additional costs, or mismanaging funds • Student challenges were compounded for first-generation students who lacked support at home • Students struggled to balance school with employment commitments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform students about financial aid, grants, and scholarship funds • Share information about availability of assistance programs and how to apply to for them • Identify strategies with employers and professors to effectively schedule and balance commitments
<p>Actualizing Transfer</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students were unaware of transfer resources or found them insufficient, resulting in misconceptions about potential transfer destinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with transfer-specific services or enrichment programs to connect with other transfer motivated peers • Schools should increase awareness of these services



INTRODUCTION

In a region with bachelor degree completion well below the state average,[1] increasing the effectiveness of community college transfer to four-year universities is a critical component of raising college attainment, closing equity gaps, and increasing the social mobility of Inland Empire residents. Given that the majority of college-going students attend a California Community College, [2] learning more about how to support students who wish to transfer to a university is a high priority. And this is especially true in the Inland Empire, where community college students have the second lowest transfer rates of any region across California.[3]

Because of the large gap between students who desire to transfer and those who actually do so, the current project sought to deepen knowledge about the barriers encountered by students who **successfully achieved transfer** from an Inland Empire community college to a four-year program. In this brief, we summarize what we learned from lengthy conversations with local students about the challenges they encountered along their educational journeys, the tactics they used to overcome these obstacles, and the recommendations they have for colleges and students to improve the path for future students.

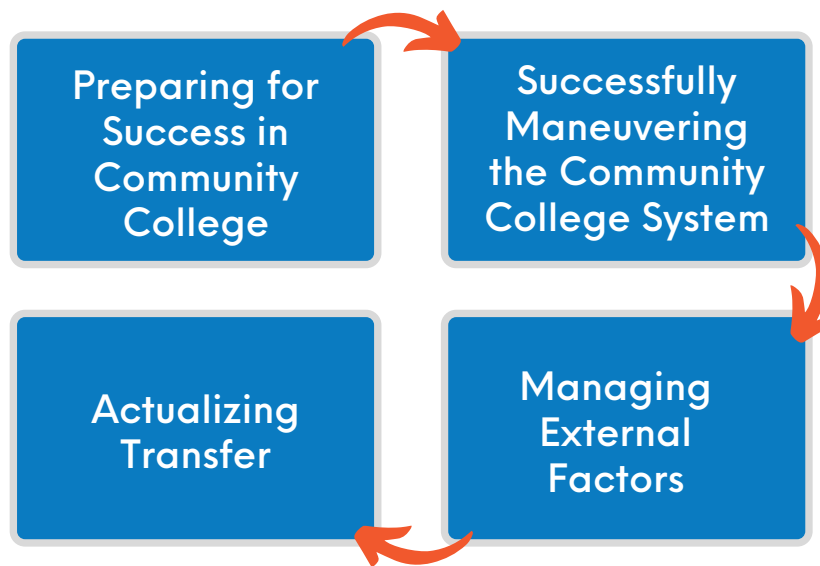
[1] American Community Survey, 2019 1-Year Estimates for Californians with a BA or above are 35% compared to 23% in the Riverside–San Bernardino–Ontario Metro Area.

[2] <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

[3] RP Group. (2019a). “Transfer Odds: Technical Report Examining Factors that Impact Whether Students Achieve Transfer or Get Stuck Near or At the Gate,” p. 6.



Beginning in Spring 2020, we spoke with **33 transfer achieving students** representing **9 Inland Empire community colleges** and currently attending **5** of the region's most frequently transferred-to **public and private four-year institutions**.^{[4]-[5]} Universities represented include UC Riverside, CSU San Bernardino, UCLA, Cal Poly Pomona, and the University of Redlands (see Appendix for protocol and participant details). The transfer achieving students described a number of challenges they faced while in community college and offered possible strategies to overcome those obstacles. The challenges and strategies focused on four aspects of their journey: (1) preparing for success in community college, (2) successfully maneuvering the community college system, (3) managing external factors, and (4) actualizing transfer.



[4] "California Community College New Enrollments at UC." University of California. February 20, 2020. <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/california-community-college-enrollments-uc>.

[5] "New Undergraduate Transfers from California Community Colleges or Other Institutions." The California State University. Accessed September 25, 2020. https://tableau.calstate.edu/view/FirstTimeFreshmanandCollegeTransfer/SummaryView?iframeSizedToWindow=true&:embed=y&:render=true&:showAppBanner=false&:display_count=no&:showVizHome=no.



PREPARING FOR SUCCESS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Students who receive clear guidance and accurate information about transfer options and requirements early in their educational journey are more likely to successfully navigate the process.

STUDENTS OFTEN LACK THE PROPER INFORMATION ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND THE TRANSFER PROCESS WHEN MAKING PLANS IN HIGH SCHOOL.

