

## WHAT WELL-PREPARED TRANSFER STUDENTS TELL US ABOUT STRATEGIES TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO TRANSFER

March 2010

Washington community and technical colleges provide a pathway to the bachelor's degree for about four out of ten baccalaureate graduates (Stern, 2009). Each year about 17,000 students transfer from the community and technical colleges (CTCs) to public and private baccalaureate programs in Washington.<sup>1</sup> Another 3,000 students transfer out of state each year.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board System Design Plan calls for increasing the number of students who transfer to universities. One approach to doing so is to identify transfer barriers for students who appeared to be well on their way to a university degree. In an effort to identify those barriers, this study observed and talked to students “well prepared”<sup>2</sup> for transfer. It describes the transfer outcomes for community and technical colleges (CTCs). For those who did not transfer within two to four years after graduating or leaving college, the study also identifies the barriers to transfer.

Many of the findings reinforce previous research, though some factors previously identified as leading to less likelihood of transfer were not confirmed. This report includes actions consistent with what students tell us about transfer barriers that, if implanted, could increase the number of well-prepared transfers. These actions would, however, require changes in the current transfer strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> Transfer counts by sending and receiving institutions are reported in the Academic Year Report, Chapter 4, Students Progress and Success.

<sup>2</sup> In this study “well-prepared” for transfer students are those who have completed a transfer associate degree or those who have completed at least 75 college-level credits in preparation for transfer and left the college. In the paper the later group is called “students without an associate degree”. Two years after graduation or leaving college about 60 percent of well-prepared students had an associate degree and 40 percent were students without an associate degree, typically having completed 96 credits but not the credits needed to apply for an associate degree. Many of the no-associate degree students return to college in subsequent years prior to eventual transfer.



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## Summary of Potential Future Actions to Increase Transfer

Based on this study of factors that impede transfer for the subset of well-prepared students who do not transfer, several strategies emerge that could result in even more students transferring. Given the nature of the current impediments, increasing transfer numbers will require changing transfer advising practices, including additional financial aid information, and increasing the degree options for older placebound adults.

### Aiming programs at students who have not yet transferred:

- Increase bachelor's options within 20 minute commute.
- Aim some additional bachelor's programs toward the needs of older students including women with family responsibilities.
- CTCs and universities can work jointly to increase associate degree completion for Native American students with an aim of at least maintaining current high transfer rate for those associate graduates.

### Advising strategies:

- CTCs and universities can work jointly to create a single advising service, a Transfer Plan B service, for students who plan to transfer a few years after leaving the CTC.
- CTCs should refocus some transfer advising resources to embedding major-specific advising in key classes taken by students in each major.
- Change university departmental web pages to provide major-specific transfer information. Use a clearly identifiable common icon such as the one shown here.
- Re-deploy existing advising resources by ending Transfer Day events.
- Consider CTC College-101 classes or sections of classes by major.
- Provide current and former students with clearer information about the net cost of attending universities.



## Key Findings

- Factors from previous research confirmed by this analysis as related to lower transfer rates in Washington:
  - **Proximity Matters:** Well-prepared students enrolled at colleges at some distance from a university or comprehensive university center are less likely to transfer. Out of all the CTCs the lowest transfer rates are at the following colleges: Peninsula, Walla Walla, Everett<sup>3</sup>, Olympic, Skagit Valley and Centralia. Transfer rates are highest at Cascadia, Whatcom, Yakima, Spokane Falls, and Clark; colleges that are near public universities or in the case of Yakima, host a University Center and is near a private institution (Heritage).
  - **Time for family impacts transfer especially for women:** More women transfer but transfer rates are lower for women than men, except for women students under the age of

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<sup>3</sup> These students left Everett Community College in 2004-05 before the growth in opportunities at the University Center of North Puget Sound.

20. The lower transfer rate for women is correlated with parenting status and/or starting college with a workforce goal before switching to a transfer goal (more women than men are parents while in college and start with a workforce goal).
- **Full-time work impacts transfer:** Older students (25 year of age or older) who also work full-time have a lower transfer rate than those not working.
  - **Goal clarity is important for transfer:** Students transfer when they are clear about their next educational goal. If, as they complete their associate degree or leave college, students are unsure about their future major or future occupation, they say they are unlikely to transfer. Students report that they will wait until their goals are clear before making further investments in college.
  - **Costs of College:** Lack of information about the net cost of college (costs the students must pay after financial aid) is a barrier to transfer for some students. Other students either not eligible for aid or who assume they are not eligible attend college on a “pay as they go” basis. They work until they save tuition and book expenses, then attend college until those reserves are gone, and then repeat the cycle. Students need information to help determine if the drop in and out, “pay-as-you-go” approach is more or less costly than taking out a loan to cover the expenses for continuous enrollment to the degree.
  - **Older adults have lower transfer rates.** Transfer rates drop significantly for each additional five years of age for CTC students. This drop in rate is likely associated with family and work status for older students. While previous studies identified delaying the start of college or stopping in and out of college as a barrier to completing a bachelor’s degree, many of the interviewed successful transfers had both delayed college and stopped in and out without a negative impact on eventual progress toward the degree.
  - **Lack of major-specific information for transfer.** The type of transfer information that students said they were looking for is major-specific transfer information. That information is generally not available. The students interviewed had not attended Transfer Days as a means of getting information. They also did not mention looking at general university transfer web site except for the course equivalency tables. Some students report excellent advising from an individual with considerable knowledge about the courses required for their chosen major, but most students rely on the departmental pages on a university website that describe requirements for majors. Those pages typically describe the path university freshmen should take. Typically the departmental pages do not describe how a transfer student should prepare for the major.
- Transfer barriers from previous research that **do not** appear to be related to lower transfer rates in Washington:
    - **Degree attainment eliminates race/ethnic transfer rate differences:** Race and ethnic differences are evident in transfer rates only for students without an associate degree (lowest for Native American students). Once a student completes an associate degree, transfer rates are nearly identical for all race and ethnic groups.
    - **Degree attainment minimizes social economic status (SES) transfer rate differences:** The transfer rates for associate degree graduates in each SES category are fairly similar with the lowest SES group at a five percent lower rate than the highest group. Differences in transfer rates are greater for students without the degree, though well-prepared low SES students have similar degree completion rate as higher SES students.

- **Taking some workforce credits was not a barrier to transfer for most students:** Most Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA)<sup>4</sup> graduates take just two workforce courses, a credit level that prepares transfers well for most majors. Only when students take more than 15 workforce credits is the transfer rate impacted. Few students in this study took 15 or more workforce credits, though women with young children at home were more likely than others to do so.
- **Starting college academically under-prepared is not a barrier:** Most students interviewed started college under-prepared in math, some in writing. This under-prepared pattern applied equally to those who successfully transferred and to those who have not yet done so. Based on their experience in college-level math and English courses, students expressed confidence that they had compensated well for their earlier lack of preparation. At this stage in their academic life, they did not see lack of college-readiness earlier in their life as barrier to transfer.
- **Students are confident about their ability to adjust well at their future university:** Since all students had completed a significant part of a bachelor's degree, it is not surprising that they were confident in their ability to fit well in any future academic environment.
- Other transfer related findings:
  - **Degrees matter:** Being an associate degree graduate, especially a graduate earning the Associate in Science – Transfer (AS-T) or the Major Related Programs (MRP) for business, the Associate in Business DTA/MRP, resulted in higher transfer rates than the rates for students without an associate degree.
  - **Not every “transfer” student plans to enroll in a bachelor’s program:** A small portion of students report that completing the two-year transfer associate degree met their educational goal. Another group identified as transfer students already has a bachelor’s degree and are taking courses to prepare to enter graduate programs. About two percent of transfer bound students already have a bachelor’s degree.
  - **About two out of ten who transfer within 10 years, do so after a delay of one to nine years:** A significant number of students who transfer have reasons for taking time between their years at the CTC and attending a university. “Pay as you go” students work to save for tuition and books, for example.

