

ENGAGING FACULTY VALUES TO DEVELOP SUPPORTIVE TRANSFER CULTURES

A Toolkit for Transfer Champions

TACKLING TRANSFER REPORT | 2021



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About the Authors

Shanna Smith Jaggars and Marcos D. Rivera are researchers in the Office of Student Academic Success at The Ohio State University, where they conduct qualitative and quantitative research projects focused on academic support programs, patterns of student academic progression, and instructional improvement initiatives. In a collaborative effort with transfer champions at Ohio State, they identified strengths and areas of opportunities to improve supports for the nearly 3,500 internal and external transfer students who enter the university's selective Columbus campus each year. In this brief, Jaggars and Rivera share strategies that help clarify the alignment between transfer student success and commonly held faculty values of collegiality, fairness, and academic excellence.

About Tackling Transfer

The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, HCM Strategists, and Sova have joined together through the Tackling Transfer initiative to partner with institutional leaders, policymakers, and practitioners in Minnesota, Texas, and Virginia to dramatically improve transfer outcomes for baccalaureate-seeking students who begin at community colleges.

This comprehensive effort incorporates policy, practice, research, and strategic communications to foster the conditions for scaled and measurable improvements for baccalaureate-seeking transfer students, including the large number of students from low-income backgrounds and students of color who begin their education at community colleges.

The **Aspen Institute College Excellence Program** aims to advance higher education practices and leadership that significantly improve student learning, completion, and employment after college—especially for the many students from low-income backgrounds and students of color on American campuses.

HCM Strategists is a public policy and advocacy consulting firm committed to removing barriers and transforming how education is delivered. Our work focuses on developing sound public policy, aligning teaching and learning practices and advancing meaningful accountability and equitable strategic financing. HCM works to support leaders and organizations that prioritize the voices and outcomes of Black, Hispanic, Native American, recent immigrant, low-income and adult students.

Sova focuses on improving the quality and accelerating the pace of complex problem solving in the areas of higher education and workforce development. Animated by a core commitment to advancing socioeconomic mobility for more Americans, Sova pursues its mission through distinctive approaches to will-building, strategic planning, change leadership and process improvement.

Acknowledgments and Citation

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Introduction

The global pandemic changed enrollment patterns across the country, forcing four-year colleges and universities to reevaluate recruitment and retention efforts.¹ At the same time, ongoing legal challenges to affirmative action continue to complicate enrollment strategies and reinforce the severe underrepresentation of low-income, Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students at highly selective colleges and universities.² As one strategy to address revenue gaps and meet equity goals, some four-year institutions are sharpening their focus on the recruitment and enrollment of community college transfer students, who are typically more diverse than the institution's directly-admitted freshmen.³ However, many four-year colleges and universities do not have explicit support systems in place to ensure strong retention and graduation rates for transfer students.⁴

To improve policies and practices that support transfer student retention and graduation, four-year institutions must cultivate a **transfer-receptive** or **transfer-supportive** culture.⁵ Most colleges and universities have one or more **transfer champions** who work closely with transfer students and may advocate on their behalf (see Feature A: Transfer Champions).

Champions may be successful in implementing specific improvements for transfer students—such as establishing transfer centers or creating stronger transfer pathways into the institution—but these efforts can be undermined by the larger institutional culture. In particular, faculty interact directly with students in advising or teaching roles, and their implicit or explicit perceptions about transfer students may dramatically shape those students' sense of belonging, motivation, and academic success. In this brief, we provide transfer champions with tools to cultivate faculty partners and positively inform the institution's conversations and understandings about transfer students.

1 Huie et al., 2021; Tanzi, 2021.

2 In particular, see Lu & Tsotsong for an overview of developments in SFFA vs. Harvard.

3 LaViolet et al., 2018

4 Wyner et al., 2016

5 Jain et al., 2020

FEATURE A: TRANSFER CHAMPIONS

“**Transfer champion**” is a common term used among people who work with transfer students, but what does it mean? The National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS) shared their definition with us:

At NISTS, we believe that transfer champions are **agents, connectors, and advocates**. Through these roles, they work consistently to ensure that transfer student access, persistence, and success aren’t just buzzwords—they’re deeply ingrained values that guide and are visible in everyday work.

