

**Report on Transfer Students for
The Office of Advising Services,
Division of Student Affairs
Hunter College
Submitted by
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Table of Contents

Transfer Students at Hunter College – A Review of the Literature	4
Attrition and Retention of Transfer Students	4
Characteristics of Successful Transfer Students	5
Institutional Characteristics as Predictors of Persistence to Degree	7
Challenges Faced by Transfer Students	7
GPA Declines	7
Students’ Social Adjustment	8
Academic Expectations	9
Credit Transfer Problems and the Need for Articulation Agreements	9
Students of Color	9
Programs and Practices Recommended in the Literature	10
Advisor Attitudes	10
Advanced Undecided Student Outreach Efforts	10
CD-ROM based Orientation Programs in Place of Live Orientation Programs	11
Developmental Advising	11
Honors Programs	12
Information and Resources	12
Learning Community Programs	13
Student Mentors	13
Transfer Student Courses	13
Transfer Orientation and Summer Bridge Programs	14
“Transfer Partnerships”: 2 Year/4 Year Collaboration	14
Standing Committees	15
Conclusions from the Literature	16
Transfer Student Focus Group Report	17
Bureaucratic Dysfunction	17
Social Adjustment	19
Academic Adjustment	20
Student Strategies and Advice	22
Help from Hunter	24
Getting Information at Hunter College	25
Student Advice to Hunter	25
Why Transfer Students Stay at Hunter College	27
Researcher Conclusions from Focus Group Data	28
Suggestions for the Office of Advising Services at Hunter College	30
Target “At-Risk” Populations with Special Attention	30
Strengthen Transfer Orientation Sessions with Web-Based Orientation Program	30

	3
Look for Opportunities to Create Multiple, Small-Scale Learning Communities	31
Find Creative Ways to Collaborate with Faculty	31
Explore Hiring an Academic Advisor to be the Community College Transfer Liaison	32
Utilize Peers More Purposefully	33
Go to Where the Students Are (Physically or Electronically)	33
Take a Leadership Role in Organizing an Institution-Wide Effort to Promote the Success of Transfer Students	33
Bibliography	35

Transfer Students at Hunter College – A Review of the Literature

The efforts of social scientists to identify practices that work in institutions of higher education provide institutions with significant guidance in designing their educational programs. The research on how institutions promote student learning and retention, even among less privileged college students, is increasingly available. In an introduction to their recent study, Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt (2005A) proclaim:

In sum, student engagement has two key components that contribute to student success. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success. The second is the way the institution allocates resources and organizes learning opportunities and services to induce students to participate in and benefit from such activities.

The literature supports the notion that the Office of Advising Services can support student persistence by doing its job well -- Metzner (1989), in a rare study of the topic, found high-quality academic advising (as perceived by students) was indeed related to student retention. And while the Office of Advising Services cannot make decisions about how the institution allocates resources and is not responsible for the creation of learning opportunities beyond its own, the staff can learn about which of those existing opportunities at Hunter work for students and help educate the student body as a whole about how to connect to such opportunities. The office can also design the services it offers to best meet student needs, and can communicate, cooperate and collaborate with other departments to better integrate their efforts. In addition, the Office of Advising Services can take a leadership role in calling attention to the needs of transfer students. Kinzie, Kuh, Schuh & Whitt (2005B) found that institutions which were more successful than their peers at involving students in learning were institutions at which administrators, or less frequently faculty and students, took a leadership role in calling attention to areas in which the institution was not having success.

Attrition and Retention of Transfer Students:

The literature on attrition and persistence can help Hunter better understand the level of success the institution has achieved compared with peers at the national level. If there is indeed a difference in completion rates between transfer students and non-transfer students at Hunter College (something which is unclear from Hunter's data), it would not be surprising in light of national trends. Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) conducted a literature review of degree completion rate research; their text is a unique attempt to review the findings of many diverse research efforts conducted during a 30 year period, and thus carries significant weight among scholars of higher education. The research they reviewed indicates that there is significant disadvantage to institutional transfer in terms of likelihood of degree completion. Horizontal transfer – from one 4-year college to another 4-year college -- is actually the more problematic; the body of evidence

reviewed by the researchers led them to conclude that horizontal transfer indeed decreases the likelihood of degree completion compared to students who continue at their initial institution (p. 383). Vertical transfer – from a 2-year institution to a 4-year institution -- is more complex, but a limited body of evidence would indicate that students who successfully transfer from a two-year institution to a four-year institution are as likely to attain a bachelors degree as those who enter college directly into a four-year institution. (p. 376). Thus Hunter College should find degree completion rates to be lower for horizontal transfer students than for those who transfer vertically, and in fact this is the case.

Overall, Hunter College degree completion rates are low. According to Astin & Oseguera (2005), the average 6-year graduation rate at public colleges nationwide is 47%, while according to statistics gathered by Hunter's Office of Institutional Research the average 6-year graduation rate at Hunter is about 36% for native students and about 38% for transfer students. If one compares Hunter with other public universities (since Hunter does offer graduate programs this may be the more appropriate comparison), the comparison is even less favorable since nationwide public universities graduate 58% of their students. Thus, transfer students at Hunter College may leave the institution for many of the same reasons native students do. These facts indicate the importance of optimum performance on the part of the Office of Advising Services and the Division of Student Affairs as a whole.

Characteristics of Successful Transfer Students:

The Office of Institutional Research found few consistent trends in the aggregate data related to the degree persistence of transfer students at Hunter College. They did find that students who performed poorly during their first semester were significantly likely to drop out, and that students who had not chosen a major were more at risk for attrition. They did not find consistent trends in terms of where students transferred from. Interestingly, Beckenstein's (1992) study of academically at-risk transfer students at City College had similar findings. Looking at transfer students from both 2-year and 4-year institutions within the CUNY system who had entered as S.E.E.K. students between 1980 and 1985 (all of whom were by definition low-income, and almost all of whom were African American or Latino), he found that only 23% completed a degree at City College. He found no significant differences between students by school of origin, or by field of study. He did find significant differences between those who had an academically good first semester and an academically poor first semester (even when students did not drop out right away, and even when they managed better results in subsequent semesters they still left in larger numbers if their first semester was poor). Thus, although many differences exist in these two quantitative efforts – most notably Beckenstein's focus on SEEK program students -- research based on aggregate data at two CUNY 4-year institutions during two different time periods told a similar story.

Studies performed at other institutions have investigated the question of which transfer students are most likely to succeed in obtaining a degree. Cejda (1998) reports that several studies have found that students who had completed 60 credits or more at the community college experienced a lesser degree of transfer shock – that is a decline in GPA following transfer -- than those who enter with fewer credits. Piland (1995) found that graduation rates for students were higher the higher the number of units transferred.

Relatedly, Cedja (1998) reports that students who had completed a degree at the community college were more likely to graduate from the senior college. Beckenstein(1992) had a similar finding in his study of SEEK program transfer students within CUNY, as did Ehrenberg & Smith (2004) in an investigation of the SUNY system, and Eimers & Mullen (1997) at the University of Missouri. Cejda & Rewey (1998) report a similar finding in their study of transfer from community college to private liberal arts college. Hunter College data show no consistent difference in attrition rates between community college transfer students who come to Hunter with degrees and those who come without them. This is an interesting finding as it contradicts the literature.

Many studies found that that having a higher entering GPA, earned at the community college, was found to predict academic success at the 4 year institution (Cejda, 1998, Cejda & Rewey, 1998; Eimers & Mullen, 1997, Townsend, McNerny & Arnold, 1993; Zhai & Newcomb, 2000). Although Zhai & Newcomb (2000) found a variety of characteristics to be predictive of success, the most predictive was high community college GPA. Cejda & Rewey (1998) found that when transfer students had both completed an Associate's Degree *and* held a GPA of 3.0 or higher at the community college their degree completion rates were identical to those of native students.