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<sup>4</sup> The vast majority of associate degree graduates in this study had completed the generic Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA) associate degree which assures junior standing for students accepted at a university. Students also completed the Associate in Science – Transfer (AS-T) designed for chemistry, engineering, physics and related majors and the Associate in Business DTA/MRP designed for transfer to bachelor's in business. Because transfer rates vary with the type of degree (highest for the AS-T and Business DTA/MRP), much of the analysis in the report is based on DTA graduates.

## Previous Related Studies

Significant research has been conducted regarding the factors that might impede transfer and/or bachelor's degree completion. The following factors are consistently identified in the previous research:

- **Proximity:** Transfer and/or bachelor's degree completion is less likely if the distance to nearest comprehensive bachelor's institution or the program of interest to the student is beyond normal commute distance. (Chance, 2009; Calcagno & Alfonso 2007)
- **Work/family conflicts:** Conflict with work schedule/family commitments reduces transfer. Working full-time increases the risk of not completing a degree. At some level of being both a worker and a student, the stress of doing both makes continuing in college too difficult. (Johnson and Rochkind, 2009; Chance, 2009; Ignash, 2008; Horn, 1999)
- **Parenting status:** Being a single parent and caring for children at home each separately and in combination increases the risk of not completing a degree. (Horn, 1999)
- **Delaying college going (going to college at a non-traditional college age):** Older students (25 and older) are less likely than others to complete degrees. (Horn, 1999)
- **Lack of goal directedness:** Having a clear goal increases the chance of transfer and/or degree completion. (Johnson and Rochkind, 2009; Cabrera, Nora and Castañeda, 1993)
- **Costs of College:** Concerns about cost/indebtedness of upper division work may reduce degree completion. Being financially independent (i.e., students who rely on their own income or savings and whose parents are not sources of income for meeting college costs) is a risk factor for not completing college. (Johnson and Rochkind, 2009; St. John & Paulsen 1996; Horn, 1999)
- **SES:** Students from lower SES groups are less likely to attend college and less likely to persist to a bachelor's degree. (Wang, 2009, Horn, 1999 (first generation student))
- **Lower previous GPA, math remediation:** Starting college academically under-prepared increases the risk of not completing a degree. (Roksa and Calcagno, 2008, Cabrera, Nora and Castañeda, 1993; Horn 1999)
- **Not fitting in:** Concerns about the "culture" or expectations at the upper division institution or not seeing themselves fitting in can reduce the chance of degree completion. (Ignash, 2008)
- **Lack of needed transfer information:** Lack of consistent information for transfer, or lack of a connection to the potential new institution can reduce transfer success. (Ignash, 2008)

## Study Design

This study combined direct student feedback from focus groups and extended interviews with administrative records based on matching with the National Student Clearinghouse.

### Focus Groups and Interviews:

**Current students at colleges with lower than typical transfer rates:** Five focus groups – 81 students – at Green River Community College, Centralia College and Everett Community College. Interviews were conducted in classes typically taken by transfer students in their

second year of study. Faculty members granted the researchers permission to use about 45 minutes of class time for this study.

- **Successful students at bachelor's institutions that serve students with risk factors:** Three focus groups - 27 students – Port Angeles (Western Washington University – WWU), City University and students in the Applied Management Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degree at Peninsula College), Pierce Fort Steilacoom and Highline (Central Washington University – CWU) class using interactive video (ITV) to teach students at Highline and Pierce campuses at the same time.) The CWU faculty members granted the researchers permission to use about 45 minutes of class time. WWU, City U and Peninsula College asked upper division students to attend a special session for the focus groups.
- **18 phone interviews with non-transferring class of 2006-07 students:** These students were selected because they were well prepared for transfer (11 with associate degrees, seven without an associate degree) and appeared to not have transferred in 2007-08 or in 2008-09. Two of the students had transferred during that time but for various reasons were not so identified in the National Student Clearinghouse (NCH) match.<sup>5</sup> Students were initially contacted either by their college or staff at the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) regarding the potential survey. Most students were contacted by mail. Each student received two subsequent mail follow-ups. Due to a low response rate, students with email addresses were also contacted at least twice by email.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Administrative Records Analysis**

- **Class of 2004-05 well-prepared students with a transfer goal at the time of their last enrollment:** 17,000 students were tracked for four years after college (60 percent with degrees and 40 percent with 75 or more credits and no degree).<sup>7</sup>
- **Class of 2006-07 well-prepared students with a transfer goal:** 18,000 students were tracked for four years after college.
- **Subset of the Class of 1998-99 well-prepared students with a transfer goal:** SBCTC had appropriate records to conduct a match for 8,500 students. This match was conducted to provide an estimate of the year to year increase in transfers over a ten year post-college time span.

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<sup>5</sup> More than 2,500 collegiate institutions participate in the record system of the Clearinghouse. Matches are based on a combination of social security number and name. Students who do not authorize use of their social security number for research purposes are not matched. International students are not matched.

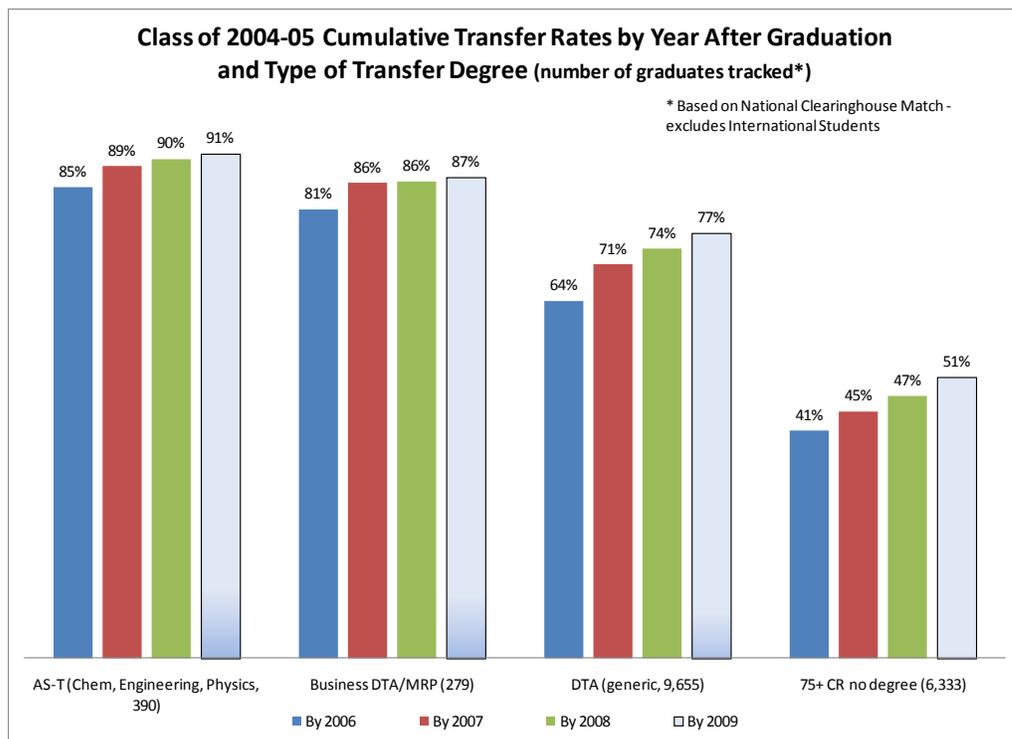
<sup>6</sup> Only half of the selected students had valid email addresses and only about one in ten with an email address responded to the repeated requests. The best response rate was after the second email directly from the researcher.