- As **agents**, transfer champions seek out, listen to, and validate transfer students’ stories while affirming educational aspirations and abilities. Agents demystify the transfer experience for students by proactively filling information gaps about college life, institutional details, and transfer logistics to encourage confident decisions on the transfer journey. Agents also aren’t afraid to ask questions about transfer practices and policies and amend them to ease student progress.
- As **connectors**, transfer champions help students envision their entire transfer journey by clarifying the relationship between completing items on a transfer to-do list and meeting long-term academic and career goals. They facilitate connections to people and resources meant to ease the transition and understand that personal introductions are more impactful than passive referrals. Connectors work to alleviate transfer shock and actively promote engagement and belonging through culturally relevant practices.
- As **advocates**, transfer champions are deeply committed to communicating the value transfer students bring to institutions. They educate themselves about transfer data, research, and stories, and share what they’ve learned to dispel myths and negative underlying assumptions about transfer students and the transfer process. Advocates take every opportunity to discuss transfer student needs and identities, and they leverage their positions to ensure that transfer is accounted for in strategic and financial decisions.

Transfer champions work in many different roles at both transfer-sending and -receiving institutions. Whether on the front lines facilitating transfer programs and services, in the classroom, or behind the scenes building partnerships and procuring resources, their efforts are crucial to creating equitable transfer pathways and supports.

An institution’s culture is composed of a mix of assumptions, values, and artifacts (see Feature B: Components of Culture). For example, imagine a kindly and distinguished STEM professor “Dr. Goode,” who serves on numerous governance committees. Dr. Goode’s assumptions about transfer students are informed by transfer students he has taught or mentored. Yet a student’s transfer status is invisible to instructors unless the student chooses to disclose it; thus while Dr. Goode has taught hundreds of transfer students over his long career, he is aware of only a

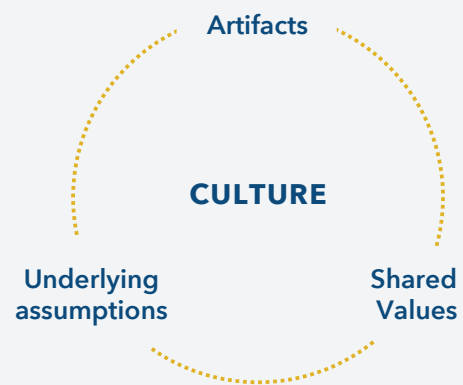
handful. His anecdotal impressions are amplified or countered by broader institutional messaging and other artifacts regarding transfer students. Blending together his personal experiences and institutional signals, Dr. Goode’s resulting assumptions about the “typical transfer student” may be well-aligned with his existing values and priorities, in which case the good doctor may be excited to welcome and support transfer students. However, if his assumptions about transfer students are misaligned with his values, then he may feel skeptical about these students.

In this brief, we describe three values that are commonly held by academic faculty, connect them with potential underlying assumptions about transfer students, and suggest artifacts that can help overturn false assumptions and clarify the alignment between faculty’s pre-existing values and the transfer student mission.

FEATURE B: COMPONENTS OF CULTURE

A university’s culture determines the extent to which its policies and personnel implicitly and explicitly welcome and support transfer students. Schein posited that **culture** is shorthand for the shared values, assumptions, and artifacts of an institution.

- **Shared values** represent goals, ideas, and beliefs that most individuals within the institution agree are important, and that explicitly inform their institutional decision-making and behaviors. In this brief, we focus on three shared values which are commonly espoused within academic settings: collegiality, fairness, and academic excellence.
- **Underlying assumptions** also inform decision-making and behavior, but while shared values are often recognized and articulated in institutional settings, assumptions are implicit and invisible.
- **Artifacts** are visible indicators of the institution’s values, goals, beliefs, and attitudes, and may include architecture, media, policies, practices, personnel, reports, data dashboards, or other documentable items.