Townsend (1995) found that successful students in her small study were self-reliant. At the University of California at San Diego, Piland (1995) studied the differences between community college students who did and did not graduate. Of 5532 bachelor's degree recipients in 1993, 1796 had begun study at an area community college. Piland studied the academic records of 300 of the 1796 students in depth and compared them to the community college transfer population at large. He found that the students who persisted to degree completion were the ones who “settled down” at the university. Although at the community college they had a history of erratic attendance patterns – going part-time, failing more than one course, dropping courses, stopping out – Piland found “considerably less” of these patterns after the move to the 4-year institution. He speculates that the difference may be caused by selecting a major, and completing general education courses, as well as “having a strong goal in mind” and maturing over the years (he found the typical baccalaureate graduate who had originated in the community college was 30 years old, and had taken time off between community college study and university study).

Two other factors in the predictive power of student characteristics were introduced and analyzed by Ehrenberg & Smith (2004), who found that students whose homes and 4-year institutions were far apart were more likely to persist in school 3 years after they enrolled, and that students who had higher annual earnings were less likely to persist 3 years later or to have graduated. Both of these factors would predict low persistence rates for Hunter College students, since most students are local and since New York City does offer a variety of economic opportunities that compete with investing time in college completion. Zhai & Newcomb (2000) found that younger students and males had higher rates of degree persistence. On the other hand, Piland (1995) found that women, part-time students, and “minority” students fared better at UCSD.

Institutional Characteristics as Predictors of Persistence to Degree:

The only study that attempted to look at institutional characteristics as predictors of persistence was Ehrenberg & Smith (2004), who studied the entire SUNY system of 64 institutions (they do not appear to have included CUNY institutions in their study). They found great variation in the effectiveness of 2 year sending institutions at preparing students for bachelor's degree programs and in the effectiveness of 4 year institutions as graduating transfer students from the community college (but didn't name names). They also found that institutions which enrolled large numbers of transfer students were more likely to graduate these students than those who enrolled small numbers, which would imply that Hunter should be in a good position to graduate large percentages of its transfer student body. Ehrenberg & Smith also found that the ability of an individual senior college to graduate transfer students from the community college system parallels their ability to graduate native students. The Office of Institutional Research's recent finding that transfer students may indeed graduate at rates similar to those of native students – even if they do take longer to graduate -- is consistent with Ehrenberg & Smith's findings. Thus, any successful effort to retain students at Hunter College will likely bolster the graduation rates of both native and transfer populations.

Challenges Faced by Transfer Students

GPA Declines:

In addition to documented attrition among transfer students in the literature, there is a documented “transfer shock” phenomenon – a decline in GPA during the first semester of attendance at the senior college. Diaz (1992) reported that 79% of community college transfer student studies reviewed reported experiencing transfer shock, which included, among other consequences a .5 drop in GPA. Thompson (2003) reported that students with under 30 credits at the time of transfer had higher incidences of GPA declines than those with over 30, and that those with 60 or more credits had virtually no incidence of GPA decline. While Diaz and others report that students often recover from transfer shock in subsequent semesters, Hunter College data indicate that poor first semester

performance is a powerful indicator of attrition. Zhai & Newcomb (2000) also found that academic deficiency was one of the major reasons for attrition among students who transferred from two year institutions to the 4-year institution they studied. Thus, any efforts which can reduce transfer shock has the potential to stem attrition.

Interestingly, Cejda & Rewey (1998) found GPA declines among transfer students with higher GPAs (3.0 -4.0) who entered a private liberal arts college from a community college, but also found INCREASES in GPA among transfer students with lower GPAs (2.0 – 3.0). Thus, the “transfer shock” phenomenon may not be universal.

Two studies by Cedja (1998) and Cedja et al (1997) which looked at students entering a private liberal arts college from public community colleges over an extended period of time documented a higher incidence of transfer shock among math, science, business and journalism majors than among transfer students in education, social sciences, fine arts and humanities majors. He reports that his findings are consistent with the findings of other studies intended to investigate the relationship between transfer shock and majors. In Cedja’s and Cedja’ et al’s own studies students in the social sciences, fine arts and humanities did not as a group experience any statistically significant GPA decline (and in one study in fact reported GPA gains). Although in some (but not all) other studies Cedja and his colleagues reviewed students in all majors did experience initial GPA declines, GPA declines among math and science majors were found to be higher. Hunter College might seek to understand if this is also the case at Hunter.

Students' Social Adjustment

The transfer transition not only affects grades, but students’ sense of well-being and belonging as well. Davies & Dickmann (1998) documented students’ experiences as community college to 4-year institution transfer students using qualitative methods. The students reported being intimidated by the size of their classes and having trouble connecting to others in such large settings. In a quantitative study of California university students who had transferred from California community colleges, Harbin (1997) found that while 80% of students surveyed felt satisfied with their academic preparation for university study, students reported other kinds of transition problems such as not knowing other students, feeling isolated and alone at the university, not knowing how to use the library and not knowing how to get academic advice.

Miville & Sedlacek (1995) studied differences and similarities in attitudes between first year students and transfer students. They found that while first year and transfer students were similarly concerned about interacting effectively with peers and faculty, the groups were different enough that they might need different strategies and opportunities to do so. Miville & Sedlacek believed that the university could successfully support transfer students by encouraging interaction between transfer students. They believed that although they found the goals and motivations for study very similar between transfer and native students, differences such as work patterns, demographic patters (transfer students were more likely to be first generation college students), commuting patterns

and family situations necessitate creating peer groups among transfer students rather than inviting transfer students into native student activities. In an unpublished presentation, Mary-Elaine Perry and Magda Manetas of the College of New Jersey reported that the college decided to house transfer students separately from the rest of the upperclass residential population, rather than to distribute them throughout the upperclass residence halls as had been done previously. This was in part to serve their needs through targeted programming, but also due to the recognition that transfer students could best connect to each other.

Academic Expectations

Two qualitative studies of community college to 4-year college transfer students (Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Townsend, 1995) reveal that these students find academic expectations at the two kinds of institutions to be very different and found themselves challenged to rise to the new standards and expectations. Students mentioned less reliance on multiple choice tests by professors, and more reliance on essays. In general they found they were required to do more writing at the university and that the professors' expectations of their writing was higher. In general, students reported faculty's expectation that students be able to master the subject matter on their own differed from those of community college faculty who expected to have to teach students how to learn. Miville & Sedlacek (1995), on the other hand, found that transfer students entering a 4 year institution had fewer concerns than first year students regarding adapting to the academic expectations of college life. Whether or not these expectations proved supported or not was not explored in the study.

Credit Transfer Problems and the Need for Articulation agreements

Almost all authors that write on the subject indicate that despite many efforts at creating articulation agreements nationwide, problems with transfer credit are ubiquitous in higher education and negatively affect transfer students by extending their studies beyond the usual required credits -- a fact that usually leaves students feeling frustrated and angry (Bingham-Newman & Hopkins, 2004). This phenomenon sometimes occurs because students have inadequate information, but more often even when students have access to course equivalencies, program and curriculum descriptions and to adequate academic advising they can still end up with credits that may only count as electives.

Students of Color

It should be noted that few of the studies available give insight into the special needs of students of color. Wawrzynski & Sedlacek (2003) declare that "none have studied transfer students in relation to race, ethnicity and gender." (p. 490) They go on to report their own findings, which are that students of color (African American, Asian American and Latino students) desired to become a part of their new community more than White students did. They were more likely than White students to study in study groups, and to report "positive academic behaviors" such as reviewing, revising and updating class

notes, reading ahead to prepare for class. They also reported more of an interest pursuing life-long skills, gaining an appreciation for attitudes and cultures different from their own, and gaining leadership skills. They were less likely to report procrastinating. Asian American students indicated having more trouble deciding what to study, and more difficulty speaking up in class. Lanaan (1999) reported that White students reported a significantly higher quality of effort with regard to faculty and course learning, which, while not entirely parallel, seems to contradict Wawarzynski & Sedlacek. He noted, however, that the students of color in his study were much more likely than Whites to be first-generation college students.

