



Student Success Summit
Lehman College, CUNY
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SUPPORTING TRANSFER STUDENTS: THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE AND A CALL TO ACTION

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Education

It's all the luck of the draw in New York City.

- Maybe you get adopted.



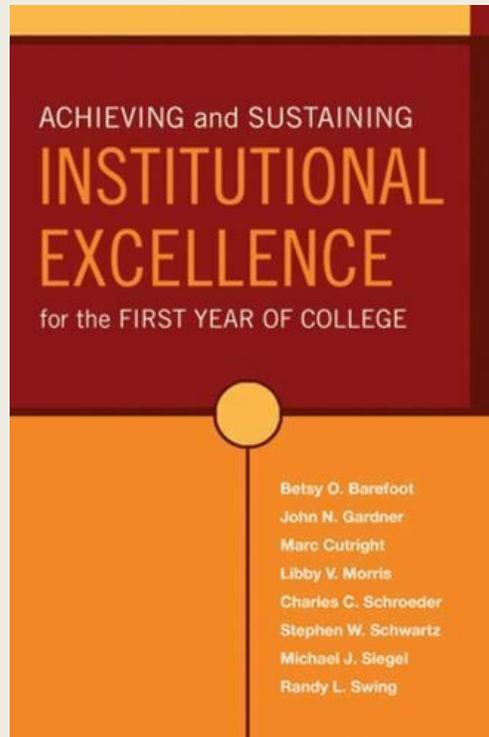
- If you're lucky, you go to college.



- If you're even luckier, you come to Lehman College.



Betsy Barefoot and I were here in 2002 to develop a case study of Lehman.



Lehman was selected in a national blind review process as one of 13 'Institutions of Excellence in the First College Year' from a pool of 130 institutional nominees.

Framing Ideas and Assumptions for My Remarks

- Higher education is the most likely channel for upward social mobility.
- Unfortunately, race and income are currently the best predictors of who will complete college.
- What can you do to replace those two predictors of success?
- The higher education system is unjust in design and outcomes.
- We created this system, and we could create an alternative one.

Framing Ideas and Assumptions for My Remarks

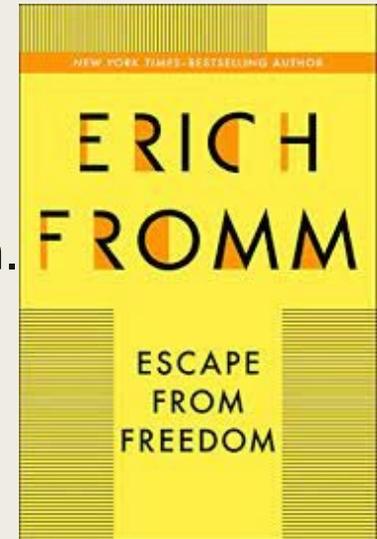
- You have two most important systems: CUNY and Lehman.
- You have far more control over Lehman than CUNY, but you can influence CUNY as well as Lehman.
- It all comes down to how you use your own sphere of control.

*CHAT: WHAT IS YOUR SPHERE OF CONTROL FOR
TRANSFER STUDENTS?*



Framing Ideas and Assumptions for My Remarks

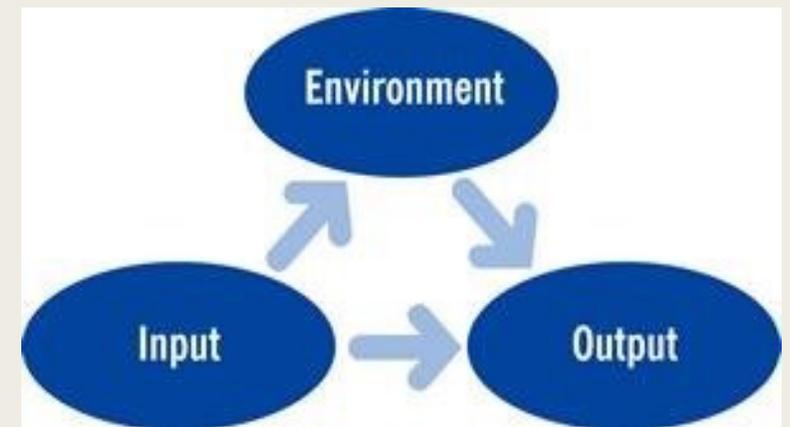
- We are living in a period of extraordinary change--politically, economically, and socially.
- If you don't manage that change, other forces and institutions will.
- Each of us has to change or be changed.
- No work environment provides more freedom than higher education.
- The question is: What are you doing with your freedom
 - *Both as an individual and as a college?*
- How I learned about freedom during my first year of college
- *CHAT: WHAT 'FREEDOM' DO YOU HAVE TO INFLUENCE STUDENT SUCCESS?*



Framing Ideas and Assumptions for My Remarks

- This IEO model explains what happens to students in college.
- To improve the “O” you must modify the “I” and/or the “E.”
- It’s much easier to modify the “E.”
- The ways you are organizing the “E” are getting you the results you have today.