Source: Schein & Schein (2016)

In Schein’s model, the three components of culture are intertwined, and mutually influence or reinforce one another. In particular, while artifacts typically represent or communicate the institution’s values and assumptions, they can also influence the values and assumptions of individuals within the institution. For example, in order to challenge assumptions about transfer students that are based on anecdotal encounters, transfer champions can share data that provide a broader and deeper understanding of these students.

In this brief, we center artifacts as tools of institutional change, and discuss how they can be leveraged to communicate positive beliefs and assumptions about transfer students, based on a shared values framework.

Three Shared Values

When engaging faculty, transfer champions need to clarify that shared values of **collegiality**, **fairness**, and **academic excellence** are aligned—not competing—with transfer student success. Artifacts can be very useful in supporting and reinforcing this message, and throughout this brief, we provide example artifacts which champions may freely adapt and incorporate into their own transfer-specific toolkit. See Feature C: Same Artifact, Different Settings, for ideas about how one artifact may be utilized in a variety of channels and settings as appropriate to the needs of each unique institution.

FEATURE C: SAME ARTIFACT, DIFFERENT SETTINGS

A useful artifact should not be deployed for a single event or setting and then forgotten. Instead, each video, pamphlet, data visualization, or other item can be adapted for deployment at multiple events or locations around campus. For example, a single video can be developed so it's appropriate for online public consumption, faculty orientations, on-campus presentations, or for looping on a screen in the student union.

At Ohio State, we placed several video artifacts on a website showcasing our transfer initiative, embedded them in multiple university and community presentations during the year, and collaborated with colleagues to include them on prospective student websites. Build your artifact toolkit by reviewing current resources and considering how they could be repackaged for the most efficient return on your time and effort.

1. Collegiality

Collegiality is the idea that work and responsibilities are shared amongst colleagues who support and respect each other. Indeed, collegiality has been a defining characteristic of American higher education institutions since the nineteenth century, when Charles Eliot granted Harvard's faculty shared governance.⁶ In most colleges and universities, faculty are consulted and included in decision-making, are expected to participate in campus service, and are committed to the shared values and goals of the institution.⁷ In recent decades, however, increased managerial processes have eroded a perceived sense of shared governance.⁸ To reinforce the value of collegiality, reformers and champions have an opportunity—and obligation—to engage faculty in ways that demonstrate a commitment to collegial environments. In this section, we discuss three potential ways to align transfer work with collegiality:

- creating a collegial framework for discussion;
- communicating budgetary benefits; and
- creating alignment with other faculty responsibilities.

Creating a collegial framework

When engaging faculty, transfer champions must honor the value of collegiality by being transparent, demonstrating respect for faculty perspectives, and providing opportunities for input and shared decision-making. If top-down decisions regarding transfer policies have already been imposed on the institution, then transfer champions may first need to engage in repair work to create a sense of collegiality around transfer. For example, Ohio state law requires

6 Christensen & Eyring, 2011

7 Ruben et al., 2017.

8 Kligyte & Barrie, 2014; Tight, 2014

public universities to admit in-state college students who have earned an associate degree with a GPA of at least 2.0. While transfer champions may personally endorse this policy, or other policies handed down from the state or the institution's trustees, they must remain aware that some faculty will be confused about why a given policy was enacted, or frustrated that they had no input into the policy's design. To build a collegial foundation for institution-specific conversations around transfer, champions need to clarify the required policy, the reasons behind it,

and communicate how the institution will adopt a collegial approach in terms of making institution-specific implementation decisions related to the policy (for one example communication, see Feature D: Clarifying Policy Requirements). For example, the Ohio statewide transfer admission policy still leaves many decisions (such as transfer application deadlines and program-specific admission requirements) to each institution's discretion.