Miville & Sedlacek (1995) found two old studies by Holahan, Curren & Kelly (1982) and Durio, Helmick and Slover (1983), which had compared the success of White transfer students and students of color, but found the numbers of participants of color to be problematically small in both. The findings indicated that White students had the highest GPAs but that Latino students persisted in greater numbers than those of other groups even though they had lower GPAs than the White students. Piland (1995) found that “minority” students had higher persistence rates than White students in his study of UCSD, but he does not break those numbers down among various groups of students of color. Hunter College data indicate that Black women transfer students currently have the highest attrition rate among transfer students.

Programs and Practices Recommended in the Literature:

The literature documents a wide variety of ideas intended to support the success of transfer students. As a whole, the recommended programs and practices are less supported by research than are the barriers faced by transfer students, so many if not most of these ideas have not been evaluated for their effectiveness.

Advisor Attitudes:

Mahon & Dannells (1998) found even the academic advisors themselves can be a barrier to transfer student success. They found that, consistent with previous research, academic advisors at 4-year institutions viewed community college transfer students as less prepared, less motivated, less knowledgeable about requirements and procedures, and less able to adjust to the upper division academic environment. The authors believe that even when such opinions are based on experience instead of stereotypes, such beliefs can damage the advising relationship. Therefore they recommend that universities work to make sure attitudes about transfer students stay positive among any personnel that have an academic advising role.

Advanced Undecided Student Outreach Efforts:

Hunter College's Office of Institutional Research noted in 2005 that only 30.7% who come to Hunter with more than 60 credits have declared a major. Having no declared major may not mean not having a course of study in mind; Bonnie Kaplan Polis noted in an interview that most new transfer students she encountered in her years of working as the Director of Transfer Programs had a course of study in mind even though some may not have taken the necessary prerequisites to formally declare a major. Still, being "undecided" was linked by the Office of Institutional Research with attrition. Hagstrom, Skovholt, & Rivers (1997) conducted a qualitative study of advanced undecided students which found that such students reported frustration, anxiety and hopelessness, a fear of commitment, self-doubt and low-self-esteem, and difficulty setting goals. They also reported a fear that they were perceived as uncommitted or lazy, that many were reluctant to seek help from academic advisors because they did not think such contact would be helpful, yet they also reported that they wanted a personal, caring advising relationship from an advisor who understood their fear, discomfort and alienation. Many indicated that the difficulty declaring a major sometimes stemmed from pressure and advice they received from relatively uneducated parents and family members who they felt really didn't understand. Wawrzynski & Sedlacek (2003) found, in a study conducted at the University of Maryland, that Asian transfer students more often reported difficulty deciding what to study, which may or may not be true at Hunter. In general, working with undeclared transfer students seems to be one in which the Office of Advising Services can be of great use (and probably already is in many cases). A more systematic outreach effort might be beneficial.

CD-ROM Based Orientation Programs in Place of Live Orientation Programs:

Richland Community College in Texas replaced two hour long "live" orientation sessions with a 20-minute long CD Rom and received positive feedback for the change (Lords, 2000). They were able to require most students to utilize the CD Rom by making utilizing the CD Rom a requirement to gain access to a test most students were required to take before they could enter the community college. This allowed the institution to put more advisors to work advising instead of leading orientation sessions. Officials were aware that students did not always attend the advising sessions, as other authors also reported (Townsend, 1995). Hunter's excellent web guide for freshmen could be adapted to such use if there is a way to create incentives for students to utilize such an orientation program alternative.

Developmental Advising:

Authors recommend advising that looks at the student client holistically, to achieve educational, career and personal goals (Bingham-Newman & Hopkins, 2004). Currently, Hunter College Office of Advising Services embraces the concepts of developmental advising, but sheer numbers dictate that one-on-one advising will never suffice. Perhaps the Office can invent a holistic academic education approach to supplement the developmental academic advising. Kadar (2001) advocated a

developmental advising concept in which a counselor from the counseling center was paired with an academic department to help faculty members understand students' developmental issues which the faculty might encounter in their academic advising relationships. At Hunter, a liaison relationship which might prove beneficial would be to pair Advising Services staff members with academic departments. The assigned (or chosen) Advising Services staff member would serve as a resource regarding general education requirements to the faculty and as a resource about the department to the Office of Advising Services.

Honors Programs:

Bingham-Newman & Hopkins (2004) recommend allowing transfer students to participate in honors programs at the 4-year institution, an assertion that seems only fair, but does not have a lot of research which either supports or contradicts the recommendation. Laanan (1996) reports mixed outcomes for an honors program for community college students at twelve Los Angeles area community colleges *sponsored by the senior college*, University of California at Los Angeles. He found that the program, the Transfer Alliance Program or "TAP", contributed very positively to the students' community college experience (in 2 out of 3 studies TAP students who later attended UCLA had higher community college GPAs than their non-TAP community college transfer peers, had taken more honors courses at the community college, believed that their community college coursework enhanced their critical and analytical skills at a higher rate, felt more comfortable approaching faculty at the community college, used community college tutoring resources more and had a better experience of academic counseling at the community college). However, although not statistically different in most cases, the TAP student experiences once they got to UCLA were not markedly better than those of the non-TAP students and in fact perceptions of their experiences at UCLA might actually have been more negative. Among the few statistically significant findings, TAP students were more likely to join the UCLA honors program and to participate in the summer bridge program for transfer students at that institution. On the other hand, TAP students mean UCLA GPA of 3.19 was lower than the non-TAP GPA of 3.26. In an earlier study, Ackerman (1989b) had found the TAP students UCLA grade point averages to be statistically higher and their attrition rates to be lower than those non-TAP students.

Information and Resources:

Physically clustering offices that service the transfer student population -- as a way to make it easier for transfer students to find resources and information -- is recommended to support transfer students (Bingham-Newman & Hopkins, 2004). In addition, the Richland Community College experience described by Lords (2000) made faculty members' advising hours better utilized by moving faculty from their offices to the student center during the registration period.

Access to accurate information is also deemed important. Kearney & Kearney (1994) found that the “multiple transfer” transfer students they studied were more likely to leave the institution when there was a gap in their perception of institutional academic quality between when they entered and after they had been at the institution for a period of time. They recommend that institutions work carefully to provide “specific, detailed information on academic programs offered, average time to degree completion in these programs and any special requirements for particularly desirable but competitive majors...” (p. 26)

Learning Community Programs:

Crampton & Holm (1993) report on a learning community program in the Department of Psychology at the University of Washington called Transfer and Returning Student Interest Group in which transfer students and students who were returning to the institution after “stopping out” for two years or more who had an interest in majoring in psychology were enrolled. “TRIG” students co-registered for two courses and attended a weekly group meeting. One course was a 200 student, lecture-style research methodology course, the other was a core major requirement (it was also a lecture course with discussion sections, one of which was reserved for transfer students). Of the 25 students who participated in the program, 75% completed an evaluation, as did the faculty and teaching assistants; overall, respondents indicated that it was a positive experience. Although large-scale block scheduling efforts are probably not practical for transfer students given the diversity of their needs, the Office of Advising Services could work with the Office of the Provost and the academic departments to identify some academic programs in which small-scale learning community programs might be effective. Staff from the Office of Advising Services could participate in such programs in some way, perhaps by facilitating the weekly group meetings in collaboration with other institutional staff members (perhaps from other offices within the Division of Student Affairs).

Student Mentors:

Laanan (1996) suggests connecting students with student mentors as a way to support transfer students. Bingham-Newman & Hopkins (2004), recommended matching up students from the same sending institutions. In both cases the suggestions made are merely that; neither author reports any attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of such programs. The Office of Advising Services currently offers trained peer advisors to supplement departmental advising staff – perhaps this program could be expanded.

Transfer Student Courses:

According to Bingham-Newman & Hopkins (2004), these courses should include discussions of transfer shock, the price of education at the new institution, and of the

losses typically faced by transfer students in terms of credits. They should also educate students about how class scheduling is handled, course articulation, rules regarding graduation and other university rules and regulations. They report that students at California State University –Los Angeles who participated in such a program had a 95% first year retention rate.