<sup>7</sup> Most students without the degree completed significantly more than 75 college-level credits at a median of 96 credits. This suggests that while students had enough credits for a degree (90 credits) they lacked some required courses for a transfer degree.

## Detailed Findings

**Degree vs. credits:** Transfer rates are much higher for students who complete a transfer associate degree especially AS-T and MRP graduates,<sup>8</sup> than for students with a transfer goal who leave college well prepared for transfer but without a degree. Transfer rates for all groups increase

significantly between the first post-college year to the fourth year. Analysis of a sample of the class of 1998-99 suggests that cumulative transfer rates continue to increase as time goes by. That longer term analysis showed a ten years transfer rate four percent higher than the four year rate for the degree graduates and



eight percent higher for those without degrees. There are students with the associate degree or with 75 or more credits and without the degree who will not yet have transferred after 10 years.

	Estimated transfer rate after 10 years	Estimated not yet transferred student numbers after 10 year
<b>Generic DTA</b>	81%	1,800
<b>With No Degree</b>	59%	2,600

**Students continue in college when they are clear about their goal:** If students are unsure about their future major or future occupation when they complete their associate degree or leave college, they report that they are not likely to transfer. Students reported that if they lacked certainty about a future major, their plan was to finish the associate degree, save money for college in the future and transfer only when they developed a clearer goal. Students described

<sup>8</sup> Not only do students with these degrees transfer at higher rates, they also complete their business or STEM bachelor's degree with fewer credits than other transfers. STEM bachelor's majors with an AS-T degree completed 234 total credits (CTC and university credits combined) versus six more (240) credits for those who transferred a generic DTA. Business bachelor's graduates with the Business DTA/MRP completed just under 200 credits versus seven more (207) for those who took the generic DTA.

transfer as a more significant investment in financial terms than their CTC work. While some current students were ready to make that invest, others planned to wait.

**Proximity Matters:** Well-prepared students enrolled at colleges at some distance from a university or comprehensive university center are less likely to transfer. Out of all the CTCs the lowest transfer rates are at the following colleges: Peninsula, Walla Walla, Everett,<sup>9</sup> Olympic, Skagit Valley and Centralia. Transfer rates are highest at Cascadia,<sup>10</sup> Whatcom, Yakima, Spokane Falls, and Clark; colleges that are near public universities or in the case of Yakima, host a University Center and near a private institution (Heritage). The graph on the next page displays this pattern. Twice as many students among those who live near a university or comprehensive university center typically transfer to that institution than to any other institution. If the broad array of well-prepared students at all colleges had the same transfer options as at Cascadia, the college with the highest transfer rate, another 1,500 students<sup>11</sup> would transfer each year.

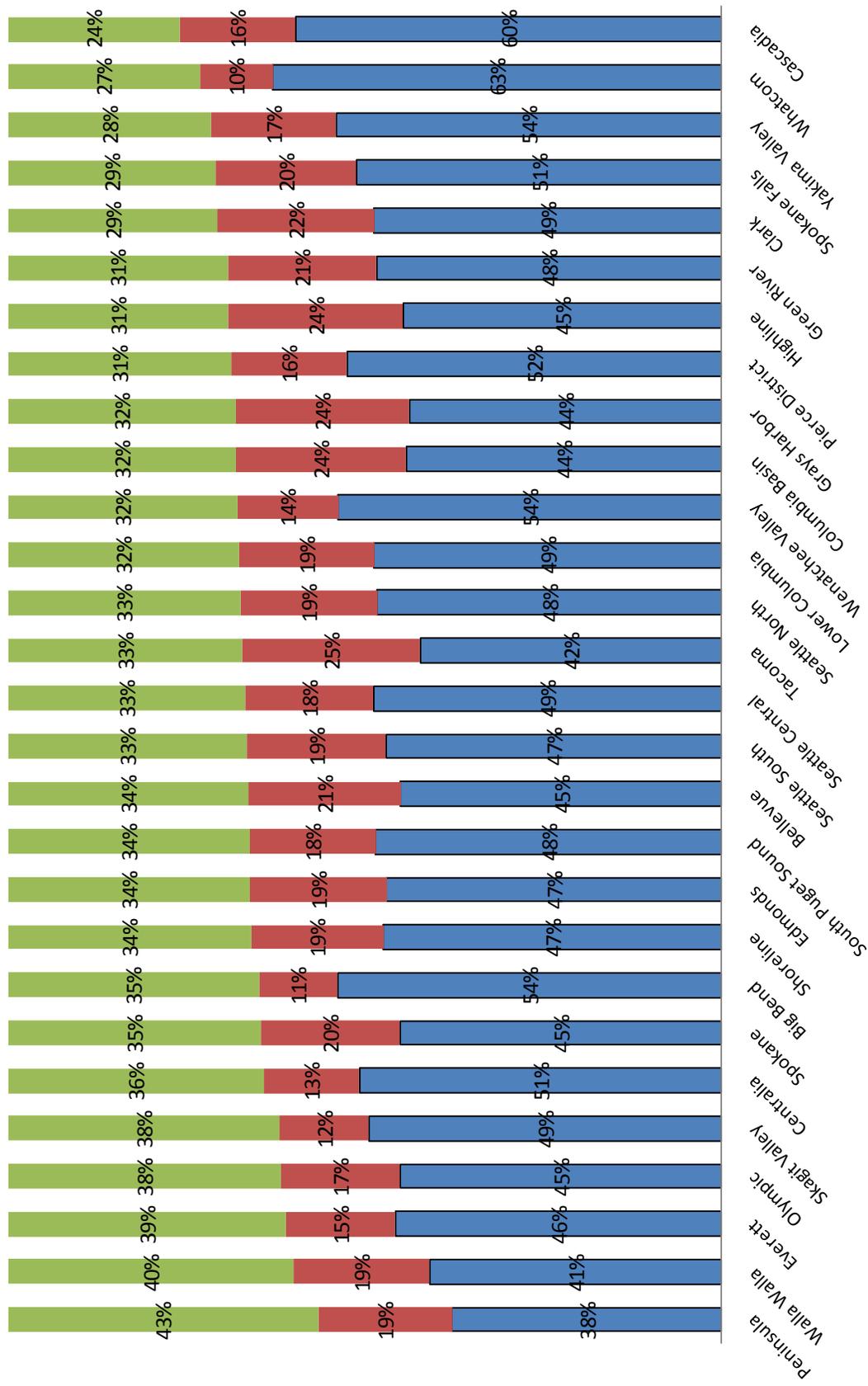
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<sup>9</sup> These students left Everett Community College in 2004-05 before the growth in opportunities at the University Center of North Puget Sound.

<sup>10</sup> Cascadia, the college with the highest transfer rate has factors other than proximity to UW Bothell (its primary transfer institution) that assure a higher transfer rate. The key other factor is a slightly younger student population. Transfer students at Cascadia are 20.7 years of age (median) compared to 21.2 for transfer students in the CTC system.

<sup>11</sup> This calculation was based on applying the Cascadia transfer rate to potential students at all colleges, then subtracting from that potential transfer number the actual number of transfers.