FEATURE D: CLARIFYING POLICY REQUIREMENTS

To communicate that “we’re all in this together” to implement given policies, artifacts can provide state-level requirements or guidance, connect the requirements to the institution’s own history, mission, or goals, and clarify how the institution has worked with (or plans to work with) faculty to refine and implement these requirements in the unique context of your institution.

For example, in one installment of her regular newsletter to over 20 academic and student-facing units, a vice provost at The Ohio State University highlighted the benefits of transfer students, addressed common misconceptions, and clarified state policies on transfer admissions. Messaging from senior leadership expressing the importance of transfer and policy requirements are influential artifacts to develop transfer-supportive cultures.

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

From the desk of Beth Hume

DECEMBER 2019

I WANT TO WISH EVERYONE a wonderful holiday! I hope you get plenty of time to relax and enjoy the season, whether you're with family and friends or getting some quality you time.

Scroll down to meet **Beth Wisner**, our new executive director for Undergraduate Admissions, and for other pertinent updates.

OSAS insight

Campus-change and transfer student initiatives

Over the past year, OSAS has increased its focus on campus-change and transfer students. Here are some common questions you may hear about this focus, and information that we hope you will find useful.

How common is campus-change and transfer? Very common. Thousands of campus-change and transfer students arrive at the Columbus campus each year ... [read more](#)

Why do we accept so many of these students? These students bring a variety of assets to the Columbus campus — and state law requires us to accept ... [read more](#)

A minimum GPA of 2.0 seems low; are these students prepared to succeed at Columbus? Only a small proportion of campus-change and transfer students arrive with GPAs below 2.5 ... [read more](#)

Source: The Ohio State University

Communicating budgetary benefits

Institutional and departmental budgeting have long been contentious topics in higher education. For public institutions, levels of state support have not kept up with the increasing costs of running an institution, resulting in repeated budget cuts and retrenchments that were exacerbated by the pandemic. At many institutions, a lack of transparency and a perceived reduction in shared governance contributes to faculty anxiety around budgeting, as faculty may feel they have been removed from budgetary decisions in favor of opaque administrative control.⁹ Some faculty may also believe in the theory that “administrative bloat” is the primary force squeezing academic budgets, thus reinforcing their frustration.¹⁰ While

transfer champions cannot solve these larger problems, they can help faculty gain a greater understanding of their local departmental budget and how transfer students can positively impact those budgets. Although institutional budget frameworks vary, typically departments with higher enrollment or more graduates will receive a larger fraction of the institutional budget. Transfer students, particularly high-achieving ones, may be attracted to academic programs with supportive pathways.¹¹ Artifacts such as the example in Feature E: Clarifying Financial Benefits, can help clarify the interconnectedness between transfer student enrollment, success, and institutional or departmental fiscal well-being.

FEATURE E: CLARIFYING FINANCIAL BENEFITS

Do you want to help faculty understand how transfer students contribute to their unit’s financial bottom line? Ask your institutional research office to generate reports showing transfer student enrollment by academic unit (for example, an individual college within a university, or department within a college). Identify the academic unit with the largest number of transfer enrollment and roughly calculate the financial benefits to that unit, based on your institution’s budgeting framework.

For example, at Ohio State, we discovered that transfer students were responsible for almost 20 percent of the enrolled credit hours in one of the largest colleges of the university, almost 30 percent in a practitioner-oriented college, and over 40 percent in one of the most transfer-receptive colleges. For colleges in performance funding states that award bonuses based on numbers of graduates, transfer students can be particularly appealing from a budgetary perspective, because they require fewer years at the institution to graduate compared to first-time freshmen. Such data in the form of figures and tables can demonstrate the financial significance of ensuring that transfer students are attracted to academic programs and are successful in those programs.