Transfer Orientation Programs and Summer Bridge Programs:

Ackermann (1989a) studied a summer bridge program at UCLA and found that students who participated attributed their positive academic, social and cultural adjustment to participation in the program. While extended orientation programs and summer bridge programs for transfer students might be worth investigating at Hunter, because they are costly and complicated, and because the literature really doesn't offer sufficient documentation of their effectiveness, such an investigation would have to proceed with caution. Beckenstein recommended that transfer students "should be placed in orientation groups very much in the way that freshmen are treated when they first enter college" (p. 59). His sentiment that "The widely held attitude that 'transfer students can make it on their own because they already experienced college life' is an erroneous assumption" was echoed throughout the literature.

"Transfer Partnerships": Two-year/ 4 year Collaboration:

Collaborations can include efforts by faculty and academic affairs staff to reach out to faculty and academic affairs staff at the community colleges. Almost all authors agreed that articulation agreements between community colleges and 4-year institutions to minimize transfer student credit loss is desirable. The CUNY system has such a program in place. Going a step further, Cedja (1994) found that an institution was able to significantly reduce GPA decline among community college to 4-year institution transfer students when faculty collaborated on examining and re-designing community college curriculum. (One student in the focus group pilot mentioned that she felt her poorer academic performance in her first two semesters at Hunter was due to not having the same knowledge base as other Hunter students.) Kisker (2005) reports on a program in which faculty from a senior college and several community colleges are paid a stipend of \$4000 to coordinate and shape the community college curriculum.

Collaborations can involve having 4-year institution personnel reaching out to students at the community colleges. Laanan (1996) recommends increasing community college student information about counseling and administrative services at the 4-year college. He also proposes providing community college students with access to support personnel at the 4-year institution early on. Rhine, Milligan & Nelson (2000) recommend preparing students for the possibility of GPA decline in the first semester or two at the 4-year institution, in the hopes that they will be prepared to work harder avoid grade loss or at least to be prepared if such a GPA decline occurs. They also recommend that advisors at community colleges and 4-year institutions should be in contact with one another.

Townsend (1995) recommends that representatives of the university go to the community colleges to seek to enroll transfer students rather than rely on the community college alone to promote transfer (since in her study students indicated bypassing the community college transfer office frequently). A residential summer program for first-generation, low income students at the community college – ones who had not yet applied for transfer, thus distinguishing this effort from a “summer bridge program – was implemented at one university (Kisker, 2005).

Collaborations can involve contact between administrators. Southwest Texas State University developed a Transfer Advisory Council, which has been in operation since 1984, part of whose mission is to help 2-year institutions prepare students for transfer (Thompson, 2003). Although a committee of the university, seats on the committee are also held by area community college representatives. Administrators at one institution implemented a university-developed tutoring model at the community college campuses (Kisker, 2005). Administrators also initiated an annual conference in introduce new theories about enhancing transfer.

One study reported on a program to increase contact between university students and community college students. This was a paid peer mentor program in which university students mentored community college students (Kisker, 2005). No evaluation as to the effectiveness of the program was included, however.

Fundamental to creating and sustaining transfer partnerships, according to Kiskar (2005), were the importance of previous relationships between institutions, strong presidential support, adequate and sustained funding and maintaining a university presence on community college campuses and the ongoing faculty involvement. Challenges included balancing the power in between university and community college personnel, and disagreements over what was desirable and feasible.

Because a large number of transfer students at Hunter College begin their studies in the CUNY community college system a dedicated advisor to this population might be in order. Ideally, this staff member would spend significant amounts of time (perhaps 25% or 50% of working hours per month) at the community colleges providing workshops, learning the curricula and cultures of the institutions and holding advising sessions for students at those institutions who have been admitted for transfer at Hunter College. This person could also cultivate relationships which could lead to organized meetings between community college faculty and Hunter College faculty.

Standing Committees:

Southwest Texas State University's Transfer Advisory Council has members from across the institution (faculty, staff and students) who monitor the success of transfer students at the institution, as well as representatives from area community colleges (Thompson,

2003). They set goals and agendas for transfer student support, and generate a report to the community colleges annually.

Conclusions from the Literature:

The Office of Institutional Research at Hunter College found few consistent trends among transfer students. Both the Hunter College data and the academic literature suggest that first semester performance of transfer students is a strong predictor of success. Therefore, efforts to connect with students and support their academic success in the first semester is paramount. The academic literature also suggests that students who enter an institution without a completed community college degree and/or who enter an institution with fewer than 60 credits are more at risk for attrition. Furthermore, as one would predict, the lower the GPA at entrance to an institution, the higher the risk of attrition. Hunter College could perhaps investigate this phenomenon at Hunter itself, and identify potentially at risk students. Hunter's finding that Black, female students leave at higher rates than other students would indicate that this population may also be in need of special support.

Given national trends, personnel in the Office of Advising Services and in the Division of Student Affairs need to be aware of the possibility of GPA decline during transfer students' first semester of study, and students may need to be made aware as well. Getting used to new academic expectations was reported to be difficult for community college transfer students; Hunter can make sure transfer students are made aware of academic expectations and also academic support resources from the beginning. Studies also report a significant need for supporting the social adjustment of transfer students. The literature indicates that encouraging interaction between transfer students may be an effective way to promote social integration. Finally, authors continue to emphasize the importance of articulation agreements, and to advocate for fairness in granting credit for academic work which has already been completed at other institutions.

The authors recommend many possible ways to support transfer students. For the most part, relatively little evidence of the effectiveness of various types of efforts is provided. Hunter needs to review the various ideas presented in the literature and determine which ones are feasible for that institution.

Transfer Student Focus Group Report

It was sincerely a privilege to meet the Hunter College transfer students – 29 in all -- who agreed to participate in one-hour long focus group interviews during the late spring and early summer of this year. The diversity, maturity and tenaciousness of these students was noteworthy and impressive. They were generous with their information and at times expressed gratitude for being given the chance to be heard. This report will attempt to describe the students' experience and to make recommendations as to ways Hunter College can better support transfer students. As a final comment, one student said, “Transfer students are a great strength of the institution because of their diverse experience” and felt they should be more highly valued and better assisted – perhaps this report can be influential in that regard.

Bureaucratic Dysfunction: “Communication is a problem everywhere, but here it is worse.”

Only two students expressed the belief that their transfer to Hunter College had been an administratively smooth one (and one of these two students managed a smooth transition by going directly to Vice President Ayravainen and bypassing the entire system). It was alarming how nearly universal students' complaints were about the difficulties they faced getting accepted into the institution, getting registered and getting together a program of study. None of the students' complaints were unique ones in higher education, but the degree to which they encountered difficulty was extreme. Students descriptions of the problems they encountered coming into the institution and their discussions of the strategies they developed to handle what they saw as a chaotic and uncaring bureaucracy took up a large part of each interview.

Problems with the CUNY Admission Office, and with communication between the CUNY Admission Office and Hunter College were nearly universal. Students complained of delays in having their transcripts evaluated, only to discover that nearly none of their courses counted as anything but electives. One student described having completed an entire psychology major in Russia and receiving just four non-elective credits in psychology. One problem described by more than one student was having documents lost; one student described sending in her transcripts three times and then having to submit course descriptions four times. Two students described having received no guidance as to how to have foreign language course descriptions evaluated; one student finally solved the problem by having a faculty member who was fluent in her native language do the translation, after the translation she paid for was not considered official enough. Another student described having to translate her own transcript, which presumably was accepted. One student described being told by the CUNY Admission Office that she was “all set” and “in the computer” only to find out that the information never reached Hunter. Several students described having to begin their studies as a non-matriculated student or to delay beginning their studies by a semester because of bureaucratic delays in the course evaluation process. One international student delayed

entry into Hunter because she was not made aware of the higher tuition rate she would have to pay; she didn't have the money for the higher rate of tuition so she entered community college for one year to gain residency.