Astin, A. W. (1977). *Four critical years: Effects of college on beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.



Focusing on the 'E' at Lehman College

- What happens to students when they arrive.
- The first year really matters – for both first-year and transfer students.
- Focus on students' 'common experiences' to yield maximum impact.
 - *Commuting*
 - *The City - living, working, going to college in NYC*
 - *Registration, financial aid, and academic advising*
 - *Food service*
 - *And the CUNY culture – whatever that means*
 - *Gateway courses*
 - *Professors*
 - *Peers*

CHAT: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE LEHMAN 'E'?

Focusing on the 'E' at Lehman College

- The REAL first-year experience: high-failure rate, gateway courses
 - *These courses must be re-designed because poor grades are excellent predictors of VOLUNTARY attrition!*
- The role of faculty. Emphasize faculty development. Work with them to redesign courses and the entire eco-system that supports instruction.
 - *Provide incentives for faculty to redesign courses*
- Rethinking the rules. Conduct a policy audit – know those that do or do not advance student success.
- Examine the barriers: policies, offices, people – especially those who have the authority to say 'yes' or 'no.'

CHAT: IDENTIFY A 'BARRIER' CREATED BY LEHMAN, NOT CUNY.

Focusing on the 'E' at Lehman College

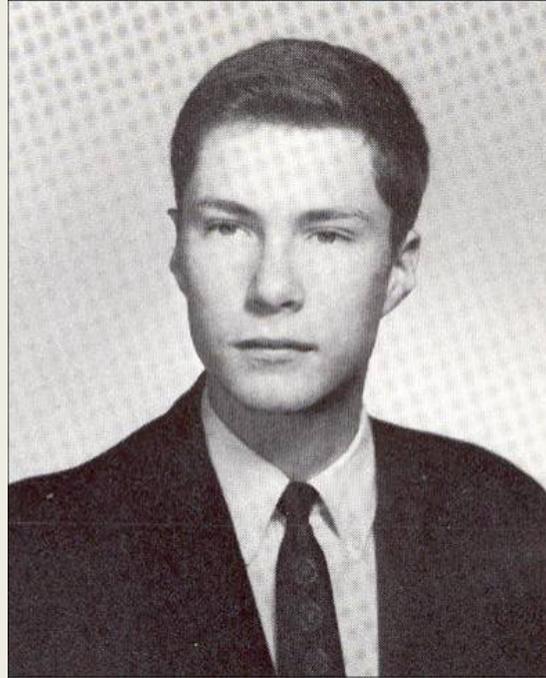
- Remember the seminal research: The greatest influence on students is other students. How are you leveraging the influence of your most able students on entering students?
- Look at the design of undergraduate education through the lens of 'Socially Just' vs. 'Socially Unjust' Design.
- Understand the student experience through the lens of disaggregation of data. There is no one student experience that fits all.
- Understand and communicate the 'Lehman Story.' Every institution has a story – what is yours? It's not static – it can change!
- Back to the fundamental question: What can YOU do within your sphere of influence without losing your job or incurring other significant negative consequences?

*1. ENTER INTO THE CHAT A WORD
OR PHRASE THAT BEST DESCRIBES HOW YOU PERCEIVE THE
TRANSFER EXPERIENCE AT LEHMAN.*

Exhibit A of Unjust Design: The Transfer System



My Personal Transfer Experience: None



If you were like me, how would you acquire empathy?

2. IN MY OWN UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE,

a) I WAS A TRANSFER STUDENT.

b) I WAS NEVER A TRANSFER STUDENT.