Example Report of Transfer Student Numbers, Course Enrollment, and Credit Hours by College

Student College	Transfer Students	% of College	Course Enrollment	% of College	Credit Hours	% of College
College A	3,751	22%	22,193	19%	70,643	18%
College B	1,084	34%	4,895	26%	12,609	27%
College C	191	45%	823	41%	2,397	41%

9 Haack, 2012.

10 Archibald & Feldman, 2018

11 Baker, 2016.

Creating alignment with other faculty responsibilities.

To demonstrate a commitment to collegial collaboration, transfer champions can also align conversations and efforts with existing faculty activities. Many faculty are stretched thin by the triple demands of teaching, research, and service, and feel they cannot devote additional intellectual or personal effort to yet another concern. Integrating a new initiative into existing faculty efforts around diversity, inclusion, or scholarly research may help instructors feel more valued and less exhausted, which in turn builds their capacity to support others.¹² For example, at Ohio State, we award faculty grants for research on student success, and we particularly encourage research topics related to transfer students, as well as students of color.¹³ The resulting projects provide three benefits: practical insights and improvements related to transfer student success, scholarly accomplishments for grantees to include in tenure and promotion

packets, and the cultivation of transfer champions within the ranks of faculty.

2. Fairness

Fairness is popularly associated with equality, equity, inclusion, and justice—terms which frequently appear in institutional mission or value statements.¹⁴ While faculty ascribe to values of equality and equity, they may use these terms interchangeably and thus fail to understand the practical differences between them.¹⁵ Importantly, they may believe that treating all students equally will lead to equitable outcomes when this is often not the case (see Feature F: Equality Versus Equity). In this section, we discuss how champions can engage faculty in understanding the role of fairness in two areas:

- transfer admissions, and
- post-admission support for transfer students.

FEATURE F: EQUALITY VERSUS EQUITY

Equality and equity are often conflated; while both have the goal of fair and just outcomes, they are distinct. Equality is the idea that all students should have access to identical materials, resources, and support with the hope that equal access will generate equal outcomes. However, equality fails to consider how historic exclusion and systemic oppression obstruct academic success.¹⁶ As depicted in the graphic, giving everyone the same bike does not mean all can participate in the activity at the same level or successfully navigate potential obstacles impeding their paths.

Equity, on the other hand, is the idea that underserved students—particularly Black, Latinx, Indigenous, lower-income, and first-generation students—require tailored levels of support to achieve fair and just outcomes because of oppressive and exclusionary practices. It also acknowledges that students with differing abilities need personalized supports. Many transfer students are from underserved populations, meaning universities must provide equitable forms of access and resources to enhance the success of these students. Similarly, the appropriate bike for each person in the picture below empowers them with the resources needed to participate and opportunity to achieve equitable outcomes.



12 Bailey et al., 2015.

13 [The Office of Student Academic Success at The Ohio State University announced their 2021 grant awardees](#)

14 McNair et al., 2020

15 Espinoza, 2007.

16 See the [American Talent Initiative Community of Practice's collective statement on academic equity](#).

Fair admissions

At selective colleges, faculty who value fairness may believe their institution should accept transfer students, but only those who meet the same lofty academic criteria required of new freshmen. Such an admissions policy provides equal treatment, but not equitable opportunity. To reframe the fairness conversation, champions may find it useful to raise the following questions for discussion:

Should prospective transfer students be evaluated based on how they performed in high school, or how they have performed in college?

From a common-sense understanding of fairness, it seems fairer to judge a person based on recent performance, rather than on long-past performance. Similarly, from a practical perspective, when predicting whether a potential student will be successful at your college, the student's recent academic momentum—rate of earning credits, enrollment in transfer programs, and rigorous coursework—can be a stronger predictor than the narrow measures of GPA or standardized exam scores.¹⁷

What are our criteria for current students to continue at this institution?

Based on federal guidelines for financial aid, most institutions require students to earn at least a 2.0 GPA in order to continue at the college. Faculty may be surprised to discover that some freshmen admitted under highly selective academic criteria maintain college GPAs not much above 2.0. Should these students be allowed to continue at your institution? If so, is it fair to deny the same opportunity to a transfer student?