When reflecting on their time in high school, many felt they didn't know about the option to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution or sensed a negative stigma associated with the choice to attend community college.



Age 20, UC Riverside, RCC

In high school I really thought a four-year university was the only way to go, they really tell you that. I think they drive everyone to really push for just immediately going into four-year university. It wasn't until like very late in my senior year that I actually realized you could transfer from a community college.



STUDENT SUGGESTION

Create opportunities for current or former community college students to talk to prospective students.

To make information about community college and the transfer process more readily available, [high schools should create opportunities for their students to talk to current or former community college students](#). During our conversations, successful transfer students noted that through discussions with community college graduates they were informed about the benefits of attending community college, including cost savings, opportunities to maintain employment, and the opportunity to transfer to a four-year institution. Additionally, these conversations helped them overcome the negative stigma attached to community college, showing they are not “less than” those who go straight to four-year universities.



Age 22, UCLA, MSJC

My uncle actually steered me towards attending community college and he said that down the road, it's not really going to matter. What matters is that you're going to have a degree, and just because you're starting at community college doesn't mean that you're like anything less.



OFTEN STUDENTS ENROLL IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE WITHOUT DIRECTION – EITHER UNDECIDED ON A MAJOR OR UNSURE IF THEY PLAN TO TRANSFER.

Upon enrollment in community college, students need direction to support efficient and effective planning throughout their journey, including how to select a major and explore career options.

In our discussions, a lack of direction prior to enrollment, compounded with insufficient advising, resulted in students spending a significant amount of time selecting an academic area of emphasis – up to 4 years. Beyond the challenge of choosing a major, some expressed doubt or lack of knowledge about how certain majors lead to potential careers. One student detailed their challenge in choosing a major – starting undecided, choosing math based on their abilities, switching to music since it was enjoyable, and finally switching to biology because it aligned to their career goals in health. Some students resorted to online quizzes to aid in their decision-making.



Age 25, UCR, COD

I spent a long time there. Not really because of an issue of academics, it was just more, I didn't really know what I wanted to do when I first got there...

STUDENT SUGGESTION

Students should meet with career counselors or advisors to help them choose a path and create a plan when they enroll in community college.

Students already on track toward selecting a major or pursuing transfer saved a great deal of time, and maintained motivation as well as the ability to perform well in class. Particularly by identifying the intent to transfer, students avoided accumulating unnecessary units that were non-transferrable. When discussing how students chose a major, most cited long-term career ambitions, life goals, or practical career decisions.



Age 26, CSUSB, RCC/MSJC

I just thought, “What’s the best option to get me a job?”...Sometimes I still think, “Oh, maybe that could have been cool to major in,” but I just thought the most practical route.

Students suggested **immediate intervention upon enrollment with career counselors to hone interests, identify strengths, and choose a major accordingly.** This could include workshops that walk students through potential career options associated with particular fields of study. Early intervention to help students begin their journey could have lasting implications for their success in community college and successfully transferring.



SUCCESSFULLY MANEUVERING THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Once students have entered the community college system, students need support and guidance to successfully maneuver the community college system to reach their goals to transfer or complete a degree. This includes registering for classes, engaging with support services and advising, and paying for school. Students need accurate and timely information along with a supportive network on campus to help them through their journey.

ONE OF THE FIRST CHALLENGES COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS FACE IS REGISTERING FOR CLASSES.

Low-priority registration was a significant impediment to students' timely transfer, often resulting in students taking too few and/or unnecessary courses. Students must be careful with course selection to ensure that the classes they select meet transfer and/or degree requirements. Many found that the courses they needed at their "home" campuses were full, and this frustration was further compounded for students who had to manage other responsibilities like employment or family demands. Community colleges do offer advising to help with this, but this does not necessarily mean students are aware of the services, use the services, or that the services meet their needs effectively.

Low-priority registration also contributed to students "swirling" between campuses as they attempted to find open classes that were required for transfer and that could accommodate their individual schedules. Swirling between multiple campuses was used by many students as a strategy to stay on pace for



transfer, but had its own challenges. Particularly for working students, spending significant time commuting between campuses put a strain on time management, as well as increased anxiety.



Age 26, U. Redlands,
SBVC/Crafton Hills/RCC

It's very hard to get classes. That was the biggest annoyance. That's one of the reasons why I ended up going to Crafton, Valley, and RCC. And yeah, so it's difficult getting courses, especially if you don't know what you're doing.

STUDENT SUGGESTION

Capitalize on priority registration offered at school.

Community colleges should explore strategies to help students register for the courses they need. Students mentioned [strategies to gain priority registration](#) such as joining the soccer team, attending orientation, using military veteran status, or participating in student enrichment programs (e.g., Trio, MESA, Honors program).