Most students described being able to subsequently get more credits to transfer as requirements than had initially been granted to them by the CUNY Admission Office, most often as major requirements, by having faculty members reevaluate their credits. While this was effective, it cost the students a great deal of time and left them feeling that the system at the institution was completely arbitrary. Students indicated that they learned to seek out several professors to get the answer that they wanted regarding course transfer and later on to bypass course prerequisites. Students said they learned to “wait a week to see the right person” -- the person who would either have the real information, or alternatively, the person they knew they could convince of their perspective -- “rather than see the wrong person right away.” They did not seem to see this so much as beating the system as surviving in chaos. It is not unusual in higher education to find inconsistency when decisions are necessarily left up to the discretion of faculty – in fact one student, after complaining about the process, said that after all he guessed that there was some “necessary inefficiency” in course evaluation given that Hunter could hardly be expected to know the curriculum at every other institution in higher education. What does stand out in the students' descriptions, though, is the lack of timeliness of the process, the lack of information students had about the process, the inconsistencies in information, the colossal waste of time and the frustration they felt. A student pointed out that this system wasted a lot of Hunter's time, too, which is particularly true given the sheer number of transfer students at the institution.

Students described frustrations with the registration process and the data management capacities of Hunter College. Again, this is not unique but students describe an extreme situation. Many students commented that they were never told how to register. Several students complained bitterly about what they saw as a “nightmare” computer system which was “extremely faulty” -- hard to access at peak times and which frequently crashed. One student described getting up at five in the morning on the first day of registration every semester to push a button over and over again for hours until she can finally get access to the system. Students described having to spend time and effort monitoring their academic records to make sure changes – most frequently a change in course evaluation – are recorded, which can take weeks if it happens at all. They pointed out that transcript changes took a surprising amount of time to go through, and there was no system to notify students when they did go through (and they were sometimes wrong anyway). Some students claimed that the TIPPS system and their transcript evaluation did not always agree and that there were mistakes on their on-line degree audit. Students also commented on the lack of instruction on how to take courses at other CUNY institutions and difficulties getting those courses reflected on their transcripts when they are completed. They also reported having to pay late fees when delays were often not their fault but caused by the system. Two students also specifically mentioned problems with the financial aid process; one called her initial encounter with the Financial Aid Office “the worst week of my life.”

All too often and throughout the institution, students found they received incorrect or inconsistent information, partial information or no information at all. The word “ping pong” came up several times to describe being sent back and forth between offices, although one student clarified this further saying it was ping pong but “you have to wait in line every time” so the process is slower than the phrase implies. Students described having information “accidents” -- learning something useful (usually from other students) totally by accident – and almost all students reported on the importance of “the grapevine” which was usually “spot on”, in contrast with official information which was universally considered dubious and in need of confirmation and reconfirmation. The researcher observed “information accidents” in several focus group interviews, in which one student would offer up a piece of information and another student would exclaim something like, “Oh, wow! I didn't know that!”

Students describe frequently encountering long lines wherever they went – all too often finding getting no real help when they reached the front of the line, as well rudeness from staff. They said staff “made no eye contact” and that they “didn't even look up to acknowledge you but just kept doing their work.” Other students pointed out that not everyone was rude, although one felt that “on the phone they are ALL terrible.” They often felt they were treated unsympathetically. One student said “It doesn't seem as if if I disappeared off the face of the Earth anybody would notice.”

Ironically, students said they learned from the administrative run around they encountered – how to be assertive, how to look out for themselves, how to stay on top of a bureaucracy – but that this unintended lesson was not welcome. One student described her efforts to make officials believe her regarding a largely unknown policy which she knew to be correct, saying “one advisor just would not believe me and make me feel so stupid I just cried.” One student said, “Transferring into CUNY aged me like three years.” Another student reported a fantasy she had, wherein the dean or someone important created a false identity and tried to enter the institution as a transfer student so that he or she could experience just exactly what students have to go through.

Social Adjustment: “One of the hardest things to get used to is the loneliness”

Loneliness was another major theme in the interviews, although it was not nearly as universal as the perception of administrative dysfunction. Students pointed out that the native students had their groups of friends – sometimes from block-scheduling, sometimes even from high school, sometimes from the residence halls – most of which the transfer students were not connected to. Other students described easily making acquaintances, usually in class, but then watching those relationships slip away after the semester. They commented that there are just so many people and you sometimes “never see the same face twice.” They said once you did make a friend you often lost them when the friend moved on either by leaving or graduating.

Most students agreed that meeting people was easier than really connecting. For some students just having acquaintances was enough. Two older students mentioned being pleased that the younger students were accepting of them and that they were nice people (“once you get past the music, the noise and the phones” said one). Students who were fortunate to be part of small academic departments or programs, such the Nursing Program, the Religion Department or the Film Department, especially departments that worked at connecting their students, found pleasure in being a part of a cohort. Courses with lab requirements or which required group work helped students to meet classmates. Other students who joined honors programs, scholars programs, sports teams or co-curricular clubs and organizations reported feeling more socially connected. Some students felt they had just gotten lucky and had made friends easily.

Several students commented that the atmosphere is “not very warm” and that you don't get the sense that “people are a family looking out for one another”. They felt this limited students' sense of personal affiliation with and identification with Hunter College.

Academic Adjustment: “I felt bad about always having to go to the professor for help, you feel dumb”

The researcher asked students about their academic adjustment to the institution. Contrary to what the academic literature would lead one to expect, frustrations in academic adjustment proved to be a minor theme, although not insignificant for those who faced challenges. Students reported difficulty in adjusting to large classes of up to 400 students. When students were not able to learn well in large lecture courses there were too often no resources available to help them. Students suggested having tutoring offered in more courses, having a permanent anatomy and physiology display available (as they found at other institutions) and having more on-line resources such as lecture notes or other learning aids available on-line for large lecture courses. One student mentioned not having the same knowledge base as the native students do – she found that these students had taken courses together and had been introduced as a group to theories and scholars to whom they made reference in class, but with whom she was unfamiliar. It took her a while to develop that base and improve her grades. Students who had faced issues in academic adjustment found this experience to be both frustrating and a blow to their self-esteem.

Many students who had not faced academic adjustment issues – the majority of respondents – used the question as an opportunity to evaluate their academic experience at Hunter. In general their evaluation of academic life was much more positive than their administrative experience, although it was still a mixed report. Students found most professors to be both good at what they do and caring about students, although most students were quick to point out that there were some notable exceptions. The sentiments of one student, that for the most part “they really want you to do well”, was echoed often in the interviews. Most students reported that teachers' ability to promote class discussion, the assignment of group work, and faculty enthusiasm for their subject matter

all contributed positively to their learning (even if group work was sometimes seen as unpleasant but good for you!). Some students reported having one or more really great learning experience at Hunter, or being part of a (generally small) academic department or program which really made their learning experience rich. One student described stumbling upon a really engaging professor from another department and subsequently signing up for her course. The student said learning from this professor was “a turning point” in her experience at Hunter (which had been largely negative up until that point).

On the down side, students reported an inability to adequately shape their academic experience. Most students seemed to come with a course of study in mind (only one student mentioned difficulty deciding what to study). They found that the process of connecting to the major they wanted – often the very reason they came to Hunter – to be bureaucratically difficult, especially regarding getting the major prerequisites they needed (often in their minds they were 'retaking' these courses to begin with, since they believed they had already fulfilled them elsewhere but did not get credit for the work). In every focus group students described their frustration with not getting the courses they need to complete their programs; students who depended on evening and Saturday offerings felt this all the more acutely. The lack of credits transferred to fulfill requirements, the complexity of the General Education Requirement and the demands of the major leaves students with little flexibility, which makes course access all the more important. Most students reported frustration with not being able to take courses they were attracted to but having to take courses they did not need or did not want to take instead. The G.E.R., especially the writing and diversity requirements, were often mentioned in this regard. One student felt forcing too many students to be in classes they did not want to be in ruined the courses because the collective apathy diminished class discussion.