Should a student's merit be judged based solely on academic characteristics?

The research literature suggests that psychological characteristics such as “perseverance of effort” are powerful predictors of long-term success, and even the makers of the SAT acknowledge the importance of

recognizing and accounting for “adversity” in the student's socioeconomic context.¹⁸ To help faculty understand the level of perseverance demonstrated by a typical community college student, it may be helpful to provide research about transfer students or share personal stories from the institution's own transfer students.

Fairness in student supports

Most institutions offer their freshmen special first-year experience events and supports designed to cultivate social and academic success. Financial aid resources may also be awarded to students on a first-come-first-served basis with freshmen admitted at the beginning of admissions cycles at the front of the line. Using the lens of fairness, equality is less important than equity. An equality approach might integrate all incoming transfer students into the existing freshman experience or allocate financial aid in the order of admission. However, freshmen-oriented programming is unlikely to meet transfer students' unique needs and transfer students are often admitted after freshmen when aid may be exhausted, leaving gaps in support for transfer students.¹⁹ An equitable approach would gauge the needs of the institution's transfer students and adjust practices and policies to ensure the needs of transfers are met as fully as those of freshmen. To help faculty consider how transfer students' needs may be similar or different from those of freshmen, students' personal stories may again be helpful (see Feature G: Personal Stories).

17 Wang, 2016

18 Credé et al., 2017; After a variety of criticisms, the College Board rolled back its “adversity score” and now advertises it as a “landscape” tool.

19 Wyner et al., 2016.

FEATURE G:

PERSONAL STORIES: REINFORCING FAIRNESS AND EXCELLENCE

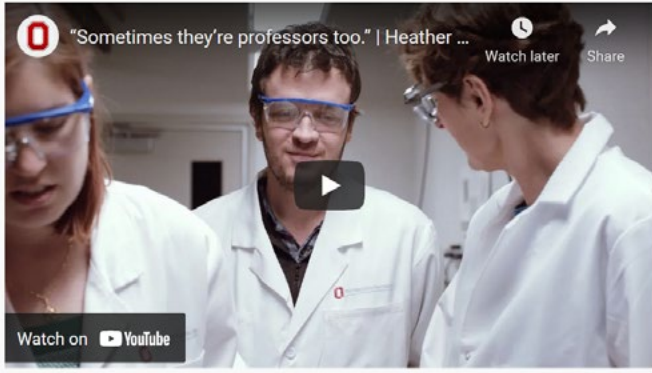
At Ohio State, we recruited faculty and students to participate in interviews about their transfer stories. Each participant discussed challenges and barriers in their educational journeys, their path to and through community college, and their experience as a transfer student. We used these interviews in three ways:


- to illustrate common themes in terms of the challenges, needs, and successes of transfer students;
- to develop individual case study stories; and
- for those who were willing, to professionally record key pieces of their story on camera.

We packaged these common themes, case studies, and testimonials into presentations, newsletters, and other formats, and shared them on university websites, in departmental meetings, and at local and national conferences.

Each transfer story can reinforce the values of fairness and excellence. For example, one of Ohio State's videos features Tim, who described his challenging path to higher education and praised both the community college and university faculty and staff for helping him achieve his ambitious goals. Another video features Dr. Allen, who demonstrates that a community college transfer student can become a highly successful STEM faculty member at a selective research university.²⁰

Profile of success



Watch on  YouTube

Meet Dr. Heather Allen

Professor and University Distinguished Scholar, Dr. Heather Allen started her science career at Saddleback College. Dr. Allen credits the Science Fellowship at Saddleback as foundational to her success.

Watch Dr. Allen's [video](#)

3. Academic Excellence

Along with equity and equality, the term **academic excellence** frequently appears in institutional mission and value statements, and academic rigor and excellence are core values for community college and university faculty alike.²¹ Faculty who prioritize excellence may have two concerns in terms of community college transfer students:

- the rigor of prior college coursework, and
- the integrity of their own institution's unique brand of excellence.