Age 23, UCLA, MSJC

I do have to say that the honors program provided me with so many perks... they had priority enrollment, which at a California community college that is golden... because my community college was severely impacted, like they're very hard to get classes beforehand. Having that priority enrollment was amazing and probably got me out when I needed to get out.

SOME STUDENTS DO NOT USE ADVISING SERVICES DUE TO LACK OF AWARENESS OR QUALITY, CAUSING ISSUES WITH COURSE SELECTION.

Many students did not obtain academic advising, and many of those who did stated that their advising sessions were often ineffective at helping them map out a transfer path, citing reasons like advisors recommending courses they already planned to take or providing incorrect information or sharing resources readily available online. Students also noted that the process to be seen by an advisor presented hurdles, sharing instances in which they had to wait three hours for a “drop-in appointment” or an advisor being an hour late. These bad experiences may be particularly detrimental if this is a student’s first experience with an advisor, resulting in them not returning for assistance. In one instance, a student credited their decision to transfer to a private university to ineffective advising received, explaining that they were willing to pay more in tuition to ensure someone was available to answer their questions effectively and help them strategically plan out their courses.



Age 26, CSUSB, RCC/MSJC

Whenever I went, it was kind of like getting a list of what you have to do and the classes that you have to take...it wasn't like, "Oh, maybe this class is better for your major, or this class might work better or it might be less work if you're taking a math class." It was just, here's what you have to do. Here's what you have left.

Perhaps most indicative of under-utilized or ineffective advising is the fact that a significant majority of students we interviewed (27 out of 33) earned an associate degree or Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT), but for the vast majority this was an inadvertent and unintentional accomplishment. **Roughly half were surprised to learn at the time of transfer that they had earned a degree without having purposely done so, and most were unaware of any distinction between the two types of degrees.**



Age 27, UCR, RCC

I didn't know I was going to get these associates until the moment that I was going to graduate... probably like four weeks before that I talked to my advisor and that's when she's like, "Oh, well you're going to get your associates in math and science, your associates in business and then your associates for transfer."

STUDENT SUGGESTION

Strategically plan classes to create feasible schedules.

Given their experiences with ineffective advising, students should be offered strategic scheduling strategies to mix easy and hard classes or strategically time when to take certain classes. For example, students suggested taking all electives while enrolled in a challenging course like biology or taking easier courses during the short winter session to focus on challenging courses during the regular semester.



Age 21, CSUSB, RCC

When it did come to classes that were more challenging for me, I made sure to plan accordingly. I took all the electives the semester that I took biology. I made sure to be smart with what classes I took and when. I took psychology in a smaller term because I knew that would be super easy for me. I wanted to dedicate a semester to a class that I would need to put more focus in.

SIMILAR TO ADVISING, FEW STUDENTS USED ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES LIKE TUTORING OR SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTION.

Only about half the students interviewed utilized academic support services such as tutoring and supplemental instruction. Some students did not take advantage of these resources because they were unaware of how to access the services and others were unable to due to scheduling conflicts (with employment, for example). If a student did access these services, they



discovered them through student enrichment programs (e.g., Honors College) or by the suggestion of faculty or staff. Students offered mixed reviews about the efficacy of these services, with some finding the peer-teaching nature typical of these services welcoming and effective while others found it to be off-putting.



Age 21, CSUSB, RCC

If I needed tutoring, I wouldn't have wanted to go to the tutoring center, just because no one taught me how to like walk in there and ask for tutoring...I just didn't know how to access anything until I finally got over that fear.

It was definitely like a hit or miss. Sometimes you get a good tutor, sometimes you wouldn't. But, with supplemental instruction, usually since there's just a higher screening process you didn't really see that there.



Age 23, UCR, RCC

STUDENT SUGGESTIONS

Find support through informal mentoring, enrichment programs, peer groups, or learning centers. Colleges should consider strategies to increase the use of services available.

Although students noted that some student services were not meeting their needs, some students found support with informal mentorships with faculty or staff from interactions in the classroom or through student enrichment programs that offered academic guidance (e.g., EOPS, MESA, Trio, Puente, LA, CASA, and Honors program). Students suggested that others should [join enrichment programs to connect to other mentors at the college and develop a network of likeminded students, form peer study groups, or spend time in various centers on campus \(e.g., learning resource or college writing center\)](#). These supports were viewed as a pivotal resource for navigating transfer, financial aid, and professional and academic development opportunities. One student called out the importance of one professor that supported them:



Age 28, UCR, COD

Specifically one professor, he was the most helpful...He would go with us to trips for MESA to programming competitions. He would go to trips to NASA with us and whatnot... he definitely helped me out big time. I picked his brain a lot, pretty much for this type stuff.

STUDENT SUGGESTIONS

Students also offered a number of suggestions to increase the use of services available, including:



Using social media or email communication to increase the awareness of academic services and events.



Creating instructional videos or conduct in-class presentations to demonstrate the step-by-step process to access services.