3. WHAT PERCENT OF LEHMAN'S CURRENT UNDERGRADUATE POPULATION DO YOU BELIEVE ARE TRANSFER STUDENTS?

- a) 25-30%*
- b) 30-40%*
- c) 40-50%*
- d) 50-60%*
- e) 60-70%*
- f) 70-80%*
- g) OVER 80%*

4. *MY POSITION HAS . . .*

a) *DIRECT RELEVANCE TO TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS.*

b) *NO DIRECT RELEVANCE TO TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS.*

5. *HOW 'TRANSFER-FRIENDLY WOULD YOU SAY THE COLLEGE IS?*

a) EXCEPTIONALLY FRIENDLY

b) FRIENDLY

c) MODERATELY FRIENDLY

d) SOMEWHAT UNFRIENDLY

e) VERY UNFRIENDLY

6. THE BARRIERS THAT MAY EXIST AT LEHMAN TO TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS ARE:

a) PRIMARILY CREATED BY THE COLLEGE.

b) PRIMARILY CREATED BY CUNY.

c) THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SENDING COLLEGE, PARTICULARLY THOSE IN CUNY.

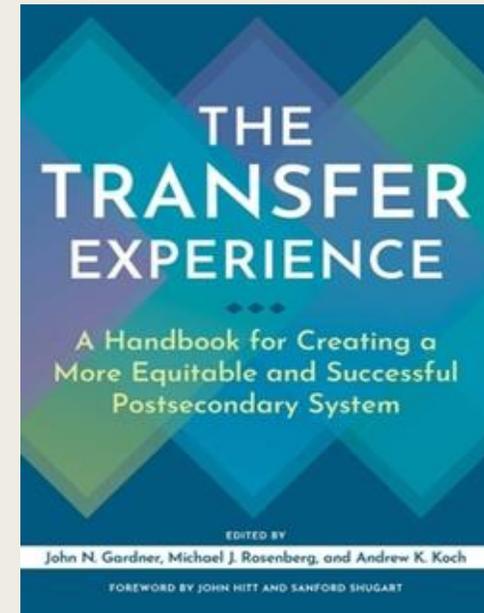
d) ARE PRIMARILY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES.

My Professional Experience Working with Transfer Students

- Co-designing a unique bachelor's degree for transfers (the Bachelors of Arts In Interdisciplinary Studies) at the University of South Carolina, 1972
- Senior academic officer, five two-year regional campuses of the University of South Carolina.
 - *Big take away: enormous amounts of discrimination against incoming transfer students and the faculty who have taught them, even in the same university system*
- Co-designer of a national transfer improvement process: Foundations of Excellence Transfer Focus—70 institutions 2008-2021, including **Lehman College in 2010-2011**
- Lead advisor for the creation of the Tulsa Higher Education Consortium, designed to advance transfer sending rate of one community college to 6 four-year institutions,

More Professional Experience

- Co-PI on a \$300,000 planning grant funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation with a focus on creating an agenda for improvement of transfer. This grant yielded this book:
 - *The Transfer Experience: A Handbook for Creating A More Equitable and Successful Postsecondary System (2021)*. (John N. Gardner, Michael J. Rosenberg, and Andrew K. Koch). Stylus Publishers.



Why is the transfer system ‘unjust’?

- The college experience was designed for protestant, white, middle and upper class, property-owning males who had a residential experience at ONE institution.
- Two-year colleges were designed to be “terminal” and to keep “those” students out of “our” universities.



- The current transfer system is a bolted-on system that provides access, but not success, to students for whom a four-year institution was not designed.

The Results of an Unjust System

- Abysmal rates of transfer to bachelors-degree completion:
 - *80% of two-year students nationally declare an initial goal of transfer.*
 - *15% accomplish that goal within 6 years.*



Who is responsible?

- Some of us blame the students.
- Some of us blame the two-year colleges.



- My view: Educators who designed, operate, and now perpetuate the system are responsible.
- What is each of you responsible for?
- What is your sphere of influence?

True Confession—My *Mea Culpa*

- I should have included transfer students in my development of the first-year experience movement dating to 1982.
 - *But it never occurred to me.*
 - *I was never a transfer myself, so I had no empathy for the transfer experience*
- I could have . . .
 - *Organized conferences with an exclusive focus on transfer.*
 - *Come up with a language to motivate such a focus.*
 - *Designed an intervention.*
 - *Established a national center to focus on these students. Now, one exists at the University of North Georgia.*
 - *Published a book years ago to call attention to transfers.*
- But for me, just like you, what matters most is not what I haven't done but what I can do now!

FEEL FREE TO ENTER YOUR OWN MEA CULPA IN THE CHAT.