# Class of 2004-05 by College Transfer Rates After 4 Years

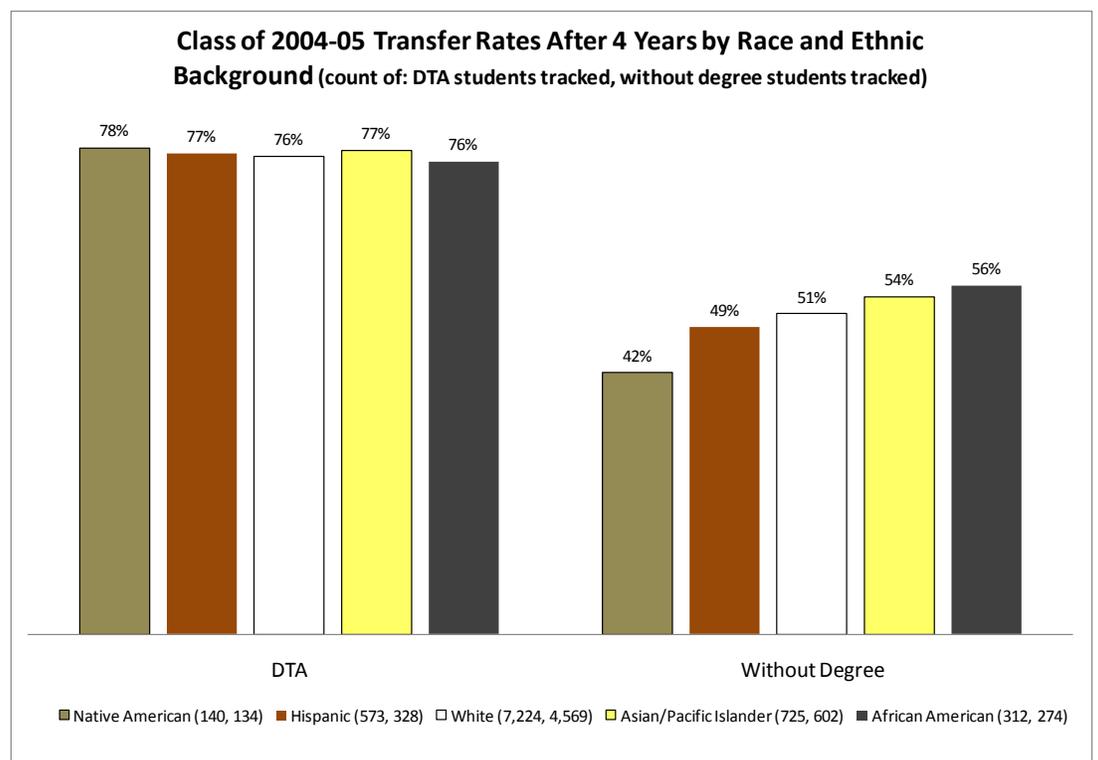


■ Transfer with Degree   
 ■ Transfer without Degree   
 ■ Not Transfer Yet

While about three in ten students in the focus groups and one interviewed student were willing or desired to “go away” to college, the vast majority of CTC students transfer to an institution in the local community. It is likely that the norm of traveling no more than 20 minutes to attend CTC classes applies as well for travel for upper division course work. eLearning is a viable option for upper division course work for students who had successful lower-division online course experience. But some students have no experience with online course work and others have had a mixed experience, leading to a preference for at least some face-to-face instruction.

- Students really appreciate the University Center programs (CWU, WWU, and City U). Students said they would not be in college if it were not for such a program located near where they live, work or raise their family. Some would move to take the same program if offered in another community but not a community perceived as high cost. Commonly students listed Seattle and Bellingham as examples of communities they thought of as higher cost communities.
- Those with younger children at home said they could not go away to college. They needed/wanted to be with their kids at night. Some have similar needs related to aging parents.
- Staying in a good job is another motivation described by students for going to college in the local community.

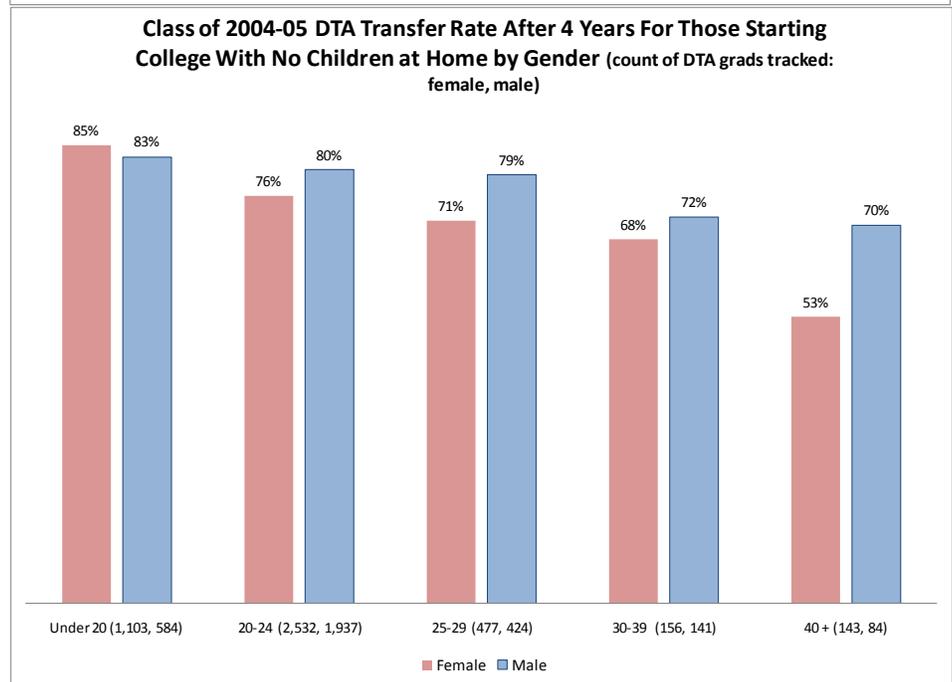
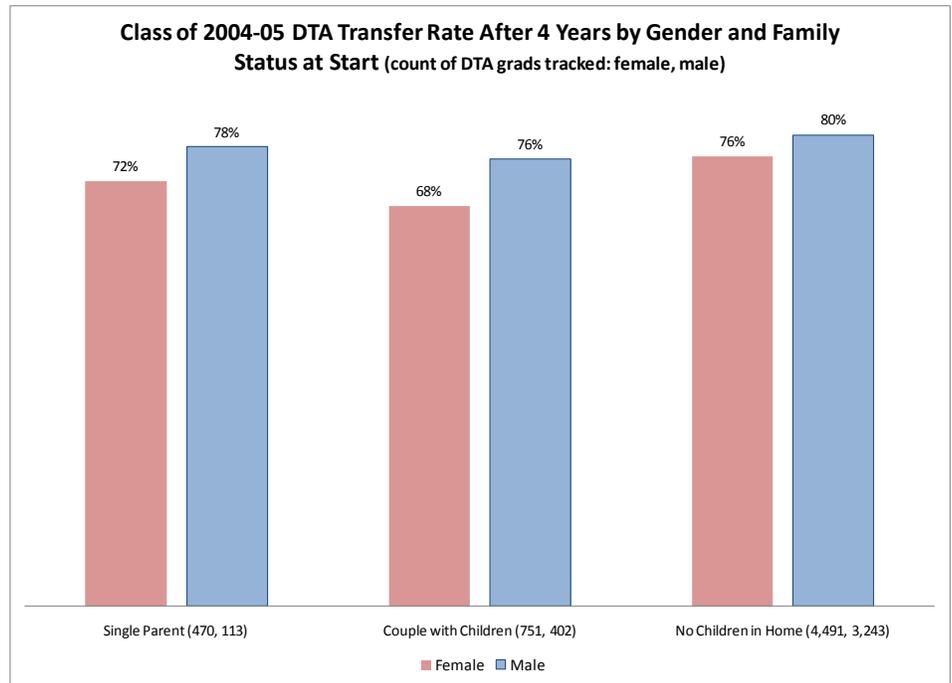
**Degree attainment eliminates race/ethnic transfer rate differences:** Race and ethnic differences are evident in transfer rates only for well-prepared transfer students not yet completing their degree (lowest for Native American). Once a student completes an associate degree transfer rates are nearly identical for all race and ethnic groups. Because transfer rates vary by type of degree (highest for the AS-T and Business MRP and lower for the generic DTA), this race and ethnic analysis for graduates is based only on the DTA. The transfer rates four years after completing the degree varied little by race and ethnic background. However, the similar four years after rate for students without the associate degree showed a