Partnering with regional four-year institutions to implement a tutoring program to improve access to quality tutoring and helping university students fulfill their requisite field work hours.

MANAGING EXTERNAL FACTORS

Completing the academic requirements necessary to transition from community college to a four-year university requires students to successfully navigate facets of the process beyond the classroom. For many of our students, this includes managing finances, finding a balance between school and work, and being a first-generation college student.

MANY STUDENTS PAID FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE OUT OF POCKET, STRUGGLED WITH THE ADDITIONAL COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL, OR MISMANAGED THEIR FUNDS THEY RECEIVED.

Many students reported paying out of pocket for college because they did not apply for and/or did not qualify for financial aid, which resulted in prolonging the time until transfer since they needed to keep a manageable semester per-unit tuition payment. Even if students received aid, some felt that not having received financial guidance prior to disbursement contributed to mismanagement of funds and subsequent loss of additional grant money.



Age 25, UCR, MSJC

When I was in community college, I was considered a dependent... it took me a lot longer to graduate just because I was paying out of pocket. I was taking like two classes a semester, which obviously takes a little bit longer to graduate.



Age 28, UCR, COD

It was pretty nice cause they paid for everything, but I was very irresponsible with the money that was given to me through grants. At that point I didn't really have anyone to guide me in, you know, telling me how I should use my money.

STUDENT SUGGESTIONS

Inform students about grants, scholarships, and assistance programs and how to apply for them.

Several students utilized the [California College Promise Grant \(formerly BOG Fee Waiver\)](#), which granted students the freedom to take as many courses as possible in a given term. This financial support allowed students to focus on school instead of work.



Age 22, UCR, Norco/RCC

They called it the BOG waiver... so I received that. I didn't have to worry about tuition. I didn't have to work for most of my community college career, and I only had to worry about the textbooks.... I don't know what I would have done without financial aid... That was a lifesaver.



Some students reported that financial struggles were further compounded by additional costs like internet service, transportation, and technology fees for online courses. Some students discussed their strategies to find free Wi-Fi, like parking in front of a Starbucks or use free RTA bus rides with Wi-Fi. To combat these costs, some students qualified for additional Promise Grant funds to cover books and supplies. Students should be informed of eligibility and application processes for public assistance programs, such as CalFresh and EBT. Participating in student enrichment programs offering scholarships/paid internships were also recommended (e.g., Math Engineering Science Achievement (MESA) at College of the Desert).



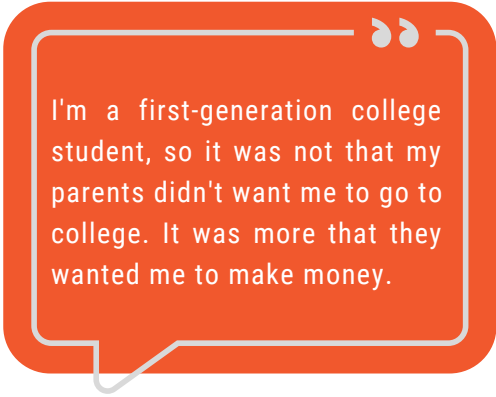
Age 26, CSUSB, RCC/MSJC

It just kind of adds up... I started taking online classes and you have to pay another fee for the online portal and then the book and then the class.

CHALLENGES WERE COMPOUNDED FOR FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS.

Nearly two thirds of the students we spoke to self-identified as a first-generation college student. Several aspects of being a first-generation college student exacerbated the barriers faced by transfer-achieving students. Without the benefit of family member experience to assist them and with some feeling

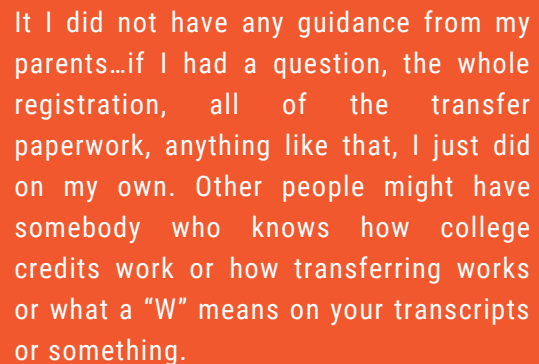
uncomfortable seeking help from high school guidance counselors, these students felt at a disadvantage throughout the process. Many largely relied on their peers to learn about post-graduation college options and maneuver through the technical aspects of applying, registering, and completing important paperwork like financial aid. Furthermore, first-generation students often had to overcome family and cultural demands, stemming from the pressure to be the first to succeed academically or pressure to work instead of pursuing school. Given this context, community colleges should identify strategies to offer additional support to first-generation students.

An orange rounded square speech bubble with a white border and a white quote icon in the top right corner.

I'm a first-generation college student, so it was not that my parents didn't want me to go to college. It was more that they wanted me to make money.