Several students complained about the required proficiency exam (the “CPE”), which they felt was poorly managed, offered no real feedback and was often seen as unnecessary and even insulting (although one student defended the exam, saying it prevented students from the sciences from missing out on the real communication skills they would need to navigate a career). One student particularly complained about the language of the CPE e-mail, which felt very heavy-handed and added insult to injury in this student's opinion.

Another interesting but minor theme was the theme of part-time instructors. Students said that often these faculty members were usually good, sometimes even “the best”, but they were often less accessible due to competing commitments. Even when students did form relationships with these faculty members they felt that the relationships were less useful because the faculty members were not decision-makers internally nor were they likely to be as respected as sources of recommendations for graduate school or other post-graduation programs and opportunities.

One student complimented the language placement system, which she felt worked well. She felt this was in contrast to the other systems for figuring out at what level of study she should be placed, such as the transfer credit evaluation system.

Student Strategies and Advice: “Always ask at least 3 people”

All students succeeded at the institution by developing strategies for managing the bureaucracy, almost always strategies they developed on their own; some also described finding “anchor” groups – student organizations, athletic teams, and engaging academic programs – which helped them both in terms of getting information and social connection. Having either a natural ability to deal with bureaucracy, which was evidently the case with some students interviewed, or being mature were assets (one student in her thirties told a moving story of being rejected three times due to the poor grades she had earned as a young student at another institution but ultimately being allowed entrance – and indeed proved very successful at connecting to learning opportunities and achieving good grades– by asking everyone she could think of for help until someone finally succeeded on her behalf).

Developing bureaucracy management strategies was a major theme. Most students described having to learn these strategies on their own. The most frequent strategy students used was asking questions. Students almost all agreed that nobody would help them (at least not enough) -- they had to help themselves. They overwhelmingly recommended not being shy and asking questions, especially of other students. A universal exclamation in the interviews was “you have to ASK!” Many students emphasized that asking one official was not enough because too often the information offered was wrong; one student asserted “You have to keep asking different people until you get the right answer.” Students debated in front of the researcher the number of times you have to hear the same answer before you believe it: Two? Three? More?

Students commented on the importance of always taking down the names of who you speak to and what they said (to protect yourself and to keep track because the processes are often complicated). Students have learned that they must do their own research, using the catalog and on-line sources, so one had evidence which allowed one to advocate for oneself better. Students described making an effort to make personal relationships with key faculty members and administrators to eliminate red tape. They mentioned not being shy about asserting yourself. They saw as a necessity the strategy of sometimes “making a stink” to get what you want – not to “get over” but to just get anything done. One student commented, “You can't let up or people will just make you do what they want with you.”

Some have learned to bypass lower level personnel and go right to the top; others have found an advisor they trust and go back to that person for everything (although one student commented that what you need is two favorite advisors so you can check information with both and make sure it is consistent!). One student learned to hang out in the student government office, which is not something he is an active participant in, just to learn about what is going on at Hunter. Some rely on information gathered off the Hunter “network” of the social networking websites. Students described getting up early

to try to get on-line or in line on peak administrative days (registration, etc.) because “demand is very high and supply is not proportionate”. Students recommended using the on-line telephone directory to bypass what they see as the “useless”, obstructionist phone menus “that I bet Hunter paid a lot of money for!” They told the researcher that they just call people down the list on the website until someone knows the answer (or until they hear the same answer from multiple people). One student said you call a department, ask a question, then call back the same number and ask again to see if you get the same answer before you believe it. Another described calling down lists of phone numbers with her father for an entire day to get something important done in time to meet a deadline she accidentally discovered existed.

Some students reported finding what the researcher came to think of as “anchor groups” – smaller communities within Hunter. These were sometimes found in the students' academic experience, such as small, active major departments or specialized academic programs. They were also sometimes honors or “scholars” programs students had joined. Other students reported connecting to smaller communities through co-curricular offerings such as athletic teams or student organizations (sometimes with ones with academic themes such as the literary journal). Three students reported more ad hoc communities that had supported them – one had a friend from before he went to Hunter whose network of friends he joined and two others stayed connected to friends they had made in community college. As mentioned above, one student hung out with the student government and attended Thomas Hunter Honors events without joining either organization (he didn't realize transfer students could join the honors program until another student brought her affiliation up during the focus group interview!). These anchor groups had multiple functions – they made the information “accidents” more frequent, they reduced loneliness and helped students learn survival strategies faster. Students in anchor groups often seemed the most satisfied and said things like “I don't know what I would have done if I wasn't part of [my athletic team]”. A concerted effort to help students see the value of affiliation and making sure they are aware of the honors programs, scholars programs and co-curricular offerings would be quite valuable.

In addition to the strategies described above, students gave the following advice to entering transfer students:

- Ask questions
- Write your questions down and show them to everyone you meet
- Go to orientation
- Read the catalog
- Get the GER sheets right away
- As soon as you declare a major, go to the D.I.G. and get your degree audit
- Use orientation to make friends with people in the same boat
- Be patient
- Be aggressive
- Don't be intimidated
- It's going to be hard, but don't give up!

- Know your goals
- Visit a class before you enroll to be sure Hunter is for you
- Get to know your classmates – they are diverse, great people – make friends
- Get involved; when you participate you get connected
- Form study groups
- Find a good adviser
- Go to an adviser before you register
- If you are older, study at night if you can
- You can do it!
- Study hard and enjoy!
- Don't buy the books until you are sure you need them

Help from Hunter

When asked what had helped them most in their transition to Hunter College, and who or what had made them feel welcome, students sometimes fell silent or said, “I helped myself” or, quite frequently, “I mostly got help from other students.” Upon brief reflection, students did recognize sources of assistance from the institution.

Most frequently mentioned was the transfer student orientation. Most students felt it was welcoming and helpful. Some said the feeling of welcome did not last as they listened to the “terrifying” description of the requirements or when they faced the “scramble” afterward. Some students wished it had included a tour; similarly, others commented that they wished it did not just cover academic requirements. One student said breaking down into small groups was very helpful. More than one student mentioned that they wished they had gone or that they wished they had been allowed to attend (a CUNY B.A. student mentioned that she was not allowed to participate, for example, as well as a student who began her studies as a non-matriculated student). One student mentioned that none of the orientation times worked for her; another did not know there was a transfer student orientation.

Two students mentioned an academic advisor as having helped in their transition, and one student mentioned a peer counselor from Advising Services. Students mentioned feeling frustrated by the limitations of the academic advisor role; they didn't like it that they could not get advisement on their major requirements. One student said the academic adviser felt like an “unnecessary third party” because it is the academic departments had the information and decision-making power they needed. Students were frustrated by the lines and the difficulty of getting access to advisers, and they felt some advisers “just don't care” about student needs.

Faculty were mentioned very frequently as a source of assistance and welcome. One commented that most of the faculty “really reach out.” Another said she found them “invigorating, thought-provoking, wonderful!” One student commented that she worried that as an international student faculty would not embrace her, but they had. One student

disagreed that faculty were welcoming; one said that while most were welcoming but one had really insulted her when he said that international students should only speak English at Hunter. The faculty should be made aware of how important their welcome of students and support of students is to students.

Two student noted assistance from the Office of Disability Services. Two students mentioned Vice-President Ayravainen. The catalog, coaches, the Welcome Center, the CUNY Admission Office (very welcoming but unfortunately gave bad information), the web-site and joining an organization were all mentioned by one student each.

Getting Information at Hunter College: “I’m *still* not sure how to get all the information I need!”

The researcher asked students how they learn what is going on at Hunter College. Students indicated that getting information, especially good information, was challenging. They most frequently cited “the grapevine” and “accidentally” finding things out from other students. They felt information from other students was the most reliable.