lower transfer rate for Native American in particular. In addition, Native American students were more likely to leave college with 75 or more credits and without the degree than any other group.

**Time for family impacts transfer, especially for women:** More women attend college than men. In terms of sheer numbers, more women transfer from CTCs than men, but the rate of transfer – the percentage who transfer – is higher for men than women, except for students under the age of 20. Family responsibility issues related to transfer requires some examination of parent status by gender and age. Transfer rates for women with children in the home are lower than for men.<sup>12</sup>

Apparently family responsibilities have a more negative impact for women than for men. Very young women – those who complete an associate degree while still in their teens – with no children at home (1,103 female students) transfer at a slightly higher rate than males of the same age and family circumstance. It is women of typical childbearing age who may



<sup>12</sup> The pattern of differences is similar with the DTA and without a degree, though the gender differences are somewhat larger for those without the degree. For illustration purposes information for transfer patterns by gender, family status and age are shown only for those with the DTA.

have had children since starting college who transfer at a lower rate than men.<sup>13</sup> Women in the 40 and older age group may have family responsibilities, such as care of aging parents or care of grandchildren, which preclude transfer.<sup>14</sup>

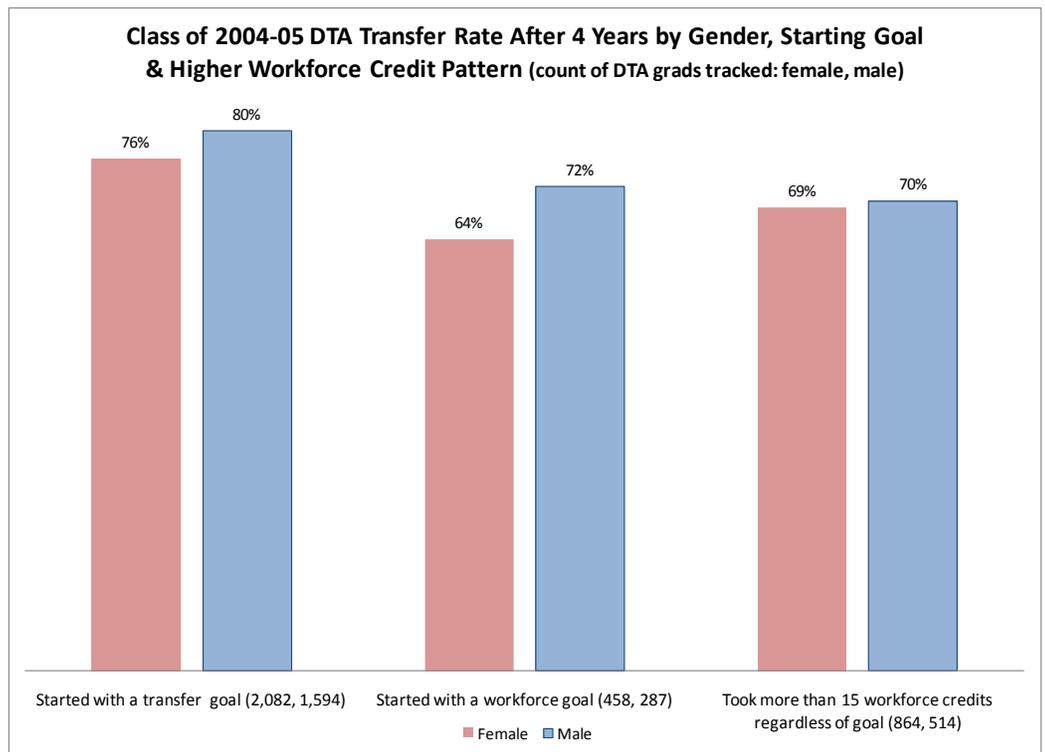
**Workforce credits are not a barrier to transfer for most students:** Part of the issue for women and transfer is the issue of workforce courses taken in the transfer degree. While taking workforce credits is not itself a barrier to the degree for most students, women are more likely to take workforce credits, and women who are parents are especially more likely to do so. Taking more than 15 workforce credits is related to lower transfer rates.

Workforce credits can be included as electives in the DTA, if students take 15 or fewer such credits. Most transfer students took two classes (median of 10 credits) in the workforce area. Transfer rates drop only for students who take 15 or more credits.

Students starting college with a workforce goal but later deciding to transfer took more workforce credits, median of 16 credits and more credits overall (median of 102 college-level credits in the associate degree versus 96 for other associate degree graduates).<sup>15</sup> Those students had a lower transfer rate than students who started college with a transfer goal.

One in five women DTA graduates started college with a workforce goal. Immediate income needs may have influenced these women. More than a third of these women (35 percent) were parents with children at home at the time

they started college. The same pressures that set these students on the workforce path may later continue to reduce their likelihood of transfer.