Age 40, UCLA, Chaffey/RCC

A large orange rounded square speech bubble with a white border and a white quote icon in the top left corner.

It I did not have any guidance from my parents...if I had a question, the whole registration, all of the transfer paperwork, anything like that, I just did on my own. Other people might have somebody who knows how college credits work or how transferring works or what a "W" means on your transcripts or something.



Age 26, CSUSB, RCC/MSJC



Age 25, UCR, MSJC

I noticed that for my culture, specific as women, we're not really that encouraged to keep going in academics, we're more encouraged to be home. There will always be that push back, "Oh, you studied too much. Why are you doing that? Why? It makes no sense. Come home and do your chores and, and then find a husband."

MANY STUDENTS ALSO HAD TO BALANCE SCHOOL WITH EMPLOYMENT.

Juggling numerous competing responsibilities is a common challenge faced by community college and transfer students. Twenty-nine of the students we interviewed had maintained employment during community college, with a significant number working full-time hours. Long hours at work and school put a major strain on students' ability to study, take maximum units towards timely transfer, and make use of available academic and transfer services and resources. Some employed students felt unaccounted for due to the lack of courses, services, and resources available to them on campus after work. Typically having to take classes at night, many working students felt left to do things blindly, restricted in their ability to use tutoring services, the library, or to network with peers. Additionally, having to work during community college left students unable to participate in important student enrichment programs (e.g., Puente) or support services like tutoring.



Age 26, CSUSB, RCC/MSJC

It was hard to make it to the school whenever there was tutoring because I would work. So I would never be there on time for that. It would be at night, so a lot of the homework and things I would have to either Google or YouTube, and I also didn't get to make too many connections, so I didn't really have people I could call or ask and say, "Hey, do you understand the homework," or anything like that.

STUDENT SUGGESTIONS

Identify strategies with employers or professors to effectively schedule and balance school with work commitments

To balance employment and school, [students employed various strategies to manage their time between the two responsibilities](#). Some students worked jobs that allowed them to study "on the clock" while they took a full course load, while others only took one or two courses a semester in order to accommodate their work schedules. Working students explained they would capitalize on their lunch breaks from work or called out sick from their work to attend advising or transfer counseling.



Age 26, CSUSB, RCC/MSJC

Like anything you just kind of trial and error, and you just kind of see what works... try to make it on your lunch time for your appointment with a counselor to talk about transferring or something...You just gotta figure out other ways to learn about certain things or get information that maybe somebody could have helped you with at the school.

Beyond time management, students recommended changes to class policies and the types of classes offered. In the classroom, students suggested that professors create policies that allow for flexibility, like allowing students to attend class virtually, creating a 30-minute grace period for arriving late and leaving early. These students would also benefit from more night or hybrid classes and more services and resources accessible in the evening.

ACTUALIZING TRANSFER

Even if students can maneuver through the community college system while juggling extracurricular hurdles, they still need specific support aimed to actualize their transfer goals. Students must be aware of and engage with these supports; however, this is not often the case.

STUDENTS DISCUSSED THEIR CONFUSION AROUND TRANSFER SERVICES, CITING THEY WERE UNAWARE OF SUPPORTS OR THEY FOUND THEM INSUFFICIENT. THIS RESULTED IN STUDENTS NAVIGATING THE TRANSFER PROCESS ON THEIR OWN WITH A NUMBER OF MISCONCEPTIONS AND UNINFORMED ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT TRANSFER DESTINATIONS.

Even if schools had transfer specific services, students were frequently unaware of transfer centers, found them poorly advertised or difficult to locate, or noted that their websites were confusing or outdated. Working students noted it was hard to participate at transfer-specific events based on their schedules. This barrier was further compounded by the ineffective interactions that students had with people who were meant to help them, like four-year college representatives. Students explained that visits with college representatives felt impersonal and they were not able to get detailed answers about their competitiveness as an applicant.



Age 22, UCLA, MSJC

“
I don't know if we had a transfer center. I think there was just one counseling unit, like academic counseling. That's it.”

“My major (communications) doesn't mesh well with the UC system as much as it would Cal state. So I did feel a little bit limited, but thankfully I was in a position where that didn't have to worry me, but it didn't seem like there were many options.



Age 21, CSUSB, RCC

”There were a couple of times where we had fairs that they would show up, but it was never really personal enough to know if I was going to qualify to go to those schools. So we didn't really have, in my opinion, like an aggressive recruitment. You kind of had to go and do it yourself.



Age 40, UCLA, Chaffey/RCC

Lack of support and guidance resulted in uninformed assumptions and general misconceptions about the schools that students could transfer to. This was most evident with assumptions pertaining to the costs of schools and potential eligibility to be accepted. Students did not receive adequate advising about how to evaluate the relative cost of attendance and potential financial aid options at various transfer destinations, resulting in uninformed assumptions about affordability. In addition, while many students felt confident that they would be admitted to a CSU campus, some made false assumptions about their eligibility for transfer to the more “selective” UC system-- particularly for those who chose a major (e.g., Communications) that didn't align with the perceived math and science focused UC system--which were never corrected.