Rigor of prior coursework

At selective institutions, some faculty may worry that transfer students' prior coursework is not as rigorous as their own. And concerns about students' ability to succeed can lead to perceived

bias and gaps in achievement.²² From the research literature, it is unclear how meaningful differences in coursework rigor may be to degree attainment.²³ However, faculty may be more influenced by personal experiences than by research. In order to inform instructors' personal experience, champions may find it helpful to connect their own faculty to those at neighboring community colleges through social or academic events. Faculty may be surprised to discover that their own institution's graduates are teaching at the college, where they maintain the same standards of rigor and excellence under which they themselves were taught. For some examples of faculty connection mechanisms, see a story from a transfer champion in Virginia (see Feature H: Building Bridges with Community College Faculty).

FEATURE H: BUILDING BRIDGES WITH COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY

Two years ago, VCCS collaborated with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) to create a seamless transfer pathway for Arts & Humanities students from two local community colleges, known as the Mellon Pathways Program. During the initial process of pathway design, faculty from the three institutions met and connected on a professional level. Those relationships have strengthened and deepened through three ongoing opportunities:

- **E-portfolio showcase:** Each spring, Mellon Pathways students present their e-portfolios to a small panel of reviewers, including a mix of community college faculty, VCU faculty, and members of the local business community. The time commitment from each faculty member is minimal, but the experience is powerful. Faculty connect with students and their stories on a personal level and partner with peers at other institutions to provide students with constructive feedback and support.
- **Mellon Research Fellows:** With a faculty mentor from their community college, Mellon Pathways students engage in an in-depth undergraduate research study on a topic of their choice. The Mellon Research Fellows have the opportunity to meet a few times in spring with a VCU faculty connection who is in their prospective major or area of research. In these meetings, they discuss their academic plans, and informally



Dr. Micol Hutchison
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to the Arts & Humanities
Virginia Community
College System (VCCS)

21 See, for example, Jaggars & Hodara (2011).

22 Canning et al., 2019; Muenks et al., 2020.

23 Some studies provide evidence that transfer-in coursework does not prepare students quite as well for subsequent courses at the destination institution; however, the difference is small (see Asarta et al., 2013; Dills & Hernandez-Julian, 2008). Contrary to concerns that

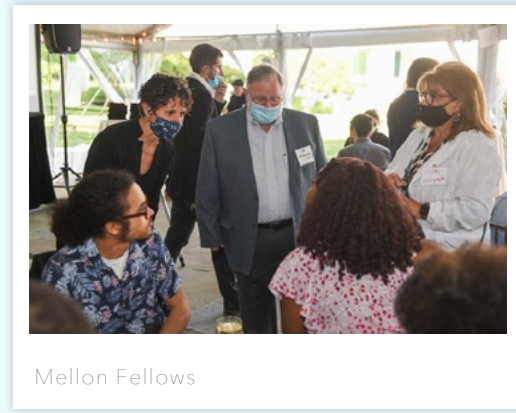
community college GPAs are inflated, in a statewide study in Virginia community college transfers had a comparable probability of baccalaureate attainment as continuing four-year college students with a similar background and early-college academic record (Xu et al., 2018).

present and receive feedback on their research. The VCU faculty connections have been impressed by the students' hard work and the quality of their product and have helped students feel more confident in their interactions with university faculty.

- **Faculty book group:** After the murder of George Floyd, community college faculty involved in the Mellon Project came together to read and discuss Ibram X. Kendi's *Stamped from the Beginning* and discussed its implications for their students and their approach to teaching. As they continued to select and discuss books that raised contemporary and pedagogical issues, the group expanded to include community college and university staff and faculty, creating a forum for rich and authentic discussion of how to cultivate an environment for students that is both academically excellent and personally supportive.