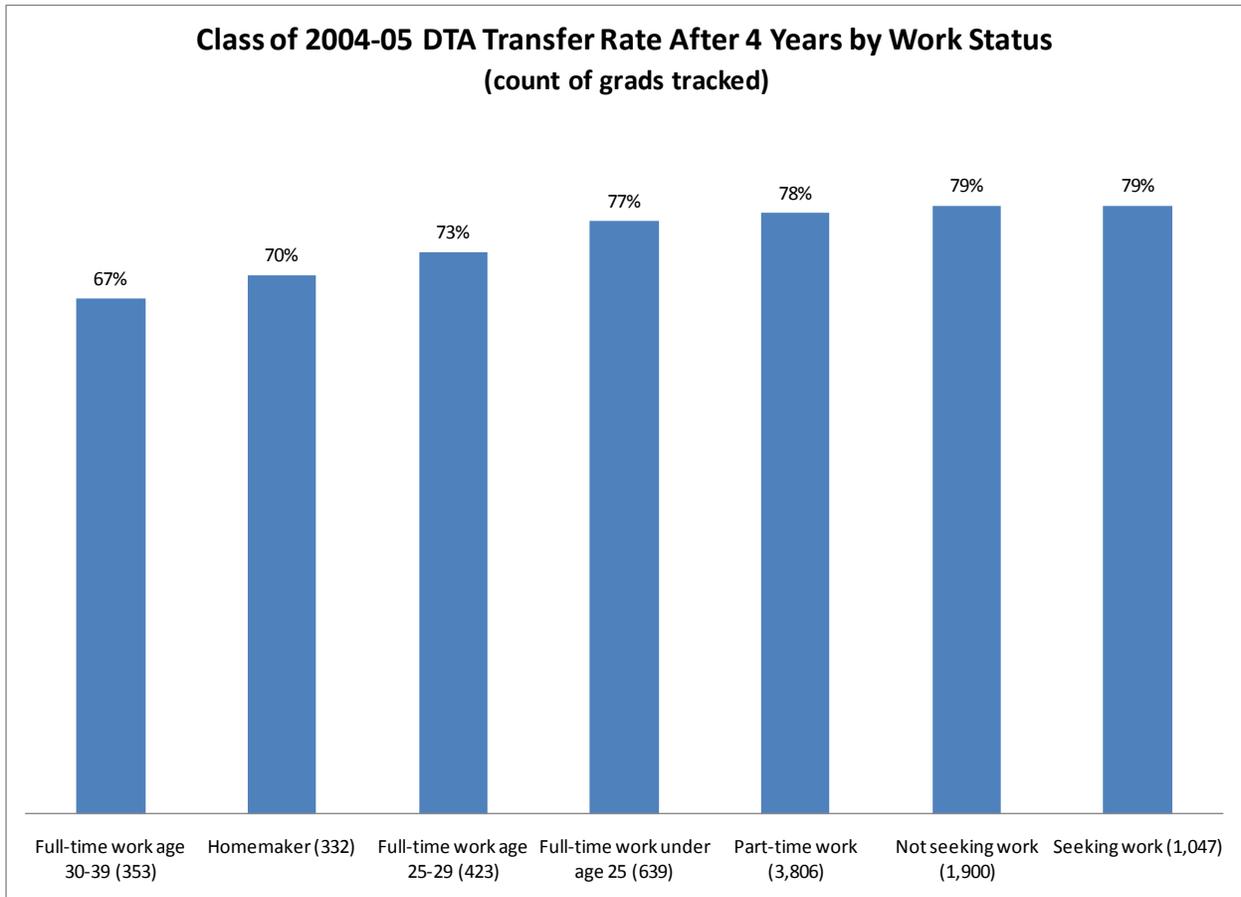
<sup>13</sup> The family status information is collected at the time students start college and typically not updated. It is reasonable to assume that some young women had children while enrolled at college and thus had a change in status not captured in these data.

<sup>14</sup> Two students interviewed indicated that care of grandchildren was a reason for not finishing their associate degree and then transferring.

<sup>15</sup> Women DTA graduates who started college with a workforce goal accumulated slightly more workforce credits than did men DTA graduates with the same workforce goal (median of 17.5 credits for females, 15 for males).

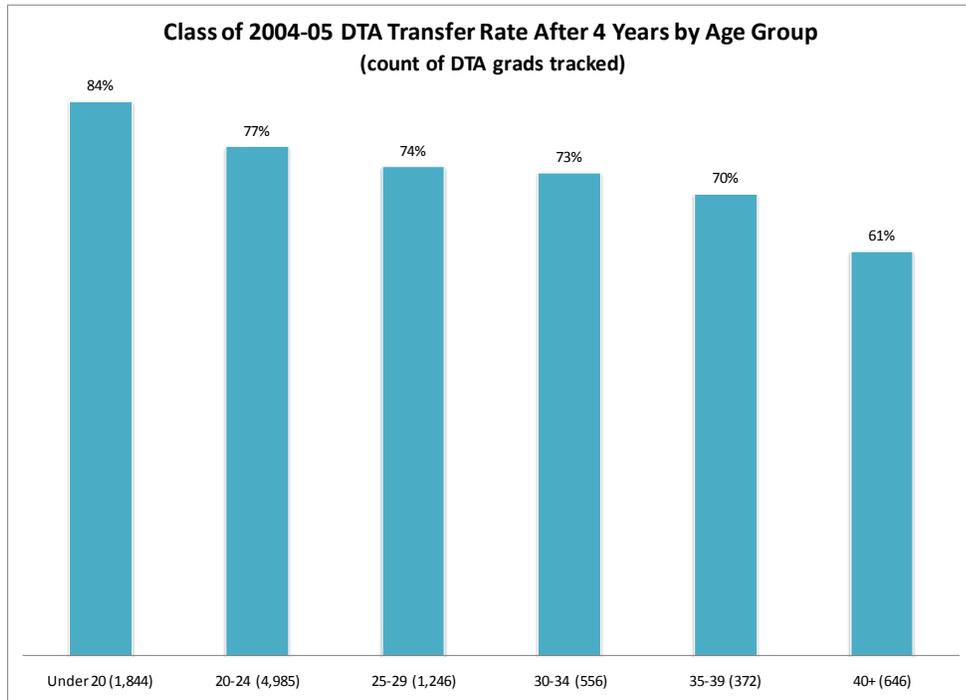
Men are less likely to start with a workforce goal before switching to transfer. Just 15 percent of male DTA graduates started with a workforce goal. Those men had an eight percent higher transfer rate than did the women who followed the same pattern.

**Full-time work impacts transfer:** Full-time workers 25 and older have a lower transfer rate than those not working. Some students do full-time work and full-time college, but in interviews they reported that their load leads to burn out and creates challenges because few employers are sufficiently flexible to the different schedules needed each quarter.



**Students are confident about their ability to fit into college:** Since all students had completed a significant part of a bachelor’s degree, it is not surprising that they were confident in their ability to fit well within any future academic environment.

**Older adults have lower transfer rates:** Younger CTC students transfer at high rates – 84 percent for students under age 20 when they complete their associate degree. While transfer rates remain high for all DTA graduates, with each five years of age, the transfer rates drop. It is likely that factors such as family, full-time work and being placebound account for this differential transfer rate by age group. Delayed college going or dropping in and out of college are typical for older students



and the previous research connected those factors to reduced degree completion. In the focus groups and interviews, however, delayed college going and dropping in and out of college was a common pattern for both students who had successfully transferred and those who had not yet transferred.

**Costs of college:** Lack of information about the net cost of college for those students eligible for financial aid is a barrier to transfer for some students. Some students have identified viable transfer options to institutions where tuition rates significantly exceed the CTC tuition rate. Without considering the potential for increased financial aid to cover that tuition differential, the students reject those transfer options. Previous research has outlined the extent to which students misunderstand college costs such as confusing the “sticker price” with the out-of-pocket cost.

A substantial number of CTC transfers attend college on a “pay as you go” basis, working for awhile to save the funds before paying tuition for classes. Students with parental or spouse support for tuition costs either mentioned cost as a potential barrier to transfer or listed only state-funded institutions (thus lower tuition institutions) as places they would attend. Four out of ten current transfer students (focus group participants) had no support from their parents for any expenses including room and board. Among former students who had not yet transferred, the majority had no parental support for college.

Regardless of their source of aid (GI Bill, employer reimbursement, spouse, parent, federal or state aid, or pay as you go), students see going on to a university as a potentially beneficial investment. But they weigh costs carefully. One factor that can change the cost benefit balance for students is the need to move to another community to go to college. For those students who wanted to move, the perceived cost to live in the university community was important. Some students said they were willing to go away to college but would not go to Seattle or Bellingham

which they called higher cost communities. Some reported that a longer commute than their current commute would be a transfer barrier. Current students travel about 20 minutes or less to their college.<sup>16</sup>

**Starting college academically underprepared is not a barrier:** Students expressed confidence in their academic abilities regardless of their skill level when they first started college years or even decades ago. Most students interviewed started college under-prepared in math and some were under-prepared in writing. Students described successes in college-level math and English classes and expressed confidence that they had compensated well for their earlier lack of preparation.