I thought I would fit in best for a Cal state. In high school I didn't get good grades...I was like, "I'm not smart." I didn't even think UC accepted transfers. I was like, "Those are really good schools. We're only allowed to go to Cal States, we're losers that go to community college."



Age 23, UCLA, COD

I just really did not want to have to borrow all that much money. I really thought, "Okay, my options locally are UCR, Cal State San Bernardino, or a private school." Private was definitely not going to be the way because it's more expensive. I compared tuition between UCR and Cal State and Cal State was cheaper, so that's what I went for."



Age 26, CSUSB, RCC/MSJC

STUDENT SUGGESTIONS

Engage with transfer-specific services like workshops, campus tours, application review or engage with enrichment programs to connect with other transfer-motivated peers. Schools should increase awareness of these useful resources.

Some students found [transfer-specific services and enrichment programs useful in the transfer process](#). Transfer application workshops, college campus tours, and transfer application review were notable transfer center services for some students. Meeting individually with an admissions representative could have a significant impact on students' decisions about whether to apply to a particular university. Specifically, UCR, CSUSB, and University of Redlands were each

credited with providing impactful one-on-one transcript review sessions. Additionally, students found enrichment programs (e.g., TRIO at San Bernardino Valley College and MESA at College of the Desert) vital as they offered mentorship and a community of transfer-motivated peers.



Age 20, UCR, RCC

Both of those programs... their intention was to get you to a four year, and so both of them helped me see that I had plenty of options... I will say that that mindset did not come from academic counseling. It was definitely just those professors and leaders of the honors program and the promise programs communities.

These transfer-specific services and supports can be impactful, but often students rely on internet research or informal conversations with alumni from four-year schools. To increase the use and awareness of the transfer specific supports, the following were suggested:

- Use social media platforms to advertise transfer center services and events
- Create a shared online platform for students to exchange valuable transfer-related resources
- Enlist visible student ambassadors to raise awareness of services
- Hold events like a panel of transfer-achieving students or "coffee chats" with college reps from revolving four-year institutions



CONCLUSION & KEY TAKEAWAYS

In conversation with local students, we learned about areas of need and points of possible intervention along the secondary to postsecondary journey that could help colleges initiate changes to their existing support and communication structures to increase the rate at which community colleges students successfully transfer to four-year institutions. Upfront advising and communication beginning at and extending beyond the high school level could change the trajectories of many of these students, offering a clearer and less expensive path to a four-year degree. These real student experiences also provide a wealth of insight into student gaps in knowledge and intentionality about their college and career choices. For instance, while the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) is widely viewed as a useful tool to facilitate transfer—and a majority (22) of the students we spoke with did, indeed, achieve ADTs—we learned that many of them did so inadvertently and without awareness or intent, thus calling into question the presumed causal connection between completing an ADT achievement and successful transfer. Additional work in this area would be helpful for clarifying this unexpected finding.

In a region of close to 5 million residents, where the majority of college-going students identify as Hispanic/Latino but less than 12% of Latino adults hold a bachelor's degree,^[6] it is critically important to address the disparity in educational outcomes, including the important role of the community

[6] <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>; American Community Survey, 2019 1-Year Estimates



college- to-university pipeline. College graduates have higher wages and lower rates of unemployment than other workers, including in the face of increasing automation and during economic recessions.[7] The Public Policy Institute of California predicts that by 2030 California will have a shortfall of 1.1 million workers with a bachelor's degree,[8] and within the Inland Empire this gap is estimated to be 61,000.[9] If we do not determine how to better meet the needs of low income, first generation, transfer students of color (especially Latino students), our region will not be successful in adequately increasing college attainment, reducing the shortfall of workers, or lowering problematic and persistent social and economic inequalities in our region.

[7]<https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelnietzel/2020/09/08/unemployment-rates-during-the-pandemic-are-much-lower-for-those-with-a-college-degree/#109cab60e29c>

