Community College Transfer Students
What is the optimal timing of transfer?

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The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)
The Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE)
Exploring Persistence and Community College
Gracia 7, 1:30-2:45 PM
November 16, 2012
Background

• UTEP
  – Hispanic-majority (HSI), low-income, working students
  – access and success

• Lumina Projects on Student Success
  – first-time student: persistence and graduation
  – transfer student: post-transfer success

• The issue with timing of transfer
  – “cooling out” or “warming up”? 
Questions

Q1: To what extent are policy proposals about the timing of transfer based on empirical evidence?

Q2: Are there differences in baccalaureate attainment rate and time-to-degree among community college transfer students who have different timing of transfer but are otherwise similar to each other?
Policy Recommendation

• "[M]ost college students should be urged to remain at the community college until they can transfer with full college senior status, that is, with the first two years of university equivalent completed at [community college]." (Dennison & Jones, 1970, p. 44)

Policy Recommendation, Cont’d

• "This study suggests that students would be well-served if they were counseled to complete two years of study at their community colleges" (Best & Gehring, 1993, p. 38)

Fact or Opinion?

• “What is it about early transfer from a community college to a 4-year school that diminishes a student’s chances of earning a bachelor’s degree?” (Adelman, 2004, p. 47).

Student Advising

• Transfer Tips – from Community College to 4-Year College, No. 1

“Complete your associate's degree. National research shows that community college students who finish their degree program go on to complete their baccalaureate at a much higher rate than those who transfer with just a grab bag of credits.” (Jacobs & Hyman, 2010, p.175)

Policy Making

• “Data shows[sic] community college students who complete an AA degree are more likely to complete a bachelor’s degree—so one consideration of this committee is to recommend the requirement that community college students complete an AA before transferring.”

Agenda (November 8, 2011)
Council for Continuous Improvement and Innovation in Texas Higher Education, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
Most Recent Quote

• “Nearly three-quarters of the students who earned an associate degree and then moved to a four-year college graduated with a bachelor's degree within four years of transferring, according to a "snapshot" report being released on Thursday by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.”

• “The report ... clearly demonstrates that earning an associate degree prior to transfer leads to greater baccalaureate attainment.”

• “Policy makers send mixed messages when they encourage four-year colleges to accept transfer students before they have earned those degrees.”

The Messages

• Timing of transfer has a causal relationship with students’ post-transfer outcomes.
• Students lack knowledge about their own optimal timing of transfer and tend to transfer too early, which hurts their post-transfer success.
• A mandatory delay of transfer (to the point of AA attainment) will benefit students who would otherwise transfer too early.
• Baccalaureate-granting institutions that accept early community college transfers are doing a disservice to these students.
Mental Model 1: Long Jump

Pre-Transfer / the Dash

Post-Transfer / the Flight

“Long jumpers generate momentum by dashing full-speed down the runway before taking flight.”

Photos and quote from trackandfield.about.com
Community College Transfer Path
The “long jump” model

Is the “long jump” model applicable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long Jump</th>
<th>Community College Transfer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The dash is considered as preparation (momentum building), not part of the actual performance.</td>
<td>Experiences at community college are part of one’s overall college experiences and overall performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The distance of dash does not affect one’s chance to finish the dash and reach the takeoff point.</td>
<td>The length of community college attendance affects one’s chance to finish the attendance and reach the transfer point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long jump is evaluated by the distance of the flight, which is measured from the same point of takeoff.</td>
<td>Post-transfer success is evaluated by whether students reach an end point (graduation), which is measured from different points of transfer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mental Model 2: Hurdle Race

Pre-Transfer / the first T hurdles  Post-Transfer / the next 10-T hurdles

“The key is to maintain momentum while clearing all ten hurdles.”

Photos and quote from trackandfield.about.com
Community College Transfer Path
The “Hurdle Race” Model

T: System time, starting when students enter any postsecondary institution

No College → Community Colleges
Labor Market → Degree (AA)

Community Colleges → Baccalaureate-Granting Institutions
→ Degree (BA)

Other Institutions or Labor Market

T: Institution time, starting when students enter a specific institution

Native Students → Early Transfers → Late Transfers
Conditional Outcomes

Type I conditional attainment rate

\[ \text{GR}_I = P(G|T, t) \]

\[ = P (\text{Graduation} | \text{transfer at } T, \text{ persist to } t) \]

Type II conditional attainment rate

\[ \text{GR}_{II} = P(G|T_1, T_2) \]

\[ = P (\text{Graduation} | \text{transfer at } T_1, \text{ persist to } T_2 ) \]

Where

T, T₁, T₂: system time, measured by cumulative credits from both sending and receiving institutions

t: institution time, measured by cumulative credits from receiving institution
Conditional Outcomes

• Type 1 (Long Jump) Rates
  – success rate of reaching degree completion after transfer ($T$)
  – Students with the same institutional persistence ($t$) may have undergone different selective attrition.

• Type 2 (Hurdle Race) Rate
  – success rate of reaching degree completion after crossing the same hurdle (system persistence $T_2$)
# Evidence from UTEP Data

Table 1. Comparison of Conditional Baccalaureate Attainment Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry cohort</th>
<th>Type I Rate</th>
<th>Native Students</th>
<th>Freshman Transfers</th>
<th>Sophomore Transfers</th>
<th>Junior Transfers</th>
<th>Senior Transfers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persist to 60</td>
<td>$GR_{0,0}$</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persist to 90</td>
<td>$GR_{0, 60}$</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persist to 90</td>
<td>$GR_{0, 90}$</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evidence from UTEP Data

Y: survival rate (percent not yet graduated)
X: institution Time
X: system Time

Native Students
Freshman Transfers
Sophomore Transfers
Junior Transfers
Senior Transfers
## Evidence from UTEP Data

### Table 2. Comparison of Conditional Time-to-Degree and Degree GPA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Native Students</th>
<th>Freshman Transfers</th>
<th>Sophomore Transfers</th>
<th>Junior Transfers</th>
<th>Senior Transfers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years-to-degree</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>7.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits-to-degree</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree GPA</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer GPA</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

• The community college transfer path
  – the “long jump” model
  – the “hurdle race” model

• Empirical evidence regarding relationship between timing of transfer and post-transfer outcomes
  – from the literature (Type 1 Rates)
  – from student-level longitudinal data
Conclusion

Q1: To what extent are policy proposals about the timing of transfer based on empirical evidence?

• The policy proposals are based on misinterpretation of accurate data.

Q2: Are there differences in baccalaureate attainment rate and time-to-degree among community college transfer students who have different timing of transfer but are otherwise similar to each other?

• The differences are not found when selective attrition is corrected (i.e., same length of system persistence for comparison groups with different timing of transfer).
Policy Implications

• Student success vs. institutional profile
  – If the goal is to raise institutional profile, mandatory rules about timing of transfer will lead to more “successful” institutions.
  – If the goal is to help individual students become more successful, such rules would not help (and could possibly harm) students.

• Evidence-based, data-driven policymaking
  – Evidence may be derived from accurate data, but accurate data do not automatically lead to valid policies.
  – Data interpretations and the underlying mental model must be rigorously evaluated.
Extend the Research Agenda

• The “cooling out” debate (Whether)
  – Should BA aspirants start at community colleges at all?
  – An “unproductive debate”?

• Timing of transfer (How Much and When)
  Given that starting at CC is the only viable option for some students,
  – What proportion of their overall college experience should be gained at CC?
  – What should be the temporal pattern (vertical, swirling, concurrent, reverse)?
Thank You!
Questions?

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