**Not every student with a “transfer” goal is destined to attend a bachelor’s program:** A small portion of students report that completing the two-year transfer degree met their educational goal. About two percent of students who report a transfer goal already have a bachelor’s degree. Most of those students are taking courses to prepare for graduate programs.

**Lack of major specific information that fits their current situation:** Students reported that they looked for major specific transfer information. Students believe you need to “know your major so that the last 30 credits of electives in your DTA meet BA prerequisites.” They are not satisfied with typical generic transfer information. Students said they want to know exactly what to take to prepare for their field of study. They appreciate advice that helps them stay in their field by finding a related major if they do poorly in required courses. Some students use the MPR and AS-T pathways to meet this major-specific advising need. Lacking other sources, students look at the departmental pages of university web sites for advising information. Those pages however are designed for university freshmen and thus do not provide the most helpful information for transfer who need to plan at least two transfer options in case they are not admitted to their first choice institution or major.

Many students apparently selected their transfer institution in a uniformed manner, never making a visit or talking with anyone at the future institution.

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<sup>16</sup> This 20 minute pattern applies to eastern and western Washington students alike.

While most students had little or no meaningful information in preparation for transfer, some gave rave reviews of a particular faculty advisor or program director who gave major-specific transfer help. Most students, however, hunted for information without success. One of the helpful advisors is Nancy Bluestein-Johnson, Program Manager, WWU Huxley College of the Environment on the Peninsulas. She serves students at Peninsula College, Olympic College and Everett Community College.

**About two out of ten who transfer within 10 years do so after a delay of one to nine years:** A significant number of students who transfer have reasons for taking time between their years at the CTC and attending a university. Family or work interests were the most common reason students cited for delaying transfer. Work issues included moving to another state and increased responsibility or hours at work. Care of children or grandchildren was the most common family issues. About equal in frequency of being mentioned as reasons for delaying transfer were lack of clarity regarding their future major, lack of a program of interest in the immediate area, and financial considerations.

**Degree attainment minimizes social economic status (SES) transfer rate differences:** Consistent with the literature, transfer is somewhat more likely for those from higher socio-economic status. But the transfer rates for associate degree graduates are fairly similar with the lowest SES group at a five percent lower rate than the highest group, a meaningful but small difference for

**Huxley Program Manager:** Nancy Bluestein-Johnson provides one example of an advisor students found very helpful. She serves as the WWU Huxley Program Manager. She holds an 11 month appointment with a part-time program assistant and ITV tech support and a travel budget. Peninsula College provides office space. She currently advises 55 juniors and seniors and keeps email contact with about three times that many potential students.

Nancy is responsible for recruiting and assisting potential students at Olympic, Everett and Peninsula:

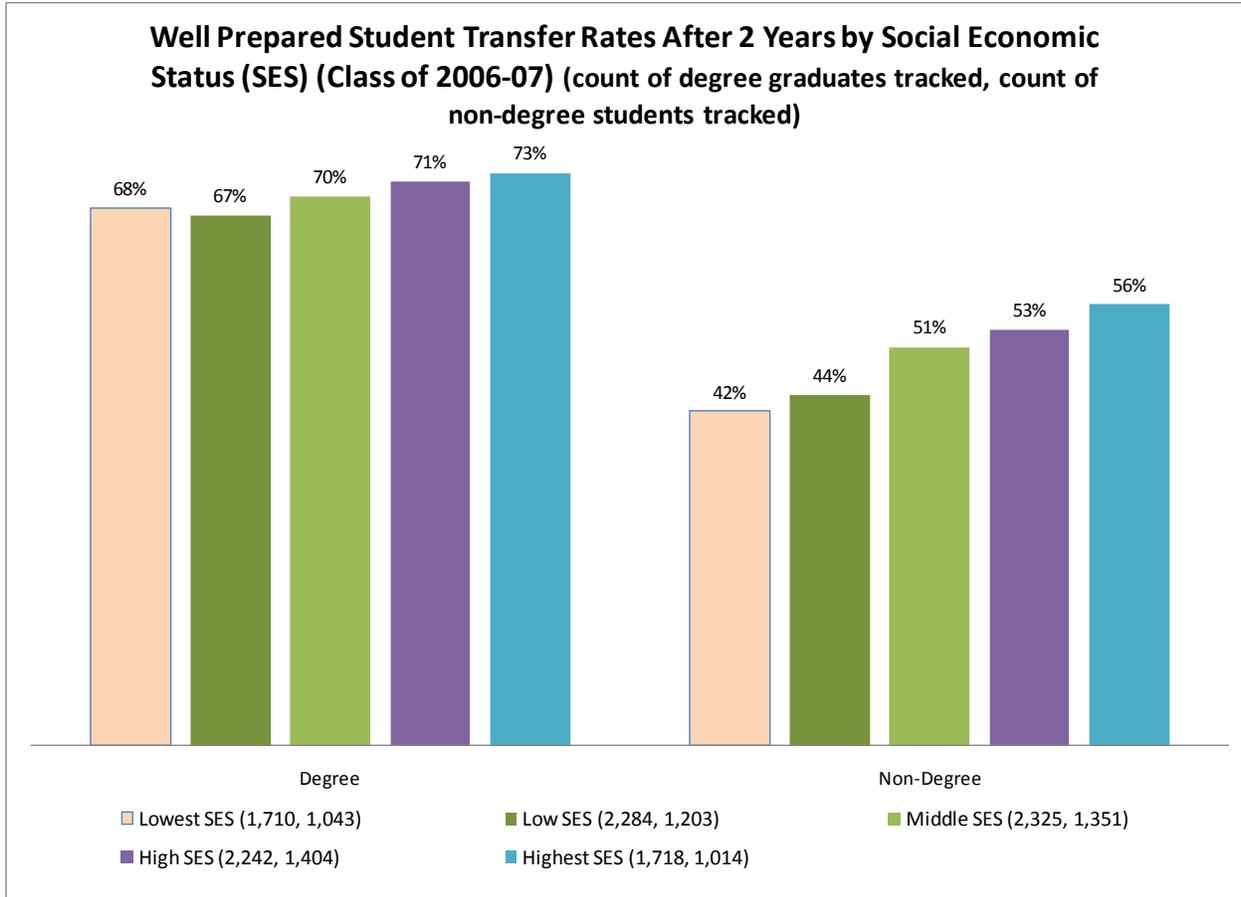
- **Olympic:** Connects with science faculty about the dates of her monthly visits and sends emails to potential students. Then Nancy spends 3 hours in the Bremer Student Center at an information table plus time in scheduled appointments. In addition she sends email to faculty, transfer counselor, potential students and puts up posters in advance of her quarterly formal information session. Because many of the interested students are working adults, she has had luck scheduling this session on Saturday morning.
- **Everett:** The University Center of North Puget Sound does the marketing for her 2 times a month visit including formal information sessions at noon and 4 pm.
- **Peninsula:** Nancy is located on the Peninsula campus and available to students on campus.

Nancy stays in constant contact with interested students. For example she sends periodic emails to potential students such as in advance of the Feb 15 FAFSA deadline.

To advise students prior to entering the program Nancy keeps tabs as to which colleges anywhere in the region offer the prerequisite courses (online or face-to-face) thus she can help students find a needed course even if not offered at their own college.

**Environmental Science/Policy:** The Science degree requires an AS-T background with plenty of chemistry, biology, and calculus. The policy degree requires less math, biology, and chemistry and focuses on environmental policy. Students in that path may minor in environmental science. The degree fits well with the natural resources issues of the peninsulas and with the urban growth challenges in the Everett area.

this examination of all degree graduates. Transfer rates, however, follow the pattern expected from previous studies of notably lower transfer rates for low SES students without the degree.