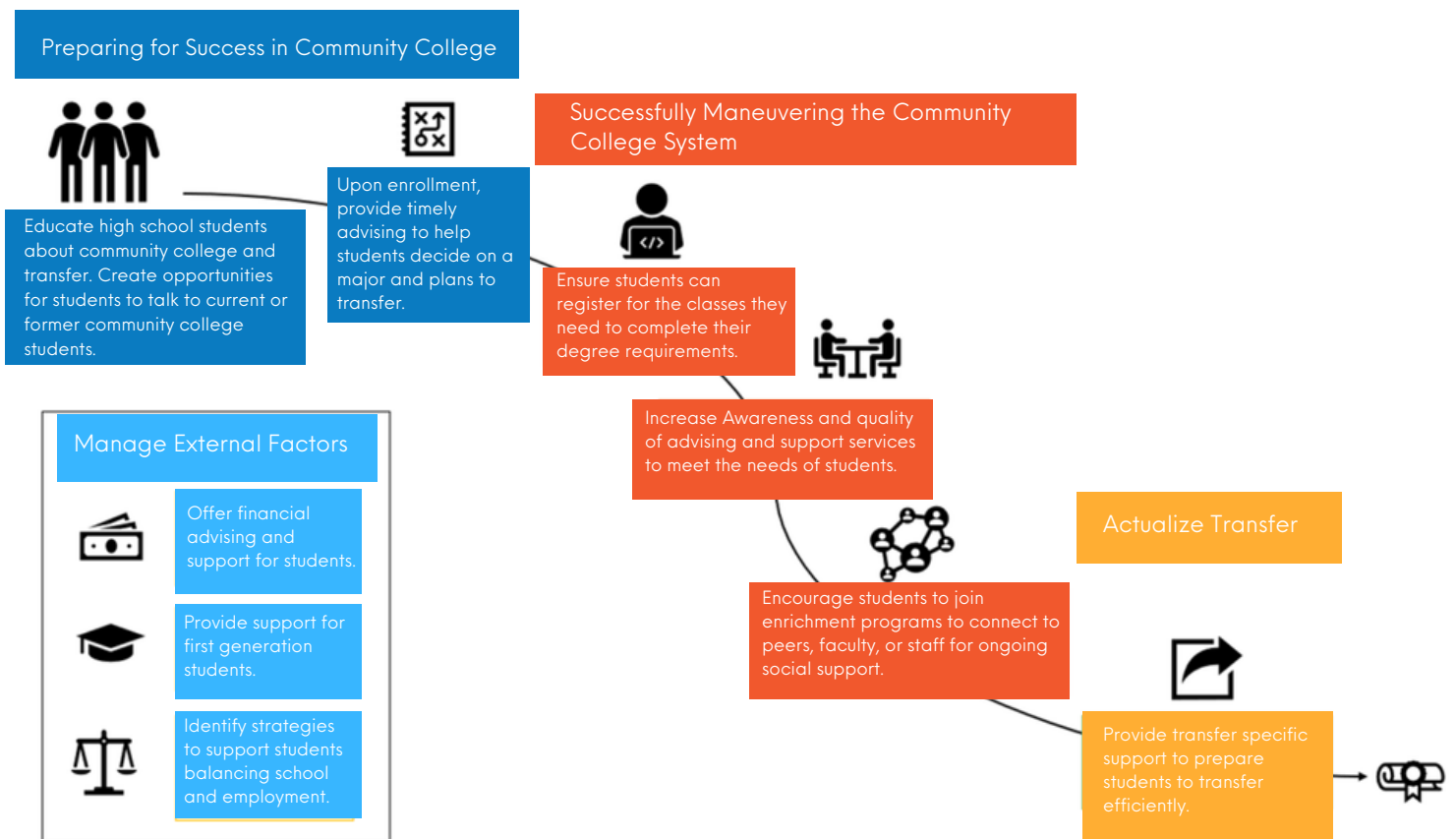
[8] Johnson, H., Mejia, M.C., & Bohn, S. (2015). "Will California Run Out of College Graduates?" Public Policy Institute of California.

[9] Colleges Future Foundation. (2019). "California Labor Market Assessment." Analysis prepared by McKinsey & Company.



The figure below summarizes student feedback into actions that can create a clearer path to transfer from community college to university:

SUMMARY OF STUDENT DRIVEN STRATEGIES ON THE PATH TO ACHIEVING TRANSFER





APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

In-depth conversations with successful transfer students ranged between approximately thirty minutes and one hour and all interviews were conducted via Zoom. Conversations were guided by a protocol of questions. One team member reviewed the transcripts and identified patterns and themes that emerged.

Table 1. Interviewee Demographics (N = 33)

Age	<i>Mode = 24</i>
First Gen College Students	63.6% (N = 21)
Employed During Community College	87.9% (N = 29)
Latinx/Hispanic	66.7% (N = 22)
Received Financial Aid	63.6% (N = 21)
Community College Units Completed	<i>Mean = 90.2 Units</i>
Years Spent at Community College	<i>Mean = 3.65</i>
Earned ADT	66.7% (N = 22)

Interview Questions

Please state your name, current college/university, and community college you transferred from.

High School

1. What did you understand your options to be post-high school?
 - a. How were you informed of those options? (Counselors? Peers? Teachers? Etc.)
2. What, if anything, did you know about dual enrollment between your high school and local community college?
 - a. What was your experience with dual enrollment?
3. How did you make the decision to attend community college?
 - a. Did anyone try to steer you towards or away from this decision?
4. To what extent was transferring from community college part of your original plan?

