



From Application and Beyond: Tracking Aspirations, Motivations, Experiences, and Outcomes of Ontario's Transfer Students

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Executive Summary

It has been well established that different segments of the population are more or less likely to aspire to and attend college or university. In particular, students with disabilities, low income students, first generation students, students from rural communities, Indigenous students, and male students are less likely to attend university. These disparities in access are primarily a university issue, in that these groups are not generally underrepresented in colleges relative to the population. Based on these findings, it has been suggested that enhancing the college-to-university pathway may be a vehicle to reduce inequities in university access (Kerr, McCloy, Liu, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to examine the profiles and pathways of college-to-university students in order to enhance our understanding of who is accessing this transfer pathway, and their unique needs and experiences. To do this, the study had two phases. In phase one, Academics Group's University and College Applicant Study (UCAS™) database was utilized in order to compare college applicants who aspired to a degree to those who do not, and to compare university applicants who had a previous college credential to those who had no previous PSE experience. The results are based on a sample of over 125,000 Ontario college and university applicants who participated in the UCAS™ between 2010 and 2015. This included 70,813 survey respondents who had applied to Ontario universities, and 57,839 survey respondents who had applied to Ontario colleges.

In the second phase, an online survey instrument was designed to track the pathways of applicants following their application to postsecondary education. In addition to demographic questions, the survey asked about students' decision making process, application outcomes, motivations, postsecondary goals, use of support resources, and the transfer experience. Of the 3,007 respondents who completed the survey, 1,985 fit the pathways of interest and were eligible to be included in the analysis.

For analysis in both phase one and phase two, survey respondents were organized into four pathway

- College applicants/students who aspired to attend university vs those who did not

- University applicants or students who had previous college (transfers) vs those without previous postsecondary education.

Four research questions guided this study:

1. How do the sociodemographic, academic, and decision-making profiles of Ontario college applicants who aspire to university compare to those who do not?
2. How do the sociodemographic, academic, and decision-making profiles of Ontario university applicants who had previously completed a college credential compare to those with no previous PSE?
3. What are the outcomes and experiences of college applicants with degree aspirations?
4. How do the transition experiences compare between college-to-university transfer students and those with no previous PSE?

Key findings related to each research question are summarized below, along with conclusions and next steps.

Phase 1: University College Applicant Survey

How do the sociodemographic, academic, and decision-making profiles of Ontario college applicants who aspire to university compare to those who do not?

Rural students, those with dependents, first generation students, students with a disability, Indigenous students, Caucasian/White students, students born in Canada, and those who primarily spoke English at home made up a significantly larger proportion of the “do not aspire to a degree” group, compared to the “aspire to a degree” group. Conversely, South Asian, Chinese, and Black students, females, single students, and those under age 25 made up a larger proportion of the “aspire to a degree” group. Interestingly, there was no difference between the two groups in the two socioeconomic indicators examined (i.e. use of government loans, and household income).

Academically, college applicants who aspired to a degree tended to have slightly higher high school GPAs than those who did not aspire to a degree, and a slightly greater percentage had taken university preparatory courses in high school.

There were also some notable differences in the decision-making profiles of the two groups. While the most commonly reported reason for applying to PSE among both college applicants with degree aspirations and those without was to prepare to enter their chosen career, the largest

gaps between those who did and did not aspire to university were for “pursuing further graduate or professional study” and “to complete the courses necessary to transfer”.

How do the sociodemographic, academic, and decision-making profiles of Ontario university applicants who had previously completed a college credential compare to those with no previous PSE?

The profiles of university applicants with a previous college credential and those with no previous PSE experience also differed significantly, with many of the traditionally under-represented groups in university making up a larger proportion of the population with a previous college credential. In particular, there was a larger percentage of first generation students, students with a disability, lower income students, Indigenous students, and rural students in the previous college credential group compared to the university applicant group with no previous PSE. College transfer students were also more likely to have identified as White/ Caucasian, or Black, and less likely to indicate they were Chinese or South Asian. Academically, university applicants who had completed a college credential were much less likely to have taken university preparatory courses in high school than those with no previous PSE experience, and their average high school GPA was significantly lower. More applicants with a previous college credential reported that hybrid/blended learning was their preferred course delivery format, though overall on-campus courses were preferred by the largest proportion of both groups.

Motivations for applying to PSE and information sources used differed between these two groups as well, though the most striking finding was that university applicants with a previous college credential showed much greater certainty that their academic program would lead to a satisfying career and that their academic program was right for them. When compared to those with no previous PSE, applicants with a college credential were more likely to state that they were applying to PSE to advance in their current career, and less likely to state that it was to become actively involved in student life and campus activities, that they had been encouraged or expected to go, or to meet new people. Traditional university channels for information provision, such as viewbooks, brochures, open houses, and university fairs are not being heavily accessed by college-to-university transfer students. Rather these students seem to rely more on

interpersonal contact for their individual circumstances, such as emails and phone calls with university staff, talking with a professor, and informal visits to campus.

Phase 2: Follow-up Survey

What are the outcomes and experiences of college applicants with degree aspirations?