## Potential Institutional and System Actions

This report includes actions to address many of the identified transfer barriers. If implanted, these actions could increase the number of well-prepared transfers. These actions would, however, require changes in the current transfer strategies. Continuing the same strategies used today will likely not reduce the barriers to transfer identified in this study.

### Where transfer options needs to increase:

- **Increase bachelor's options within a 20 minute commute:** If the transfer rates for the six colleges with the lowest transfer rates (the colleges furthest from universities) matched the average transfer rate for the CTCs combined, another 160 students could transfer each year.<sup>17</sup> Increasing bachelor's options might include comprehensive University Center offerings, CTC applied bachelor's options and more eLearning degree options. Comprehensive University Center offerings might include business, elementary education, selected secondary teacher preparation, liberal studies with a social science focus, liberal studies with a humanities focus, and a regionally relevant science and engineering related (STEM) degrees.

### Which additional students:

- **Aim additional transfer options toward older students including women with family responsibilities:** Transfer rates drop significantly for adults (25 and older) with children at home. To increase transfer for these students, upper division programs are needed that meet the needs of parents or caregivers. Such non-traditional programs might use eLearning or University Center approaches marketed to re-entry adults. Programs might include pathways for para-educators and early childhood education professionals to gain teacher certification, upside down degrees, applied management BAS degrees, liberal studies with a social science focus, and liberal studies with a humanities focus. If transfer rates for all groups were equal to the current transfer rate for younger students who are not parents, several hundred additional students could transfer.

Bachelor's options for older students must be flexible in time scheduling. Cost must be perceived as low. Programs of interest that students reported are not currently available locally include:

- Fine and performing arts related liberal studies degrees (in Pierce County liberal studies degrees at public universities are social science focused).
- Technology or science related pathways that don't required calculus skills for upper division course work.
- Some parts of the state have no local bachelor's in business or liberal studies.

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<sup>17</sup> For these and later estimates the number is based on applying the higher transfer rate, then subtracting the actual transfer numbers from the potential transfers based on the higher rate.

- **Jointly work to increase degree completion for Native American students and for students from lower SES families:** Non-traditional options such as the tribal program offered by The Evergreen State College (TESC) in coordination with several CTCs is an example of the type of effort that needs to be encouraged to assure high degree completion rates for Native American students. If Native American students completed degrees at the same rate as other students and maintained their current high transfer rate for graduates, there could be 130 more Native American transfers. Lower SES students may be aided by improving information about the net cost of college and program options for placebound adults.

**Putting transfer resources where students say they are needed:**

- **Jointly create a single advising service for students needing Transfer Plan-B to find information:** Seven of the 18 students completing extended interviews were stuck on their transfer path, blocked in part because the transfer plan developed two years earlier, when they were still in college, no longer fit their life circumstances. What would help these students now that they are two years out of college includes:
  - Access to information about degree options in their immediate community (20 minute commute) geared to working adults and online programs (students know how to find information about traditional opportunities at the main campus of nearby universities).
  - Upper division programs that either do not require or offer quick approaches for World Language (may not have taken in high school) and algebra/calculus (because skills may now be rusty).
  - Upper division programs that could be online only, face-to-face including hybrid and ITV only, or a mix. Most of the students interviewed had previous online course experience and would be interested in or willing to continue with online instruction for all or some of their course work.

This advising service needs to be aimed at students two or more years after completing their associate degree who have not yet transferred. Even well-made plans from several years ago may no longer meet student needs. This service could gather information about a student's educational path to-date, about a range of acceptable future goals and return information about relevant local or eLearning options. Strategies used in other states may prove helpful in designing an advising service. Many of these students need non-traditional programs such as those offered by eLearning and University Centers. Staff at those programs likely would be the key staff to implement this service.

- **CTCs could refocus some transfer advising resources to embed major-specific transfer information in courses:** Many 200 level courses are specific to a single major or set of majors. Most students in such courses enroll to prepare for the same transfer major(s). Thus faculty or staff advisors could deliver advising information as part of the course. Information could include all future options for courses needed to prepare for the major

including those at a nearby college or online to assure that students know how to get the courses to complete their associate degree in a timely manner. To increase transfers, CTC major specific advising must be based on accurate and specific information for the major. To assure a solid knowledge base, some colleges assign staff advisors to specific fields of study.

CTCs could also identify strategies to help students with uncertain goals to clarify those goals. For example, agreements could be made to allow College 101 goal setting-type courses to apply in transfer as an academic elective credit<sup>19</sup> not limited to the “gray area” electives. If transfer rates for generic DTA were equal to the current transfer rate for Business DTA/MRP graduates an additional several hundred students could transfer.

- **Connect transfer staff with students in ways other than Transfer Day events:** These are events where transfer advisors from universities set up tables at the CTC campus. None of the students, whether they had already successfully transferred or had not yet transferred, mentioned those events when asked about how they gained information to help them with transfer. Transfer days require considerable staff time that could likely be used in more effective ways providing major-specific information to potential transfer students or providing the personal connection between the student and their future institution. It is time to discontinue transfer days on CTC campuses.
- **Change university departmental information web pages:** Students look to university department web pages to learn about transfer requirements, so those pages need to provide appropriate information including reference to the statewide transfer agreements that best match the major. Since this work would likely require a joint effort by faculty in each major and transfer advisors at the universities, programs may need a small financial incentive to encourage this work. An organization like the Intercollege Relations Council (ICRC) might monitor the extent to which university departmental pages include appropriate transfer information. The transfer pages, regardless of institution could use the same clearly identifiable icon such as the one shown here.
- **Consider College-101 classes by Major:** Several community colleges offer College 101 classes that provide general planning, including planning for transfer. Given student interest in major-specific advising, providing break-out sections of the College 101 course for each major or similar major-specific majors would meet student’s need for major-specific transfer information. When these courses are offered, they need to be accepted as fully transferable academic electives comparable to similar classes offered for university freshmen.



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<sup>19</sup> Currently college-orientation, study skills and goal setting courses, if applicable to transfer at all, transfer as part of the maximum of 15 credits of non-traditional electives (electives not traditionally offered by universities). Increasingly universities are offering a College 101 class for some or all new freshmen.

## Providing information about the cost of college:

- **Provide clearer information about college costs:** Before they select their future transfer institution, students need easy ways to understand the likely net cost of college attendance (including the additional cost of transportation or moving). Students are adept at finding information about the tuition cost, but such information does not clarify net cost when considering the increased financial aid students may receive. Students from lower SES families may especially gain from improved net cost information. Transfer students who re-enter college after previously acting in a manner that precludes future federal aid, need to know about second chance financial aid options. If second chance options exist, they need to know that. If there are no second chance options, they need to be created. Students seldom mentioned loans as a means of funding college even though federally supported low-interest loans could fit well to fund upper-division course work.

## Summary

Transfer rates for well-prepared students are already quite high. Some 79 percent of those with transfer associate degrees enrolled at a bachelor's institutions within four years of completing the associate degree. Transfer rates for well-prepared students without the degree (those with 75 or more college credits) are lower, yet still the slight majority of that group also has transferred in that same time period. Based on this study of factors that impede transfer, several strategies emerge that could result in even more students transferring. Given the nature of the current impediments, to increase the transfer number will require changed transfer advising practices, including additional financial aid information, and increases in degree options for older placebound adults.

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