Community College

5. Please tell me about your academic experience as a community college student.
 - a. Please describe any significant academic barriers/challenges you had to overcome (subjects, prerequisites, course schedule, etc.).
 - i. How did you overcome those barriers/challenges?



6. How did you decide on a major or area of emphasis during community college?

a. Did you switch majors at any point during community college? If yes, why?

7. Please explain why you attended more than one community college prior to transferring?

a. How did you select which colleges to attend?

b. What was the experience like?

8. To what extent did financial aid impact your community college experience?

a. How, if at all, did it complicate your experience?

9. How would you characterize your use of community college support services? (family, peer support, counseling, tutoring, etc.)

10. Please describe any other significant barriers/challenges you had to overcome as a community college student; For example, work or family obligations.

a. How did you overcome those barriers/challenges?

11. You indicated you are a first-gen college student. How, if at all, did this impact your college experience?

12. Reflecting back on your community college experience, what were the things you wished you knew before getting started?

a. Would you do it again?

Transfer Experience

13. When did transferring to a BA degree-granting institution become a goal of yours?

a. Why did transferring become a goal?

14. Please explain how you thought of your transfer options during community college.

a. How did you learn of those options?

15. What was your motivation to transfer to your current college/university, specifically?

16. Please explain how, if at all, financial aid factored into your decision to attend your college/university.

17. Your survey response indicates you completed X number of units at community college. Why did you complete more than required to transfer to your college/university?

18. You did/did not obtain an Associate's degree prior to transferring. Why? /Why not?

a. You did/did not obtain an ADT (Associates of Transfer Degree) prior to transferring. Why?

i. What was your understanding of the advantages to earning an ADT?

ii. Any disadvantages/limitations?

b. Where did you learn this information?



19. Please describe any significant barriers/challenges you had to overcome during your transfer experience.

a. How did you overcome those barriers/challenges?

20. In your survey response, you indicated utilizing your community college transfer support services "XXXXXX." Why?

a. How would you describe their accessibility?

21. Please describe your experience, if any, with community college transfer support services or initiatives; For example, MESA, EOP, Umoja, Puente, Pathway to Law School, etc.

a. How, if at all, did these services impact your transfer experience?

22. Please describe your experience attending any meetings or info sessions facilitated by a four-year college/university representative while attending community college.

a. How, if at all, did these experiences impact your decision on which college/university to apply to?

23. Describe your experience, if any, as a community college student participating in an academic or social initiative, for example, undergraduate research, associated with a four-year college/university.

a. How, if at all, did this experience influence your self-perceived potential to be a future student at that university?

24. You are a successful transfer student. Do you know students who were not successful?

a. Why were they not successful?

b. How could that be alleviated?

25. Besides the gift card, what interested you in being interviewed about your transfer experience?

26. Is there anything else about your transfer experience we did not cover but you think is important for people to know?

Pre-Interview Survey Questions

1. What is your name?

2. Date of birth?

3. What is your gender identity?

4. What is your ethnic identity? (Please list all that apply)

5. What was the name and location of your high school?

6. Did you participate in Dual Enrollment with your local community college during high school?

a. Yes

b. No



7. Are you the first member of your family to attend college? (“first-generation college student”)
- Yes
 - No
8. Which community college(s) did you attend/transfer from? (Please list all)
9. How long was your commute to community college? (Please list time in minutes)
10. What form of transportation did you use to get to community college? (Please list all)
11. Did you work while attending community college?
- Yes. Hours per week: _____
 - No
12. Were you eligible for state or federal financial aid as a community college student?
- Yes
 - No
13. Did you receive financial aid while attending community college?
- Yes
 - No
14. How often did you utilize your community college transfer support services?
- Very frequently
 - Frequently
 - Occasionally
 - Rarely
 - Very Rarely
 - Never
15. How many units did you complete at community college? (If unsure, please approximate)
16. How many academic years did you spend at community college?
17. Did you receive an Associate’s Degree from your community college?
- Yes
 - No
18. Did you receive an Associate’s Degree for Transfer from your community college?
- Yes
 - No
19. In addition to your current college/university, where else did you apply for transfer? (Please list all)



20. Was the availability of financial aid a factor in your ability to transfer to your current college/university?

21. When was your first academic term at your current college/university?

22. What is your major(s) or planned major(s)?

23. Are you a parent?

a. Yes. Age of child(ren): _____

b. No

24. Are you a veteran of the United States military?

a. Yes. Branch: _____

b. No

25. When do you expect to graduate from your current institution? (Term and Year)

Research Support Provided By:

Eric M. Michael, MPA, JD

Ph.D Candidate

School of Educational Studies

Claremont Graduate University