They did, however, consistently cite several administratively provided sources of information. They frequently cited the weekly E-Bulletin, which students appreciated (one student said it was especially important to students on the Brookdale campus who otherwise have no idea what is happening on the main campus). Students felt it could have more detail or better links to more detail (although one student said it had too many links and you found yourself “clicking around” too much). Students also frequently mentioned the website (although they sometimes found the information “too shallow”), professors' in-class announcements and publicity on the 3rd floor. Somewhat fewer students mentioned getting information through programs and organizations affiliated with Hunter College, sometimes via listservs such as the Pre-med Club listserv. Also, MySpace was mentioned by two students (although one student adamantly pointed out that she would never join a social networking site and felt one should not have to do so just to learn what was going on at your campus). One student mentioned using “ratemyteacher.com” to learn about faculty members. Nobody mentioned any Hunter College publications except the catalog, which students often reported referring to.

Student Advice to Hunter: “Treat transfer students as if they are a freshman -- give them information as if they know nothing about college”

Overall, students want a better-functioning administration with more polite service – one student said “tell them that please and thank-you go a long way” -- and less conflicting information. They had the following suggestions for how Hunter could achieve this goal:

Improve transfer credit process: Students did not know exactly how to do this but said it took too long, and felt too arbitrary. They say the decisions are never explained and there are no protocols or procedures that anyone could review. Challenging the decisions was often successful but took too much time. They suggested the creation of written guidelines and protocols and the institution of real deadlines for transcripts.

Give us maps and tours: Several students would have appreciated a good campus map and the chance to take an orientation tour of the campus, especially one which tells them what services are available to students and how to access them. Students said to be sure to include the roof terrace, the student copying services, and the computer lab. In general, better signage around the school and signs which display hours of service are needed.

Help us get connected socially: Students felt an orientation program which did more to help students get to know each other would be helpful. They also mentioned making information about clubs, organizations and programs more available to new students, and telling them the value of getting involved. Students suggested a peer adviser or peer mentor program, and the option of a course like the “ORSEM” program available to freshmen (but don’t make it a requirement). They felt the Hunter did not have a “warm” atmosphere and anything that could improve that would be welcome.

Give us a transfer adviser who can help us with ALL our issues: Students desired more coordinated services, and a central location where they could get all the information they needed. Students recommended having a central help desk or booth, or an adviser who could help students with everything they needed to know at Hunter College and everything they needed to do. They asked that the transfer evaluator and Advising Services work together better. They also wanted better, more consistent advising and were frustrated by the need to get GER advising and major advising separately. One student mentioned that non-matriculated students should be allowed to see advisers when they have an intention to transfer into the institution. Students want to be able to go back to the same adviser multiple times, rather than having to take whomever is available and tell their story over again. One student mentioned that the advising system should be one in which students can feed information back into the institution, not just get information or guidance out.

Help us learn what we came here for: Students want better access to the classes they need. They recommended giving transfer students higher status for registration, increasing the number of course sections, running sequential courses more frequently, and balancing evening and day offerings more fairly. Conversely, students want fewer classes they don’t want. One student said, “If I could change one thing it would be the GER.” One student commented that the math requirement is “dumb.” Students were very pleased with most of their classes and faculty, but felt the bad experiences were very bad; they wanted a little more quality control.

Give us a “transfer process handbook” with all the information: Students felt they lacked too much information. The Participants felt Hunter College should tell students:

- Application deadlines
- Transcript deadlines
- Registration dates
- GER requirements
- What to do if you can't register on time
- A contact person who can be e-mailed if you get stuck at any point in the process
- All about the CPE and how to prepare for it (or “just get rid of it”)
- How registration works
- How to use e-mail, E-Sims and S-Net
- How to get a password
- How to get your Hunter e-mail to forward to your personal e-mail account
- About the availability of Hunter College housing
- About the over-tally process and how it works
- Where to go to get your grades
- Where to find out about major requirements and how to sign up for a major
- How and when to use the D.I.G.
- How to use the library
- How to use the gym

Other Ideas students offered were:

- Host another orientation event for transfer students a couple of weeks after classes start
- Add advisers - only one health-care professions adviser is not enough
- Add another adviser in the history department – one is not enough
- Offer a GPA waiver for the C.P.E.

Why Transfer Students Stay at Hunter: “Hunter is an excellent university”

Students say they persist because of a strong desire to obtain a college degree. Several expressed pride at being at Hunter because of its reputation for academic excellence, and more than one expressed the hope that a degree from Hunter would be an asset in gaining acceptance to graduate school. Most expressed the opinion that although there were weaknesses in their academic experience, the strengths of their academic programs outweighed the weaknesses, especially within the department or program. They felt the level of academic expectation was appropriately high in most cases. Students like the location and the fact that the institution is affordable.

A small, dissenting voice was that of the few students who felt the only reason they stayed was that they had too much invested to change at this point. These students had

already transferred once (or more than once) and just wanted to be done with college even though they were not pleased with the experience.

Researcher Conclusions from Focus Group Data

The students who participated in the focus group interviews were impressive in their desire to learn. They yearned for more effective administrative processes which would not take so much of their time and attention away from their studies, and they yearned to have more power to shape their course of study.

Improvement in the administrative systems, especially the credit transfer evaluation system, would be of tremendous help to this group of students. Any change which would eliminate the need to go around from department to department pleading their case would be welcome by this group, to say the least. Without knowing all of the funding and political implications of such a measure, outsourcing the foreign transcript process to World Education Services and/or “in-sourcing” the credit transfer process to within Hunter College itself might be worth exploring. If the process were taken in-house, an extensive effort to include the academic departments in establishing consistent guidelines for evaluation would be recommended.

Strengthening the orientation program, which is already mostly viewed as a source of help by students, is another area for attention. Students clearly clamor for more information, and were reasonably specific as to what they would have wanted to know. New materials should be developed accordingly. Including returning transfer students in orientation planning would be helpful. A small advisory group could vet materials, and a student “panel” could share the many strategies students develop for dealing with a large bureaucracy – rather than having each student come up with their own strategies through trial and error.

Helping students make social connections seems to be an important goal. Not all students felt lonely, but many did. In particular helping students find “anchor groups”, not just academic courses of study, would be a worthwhile goal for the Office of Advising Services. Students who were connected to a student network were less lonely and had more access to needed information. The assumption that transfer students don't have time for social connection or a need for it seems incorrect. Advising Services could work with other departments in the Division of Student Affairs to make sure they know about the institution's co-curricular offerings. Advising Services should also work with the academic departments to learn about the various honors programs and scholars programs available to transfer students, since many of the “anchor groups” were academic programs. Advising Services could work with the Division of Student Affairs help formalize the informal networks students currently rely on, and could work with the academic departments to help them become meaningful subcommunities.

Faculty are an asset to supporting transfer students, and need to be informed of the difference they make so that they keep up the good work (or change their ways, in a

minority of cases). Faculty also need to know how group work, laboratory work, and programs which move students together through a course of study support students' social connection. They also need to be informed of the importance of social connection for its own sake but also, in such a big institution, for connecting students to needed strategies and information.

Academic adjustment was not a major issue for most students – getting used to classes at Hunter was not a process for most. However, those that did face academic adjustment issues suffered. Using the orientation and advising programs to help students know where to turn if they do encounter difficulty is important. Also, encouraging the departments to have faculty provide supplementary learning resources, especially for large, lecture-style classes, would be beneficial to students.

Finally, helping the students feel engaged with their studies was paramount to student satisfaction. Increasing students' choices by reducing requirements is one option the students liked, as well as making more course sections available – in the day and in the evenings -- so they can get into the courses they need. Students liked it when they felt there were good course offerings, and that the course listed were really offered, especially courses in their majors. They liked faculty who were passionate about the subject they were teaching and they liked active learning opportunities such as group work and having a “classroom atmosphere which encourages discussion”. The students who participated in the focus groups were mature students who attend the institution to achieve the learning goals they set for themselves and were eager to shape their own academic experience. They were happiest when they were trusted to do so.