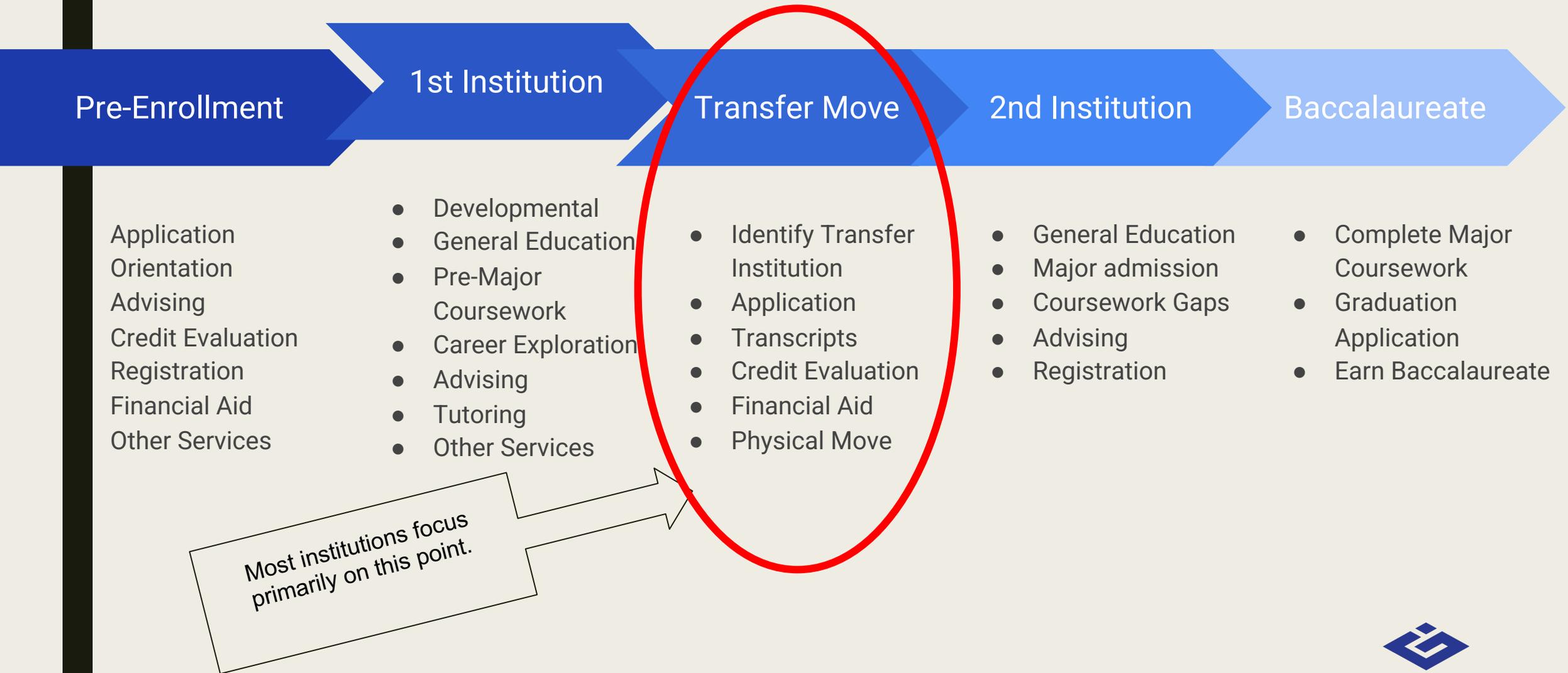
Questions for You

- How is the part of the transfer system I work in unjust? Not separate but not equal. Remember the US history of 'separate but equal.'
- What could I do to remedy that?
 - *Through my individual actions?*
 - *With others in some sort of coalition?*

The Conventional Definition of Transfer is Too Narrow

- It is viewed as
 - *a phase, a “stage of development,” or a “transition.”*
 - *a limited time frame when a student moves from one institution to another.*
 - *a transactional process provided by admissions or enrollment management units.*
 - *an “event.”*
- It is not viewed as an academic experience, and hence not managed by academics

The Life of a Transfer Student



Instead, I posit that the transfer student experience . . .

- Is the sum of everything the students experience at both sending and receiving institutions in pursuit of their desired educational credentials.
- Is the totality of educationally purposeful experiences that we intentionally provide our students throughout their educational journey enabling them to pursue their desired academic and life goals, whatever they may be, as they enroll in successive, occasionally simultaneous, different, post-secondary institutions.

7. REGARDING JOHN GARDNER'S DEFINITION OF TRANSFER:

a) IT MAKES SENSE TO ME – I AM PERSUADED THAT'S WHAT WE HAVE TO FOCUS ON TO BE MORE SUCCESSFUL WITH TRANSFER STUDENTS

b) I DO NOT AGREE WITH HIS ARGUMENT IN THIS REGARD.