Overall, these opportunities for connection have created a deep bond of trust between many VCU Arts & Humanities faculty and their peers at neighboring community colleges. While participating faculty were always receptive to transfer students, these experiences have allowed faculty to understand students' life challenges as well as their immense academic potential and have helped faculty to identify how and when they can most effectively support these students.

To see the Mellon Research Fellows projects, visit <https://provost.vcu.edu/mrf/>.



A unique brand of excellence

In considering the unique excellence of their own institution, faculty are justly proud of their college's signature academic experiences, which may include in-depth first-year seminars, specialized versions of general education courses, or unique writing and research requirements. From the perspectives of both equality and quality, faculty may believe that all transfer students should participate in the same specialized, unique, and coherent set of requirements as their freshmen peers. However, such requirements would send a distinctly unwelcoming message to prospective transfers, who are unlikely to have the desire, time, or financial resources to re-take specialized

versions of courses already completed at another institution. From the perspective of equity, champions can ask faculty to identify the key skills and learning outcomes that the college's graduates should have and consider how those could be interwoven into the transfer student experience without requiring a repeat of common general education or introductory major courses. For the story of how Ohio State explicitly considered transfer students in its current general education redesign, see Feature I: Considering Transfer Students in General Education Redesign.

FEATURE I:

CONSIDERING TRANSFER STUDENTS IN GENERAL EDUCATION REDESIGN

For four years, Ohio State has been engaged in a massive redesign of our General Education (GE) curriculum, which will launch in Autumn 2022. The faculty-led redesign process, which incorporated input from over 1,000 university and community members, will provide students with a signature academic experience that leverages the university's unique areas of strength. Throughout the process, however, redesign committee members were attentive to the needs of our many students who switch campuses, change majors, or transfer from other colleges. Indeed, a key tenet of the redesign was that the new GE would not harm these students in terms of the time required to complete their degrees. To allow for a seamless transition for students who move from open-access campuses or colleges to the selective Columbus campus, the redesign committee took two major steps.



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First, the university's open-access regional campuses were integrally involved in the GE redesign process. Regional campus stakeholders sat on the initial visioning committee, which held listening sessions on the regional campuses in 2017; and in 2019, a specific subcommittee was formed to anticipate and address potential implementation challenges faced by the regional campuses and students who wish to transition between campuses. As the subcommittee reported, "The central implementation issue for these campuses, with relatively small numbers of faculty and staff, is to be full participants in the new GE, in course development and offering, and have the resource base needed to implement a GE that has distinctive instructional/advising needs." The subcommittee provided specific recommendations to address these challenges, which are being incorporated into the final implementation for 2022.

Second, the university's key community college feeder, Columbus State Community College (CSCC), has long offered courses with equivalent numbering and content to Ohio State, allowing for relatively straightforward communication and maintenance regarding the two institutions' transfer pathways. To ensure continued equivalency, CSCC needed to be kept abreast of the visioning process and involved in the implementation process. Thus, as the implementation team was formed in 2019, a CSCC representative was included to help us understand how the curriculum might impact this and other two-year transfer partners.

For more information on the phases of Ohio State's GE redesign and how the process explicitly incorporated broader considerations of equity, see a recent essay for the American Talent Initiative, "[Using Equity Data to Guide the Design and Implementation of the New General Education Curriculum at Ohio State.](#)"

Conclusion

When four-year colleges and universities enroll community college transfer students, they must ensure explicit supports are in place to promote these students' academic success. To reinforce that system of supports, faculty and staff need help understanding the unique needs and assets of transfer students, as well as how the transfer student mission aligns with their own personal values.

In this brief, we have provided examples of artifacts which help communicate how faculty's pre-existing values are aligned—not competing—with the transfer student mission. Transfer champions can feel free to use and adapt these artifacts to cultivate additional champions among the faculty ranks. As such artifacts help overturn false assumptions and create a transfer-affirming culture, more students will feel welcome and supported, which may in turn allow them to embrace and make visible their previously invisible and stigmatized status of transfer student.

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