Suggestions for the Office of Advising Services at Hunter College

The students who participated in the focus group interviews had many suggestions for Hunter College, which were included in that report. In addition, the academic literature on transfer students is a source of further ideas regarding how to support transfer students. Because of the size and diversity of the transfer student body, there are few large-scale changes and programs that would help all transfer students. An approach that offers multiple small-scale opportunities to engage transfer students in their academic planning and in their studies will best reach this population. The Office of Advising Services' commitment to giving transfer students the information they need to succeed at the institution, not just fulfill their requirements, should be re-emphasized. This includes helping students connect to the institution and commit to a program of study. A few suggestions, drawn from the focus group interviews and the literature both, follow.

Target “At-Risk” Populations with Special Attention:

- Prioritize advanced undecided students in advising. Advanced undecided students are found to be at-risk by the literature and the Office of Institutional Research, and the focus group data indicates that having clear academic goals was a big motivator. Although undoubtedly the Office of Advising Services has helping students choose a major on it's radar, increased, active, systematic outreach to new advanced transfer students who have not declared a major seems warranted. Having information about students' major or program intentions, either through the admission process or some other intake process, would be very helpful.
- Identify students with low GPAs at entry, and prioritize them for advising sessions, since both the literature and the Office of Institutional Research found that entering with a low GPA is negatively correlated with persistence. This will allow you to connect them to academic support services immediately. “Low” was defined differently in different studies; if an institutional definition does not exist at Hunter one should be determined. While most students in the focus group interviews did not have trouble adjusting to Hunter's academic demands, it is worth noting that these are the students who stayed at the institution – the ones that had trouble may not have lasted long enough to participate! Those that did report academic adjustment issues reported having to work hard to find support resources.

Strengthen Transfer Orientation Sessions with Web-Based Orientation Program (similar to that reported by Lords (2000)):

- Students in the focus groups had concrete ideas about what they would have liked to know from the beginning and some suggested a “handbook”; the web-based program and the orientation could include those suggestion.

- Educate students about the credit evaluation and registration processes
- Educate students about the curriculum and where to get information about courses and the curriculum on an on-going basis (i.e. TIPS system, on-line catalog)
- Warn students about the “Transfer Shock” phenomenon
- Warn students about the fact that they may need more than 120 credits hours to graduate; give them the tools to minimize the additional credits
- Educate students about the academic support resources on campus and the services provided by the Office of Advising Services
- Educate students about any special programs in place to support transfer student success
- Educate students about the value of getting involved in a subcommunity
- Create incentives to use the Web-based program (such as requiring students to prove they have used the program before they are eligible for one-on-one advising, having computers available in waiting areas for students to use while they wait, etc.)

Look for Opportunities to Create Multiple, Small-Scale Learning Communities:

- Help students understand the value of being connected to a sub-community-- what I have called an “anchor group” -- at Hunter as part of orientation, the web-based orientation and in advising sessions. Make sure to regularly ask advanced students what sub-communities they are connected to so that you know what options are working for students.
- Reach out to academic departments to promote the value of establishing learning communities and to explore which departments might be open to initiating one or more communities around either block-scheduling efforts or active learning-oriented courses. Make sure the Office of Advising Services is aware of what departments offer.
- Encourage academic departments to think small, at least at first. Trying to force one model on a large group of students will not work as well as offering several small opportunities. The model offered in Crampton & Holm (1993) is a good one – offering a two-course “learning community” in an individual department as an option to new transfer students -- because it operates on a small scale and is voluntary.
- Look for ways that the existing extended orientation seminars (ORSEM) could be utilized by transfer students. Again, try to do this on a small scale as one of many options to connect students to the institution, not as a large-scale operation.

Find Creative Ways to Collaborate With Faculty:

- The literature overwhelmingly supports any efforts that connect students, faculty and staff as being supportive of student academic success. The

Office of Advising Services mission and the faculty mission have clear parallels and connections and make academic advising an natural arena for collaboration.

- Investigate a variant of the “Liaison” model described by Kadar (2001); offer academic departments the opportunity to have a “partner” from the staff in Advising Services. Kadar suggests having the staff liaison attend departmental meetings where appropriate and to have on-going interactions which develop a level of trust. It is fine if only a couple of departments are interested – make connections where they are offered.
- Consider training and paying faculty to serve as advisors to supplement Advising Services staff during peak periods. The experience of Richland Community College (Lords, 2000) indicated that this experience allowed faculty to better connect to and empathize with students and to understand the impact of curricular decisions on students.
- Let faculty know that their efforts to make students feel welcome are essential (and that for the most part they are doing well in this area, or at least the student persists who participated in the focus group thought so). In addition, let faculty know that when they help students connect to each other they support student success (by creating group projects, promoting class discussion, assigning lab partners and lab groups, organizing events for students in the major). The Division of Student Affairs can help faculty learn how to reach out to students effectively and can partner with them to help support student organizations connected to the major or program (i.e. Help create and support academically-based sub-communities).

Explore Hiring an Academic Advisor to be the Community College Transfer Liaison:

- Although this is not the entire transfer student population at Hunter, transfer students from the CUNY community colleges represent a large percentage of the transfer population.
- The literature is unanimous about the value of making connections between two and four-year institutions. This designated advisor could take the lead in connecting Hunter to those institutions.
- This person should spend a significant part of every week at the community colleges, conducting programs and workshops for students accepted at Hunter and providing on-site advising.
- The literature supports the value of making early contact with transfer students and of meeting students where they are whenever possible, rather than always requiring students to come to you.
- Together with the Director of Transfer Programs, this person could make sure that the staff in Advising Services remains positive about community

college transfer students and help them to understand the students in a multi-dimensional way so as to avoid stereotyping.

Utilize peers more purposefully:

- Solicit transfer student input to inform the Office of Advising Services' orientation program on an on-going basis; ask for their participation on panels at orientation.
- Search for and support naturally occurring affinities – would a BMCC to Hunter College student organization be attractive to students, for example?
- Explore peer mentor programs to find effective models; this may be particularly helpful for adult learners who may not want to connect socially with younger students but who need support.
- Solicit student input to make sure the program will meet student needs.
- Define a system for identifying successful transfer students to serve as mentors; use incentives to encourage both electronic and in person communication.
- Educate mentors about the resources of the institution (and choose mentors who utilize them)
- Explore the creation of multiple on-line communities in which students can offer support and advice.

Go to where the students are (physically or electronically):

- Find ways to reach students in classes, student organizations, via displays in public spaces, on-line, etc. to teach them “best practices” of being a student, to advertise student achievements, to promote opportunities for learning and involvement, and to help students feel a part of something special. Hunter's bulletin boards and wall spaces seem to be very underutilized – I learned next to nothing about the institution walking around the public spaces.
- Be aware of the “social networking” websites and what is posted about Hunter there if possible – that is one way students communicate with each other.
- Reach students early (as soon as they are accepted) and often. Make sure students hear the “bad news” as well as the “good news” to ensure realistic expectations. Sending out welcoming, newsy e-mails from the Office of Academic Advising to transfer students as soon as they are admitted is one way this could be accomplished.

Take a leadership role in organizing an institution-wide effort to promote the success of transfer students:

- Initiate a “disappearing task force” to address the needs of transfer students, as described in Kinzie et al (2005), or a permanent Transfer

Student Standing Committee, as they did at Southwest Texas State to engage the entire university community in supporting transfer student success. Transfer students reported the belief that many administrative systems are not working well, but the Office of Advising Services cannot change such systems on its own. A broad coalition is needed for such change; a good place for the task force to start might be reviewing the credit transfer process.

- An even more ambitious option would be to initiate a formal, grant-funded 4-year college/2-year college collaboration such as the one described by Kisker (2005), to help encourage the transfer function at the community college, to ensure that community college students have the best possible preparation for Hunter and to learn from the community colleges what they are doing well. If such a collaboration were to be undertaken, faculty participation would be paramount, but the Office of Advising Services could initiate the effort.

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