8. *REGARDING JOHN GARDNER'S ARGUMENT THAT IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF STUDENTS: TRANSFER AND NON-TRANSFER AND THAT THEIR EXPERIENCES ARE NOT EQUAL:*

a) I AM PERSUADED.

b) I'M NOT BUYING THIS – SEEMS TOO OVERSIMPLIFIED.

In the current US political and economic climate, how do we advance transfer student success?

- We need a compelling rationale.
 - *This is a matter of social justice.*
 - *Transfer is part of an unjust system that produces unjust outcomes.*
 - *The unjust nature of transfer is a byproduct of unexamined and unquestioned design.*
 - *To change this, we must examine and alter the systems that produce these inequitable outcomes.*
 - *Faculty, and the courses they teach, are overlooked yet primary areas for change.*

9. DO YOU AGREE THAT THE DESCRIPTION OF TRANSFER IS AN EXAMPLE OF 'SOCIALLY UNJUST DESIGN AND OUTCOMES'?

a) YES, STRONGLY

b) YES

c) NOT PERSUADED

d) STRONGLY DISAGREE

e) DON'T KNOW

In the current US political and economic climate, how do we advance transfer student success?

- Consider
 - *The human costs of non-completion*
 - *The costs of wasted credit hours - accumulated total credits minus those not accepted*
 - *The impact of transfers on overall enrollment*



John's Hypothesis: Explaining an enrollment decline over the past two years in the nation's colleges and universities

- Part of the decline we are currently experiencing is explained by the same factors that are explaining the failure of employment levels to return to pre-pandemic levels.
- Working people - and some students - are sick of the status quo. They don't like the way the system has been treating them. (Transfer is Exhibit A of how the system treats them.)
- They are fed up and would rather stay home and out of the system, in both conventional "work" as they knew it and discretionary college contexts.

*10. DO YOU AGREE THAT JOHN'S HYPOTHESIS MAY PARTIALLY
EXPLAIN A FACTOR IMPINGING ON THE COLLEGE'S ENROLLMENT?*

a) YES

b) NO

*11.CHAT: WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE THE COLLEGE IS DOING WELL
IN TERMS OF SUPPORTING TRANSFER?*

12. CHAT: WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE THE COLLEGE IS NOT DOING WELL?

13. *CHAT:*

- a) *AS YOU LISTEN TO JOHN'S RECOMMENDATIONS, ENTER INTO THE CHAT THE INTERVENTION YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE COLLEGE UNDERTAKE.*

- b) *WHICH WOULD YOU NOT WANT TO SEE THE COLLEGE PURSUE?*

Interventions

1. Make transfer student success a high priority. There will be no progress or justice by maintaining the status quo.
2. Start with the end in mind. Provide experiences and support for beginning transfers that increase the likelihood they will thrive.
3. Use data to understand students and for decision making to improve student learning and success.
4. Conduct a voluntary study of the transfer experience and produce recommendations to improve. Reexamine your FoE self-study of 2010-11 and 'refresh.'
5. Intentionally involve faculty in the discussion around transfer-study success.
6. Identify institutional barriers to transfer student success.
7. Undertake a policy audit to determine the extent of prejudice against transfer students,

7. (Cont'd.) Compare the policies that determine how you treat transfer vs. non-transfer students.

- Admissions (deadlines for application, costs for application, deadlines for notice of acceptance, recognition of prior credit and learning experiences)
- Financial Aid (deadlines for application and notification, criteria for eligibility, amounts and types of aid, designations specifically for transfer vs. non-transfer students, criteria for renewal and maintaining eligibility)
- Eligibility for on-campus housing
- Priority for class registration
- Availability of required vs. elective programs, opportunities, courses to support student success (e.g., orientation, academic advising, college success courses, etc.)

7. (Cont'd.) Compare the policies that determine how you treat transfer vs. non-transfer students

- Provision of academic advising – is it optional or mandatory and for which populations?
- Eligibility for internships, co-op programs
- Eligibility for study abroad, National Student Exchange
- Eligibility for on-campus employment supported by College Work Study or regular institutional funds
- Eligibility for academic awards, prizes
- Existence of specific officer/programs dedicated to transfer support

8. Audit your website and other official publications. *Do they have specific sections that are clearly and conspicuously devoted to transfer students? Do they cover these topics?*

- Admissions
- Financial aid
- Registration
- Academic advising
- Orientation
- On-campus employment
- Career services
- Housing
- Student activities
- Parking/transportation
- Childcare
- Health services and insurance
- Family involvement opportunities
- Counseling

9. Peer-to-peer relationships

- Much of what seems to make real differences in transfer student success comes down to the informal relationships between peers. The most important peer-to-peer structure is that of CEOs for geographically contiguous institutions.
- Encourage these relationships across these critical roles
 - *Senior academic officers* *Senior student services/student success officers*
 - *Senior library officers* *Senior enrollment mgt. officers*
 - *Senior acad. support officers* *Senior business officers*
 - *Senior financial aid officers* *Senior developmental education officers*
 - *Senior academic adv. officers* *Senior registrars' officers and support staff*

More Interventions

10. Showcase the history of transfer students at Lehman and those who have supported and championed them.
11. Establish a stakeholder institution-spanning advocacy group.
12. Ask your students, "How transfer-friendly are we?"
13. Involve your institution in the major annual professional development conferences to support transfer-student success (e.g., New York State Transfer and Articulation Association).



More Interventions

14. Visit some other systems/institutions to learn and be inspired.
15. Fundamentally, this is a pipeline issue. We have to produce more students with enough credits to transfer anywhere from CUNY's community colleges!



16. If you agree with my definition of transfer as a fundamentally academic experience, realign responsibility for transfer students especially between academic affairs and enrollment management so as to increase the academic priority for the transfer experience.

Final Suggestions for Next Steps

- Create communities of practice around functional areas.
- Institutionalize processes for asking those who have most contact with transfer students to tell the larger institution what they know about the transfer experience and what needs to be changed (e.g., academic advisors).
- Create more contexts for listening to transfer students
- Establish a transfer advocacy system. Do you need a transfer czar?
- Develop a culture of urgency – students are suffering.
- How about creating an 800 hotline for transfer?

Final Suggestions for Next Steps

- Pay special attention to challenges for transfer students--pain points in the overall transfer system where students encounter what I term “discretionary review” – for instance, situations in which decisions about what credits do or do not “count” are left to individual reviewing officers, most commonly well-intentioned academic department chairs or assistant/associate deans of schools and colleges.
- Problems with discretionary review
 - *Inconsistency*
 - *Lack of transparency*
 - *Potential for bias, prejudice, capriciousness*
 - *Lack of predictability for the entire institution, especially students*
 - *Denying application of credit based on a desire to boost credit generation by transfer-receiving institution*
 - *Reviewers’ lack of requisite knowledge about content of courses from other institutions under review*
 - *Reviewers’ ignoring the reality that the two courses being considered are usually both approved by the same regional accreditor, meaning that reviewers are exercising a quality monitoring process that should be domain of the accreditor*
 - *Frequently the same adjunct faculty are teaching the same courses at both transfer sending and receiving levels*
 - *Denial of credit deprives the student of the chance to demonstrate that he/she can master the course content in next course in sequence*

Final Suggestions for Next Steps

- How could you collect the kind of data that would help these reviewing officers make data-driven decisions?
- Student dissatisfaction with discretionary review begs for legislative intervention! Better to get our own houses in order than to have it done for us.



What if we don't become more transfer-student friendly?



- The “nuclear option” – convert some of your two-year colleges to four-year degree-granting status.
 - *The community college baccalaureate movement can only grow (e.g., Florida, Michigan, Texas)*
- Private institutions will become more attractive to transfers .
- Cross-border institutions will become more competitive.
- For-profit institutions will attempt to address the needs.
- There will be more assertive intrusion from Middle States to help stave off pressure for more federal regulations.

Bottomline: All the alternatives to improving transfer are going to cost you students.

Are You Ready?

- To ask the really big question? What would be an EXCELLENT TRANSFER SYSTEM?
- This question is being asked right now by task forces in four states: SC, NC, CO, WA in a project grant to SHEEO and the Gardner Institute from the ECMC Foundation
 - *This is an aspirational question*
 - *And a measurement question*
 - *And one that embraces, ideally, all sectors of PSE: two-year, four-year, public, private, not-for-profit/for-profit*
- What would it take for the College and CUNY to tackle this question?

14.INTENTION STATEMENT:

*TO HELP INCREASE TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS, I WILL DO
THE FOLLOWING:*

In Conclusion

- Please attend other sessions today to be informed and inspired.
- Come to the concluding session and provide feedback on next steps.
- Decide what you can do in your sphere of influence.
- Get busy and do it!



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