Of the college applicants with degree aspirations who responded to the follow-up survey, about half still aspired to complete a degree, 13.4% had successfully transferred, and 39.4% no longer had aspirations for a degree. While just over one-third of those who no longer aspired reported that their interests had simply changed, an equal proportion stated that they no longer planned to attain a degree because they could not afford university.

Among college students who still aspired to complete a degree, approximately one-third did not know whether there was a formal transfer agreement in place between their college program and the university program they would apply to, and two-fifths did not know how much credit they expected to receive for their college education. Lack of guidance on application procedures, a lack of clarity between various credit granting processes, and finding/confirming requirements for transfer credits were the most frequently anticipated challenges. However, 42% said they did not expect to experience any challenges in transferring to university.

How do the transition experiences compare between college-to-university transfer students and those with no previous PSE?

University students with a previous college credential were less satisfied than non-transfer students with all aspects of their university's application and transition process that were examined. Areas where the largest proportions of college-to-university transfer students felt their university needed improvement was in relation to academic orientation, providing information about the admissions process and requirements, providing information about required courses, and campus orientation.

In comparison to non-transfer students, college-to-university transfer students were more likely to participate in classroom discussion and engage in student-faculty interactions such as

discussing assignments/grades, ideas, and career plans, but were less likely to engage in on-campus volunteer activities, student clubs, and cultural events.

In terms of on-campus resources, financial aid and personal counseling were accessed by a greater proportion of college-to-university transfer students than non-transfer students, but fewer accessed orientation programs and recreation and athletic facilities.

Conclusions

The results of this study confirm previous research showing that the college-to-university transfer student population has a relatively large proportion of traditionally under-represented groups compared to those who are entering university from high school, supporting the idea that the college-to-university pathway may serve as a vehicle for under-represented students to access university (Kerr, McCloy, Liu, 2010). These students were shown to be highly engaged in their learning and academically confident, however, the results also suggest that more work needs to be done to support both the admissions process and the university transition experience. College-to-university transfer students are relying less on traditional university channels for information provision, and are instead relying more on interpersonal contact for their individual circumstances. Similarly, university orientation programming is often geared primarily to the direct-entry student and transfer students are much less likely to participate. Orientation, particularly to the academic expectations of university, was a key area where transfer students felt their university needed to improve.

While college-to-university transfer students tend to be highly academically engaged, engagement outside of the classroom is a challenge. This is likely related in part to age differences, as college-to-university transfer students tend to have more outside responsibilities such as dependent children, as well as less financial support. Developing flexible ways to enrich the non-academic experience of college-to-university transfer students should be a priority.

Overall, this study, as well as previous research suggests that increasing the number of students utilizing the college-to-university transfer pathway should enhance the diversity in the student population in university, and at the same time increase numbers of academically engaged students. Both of these factors would likely enrich the university environment overall.

Introduction

It has been well established that different segments of the population are more or less likely to aspire to and attend postsecondary education (PSE). In particular, students with disabilities, low income students, first generation students, students from rural communities, Indigenous students, and male students are less likely to attend university (Finnie et al, 2011). The underrepresentation of such groups is primarily a university issue, however, they are not generally underrepresented in colleges relative to the general population. Therefore, it has been suggested that enhancing the college-to-university pathway may be a vehicle to reduce inequities in university access (Kerr, McCloy, Liu, 2010).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to profile and examine the pathways of college-to-university students in order to enhance our understanding of the needs and experiences of students who access this transfer pathway. To do this, the motivations, experiences and outcomes of the following groups of Ontario students were examined:

- College applicants/students who aspired to attend university vs those who do not
- University applicants or students who have previous college (transfers) vs those without previous postsecondary education.

Research Questions

Two study phases were conducted to answer the following research questions:

Phase 1: College and university applicants

1. How do the sociodemographic, academic, and decision-making profiles of Ontario college applicants who aspire to university compare to those who do not?
2. How do the sociodemographic, academic, and decision-making profiles of Ontario university applicants who had previously completed a college credential compare to those with no previous PSE?

Phase 2: Follow-up survey of college and university applicants:

1. What are the outcomes and experiences of college applicants with degree aspirations?
2. What were the transition experiences of students who successfully transferred to university?
3. How do college-to-university transfer students and those with no previous PSE compare in terms of their transition to university, service use, and overall student engagement?

Literature Review

Over the past two decades, college-to-university transfer has become an important pathway for degree attainment for many Ontario students. As a result, research exploring issues and trends related to the experiences and outcomes of Ontario's transfer students has increased significantly (Smith et al., 2016; ONCAT, 2013).

Ten years ago, Decock (2006) found that there was an increasing number of college students who wished to attend university after graduation, rather than enter the workforce. The results of this study suggested that more and more students were entering college with the intent of transferring to university, leading to the conclusion that "... students are consciously enrolling in colleges for the purpose of transferring to university even though colleges and their programs were not established for this function." Research examining the different pathways between colleges and universities has consistently shown that college-to-university transfer students tend to belong to underrepresented groups such as those with disabilities, Aboriginal students, and first generation students (Kerr et al., 2010; Sidhu et al., 2016).

The question of *why* students aspire to transfer to degree programs has also been considered. According to a recent study (Gorman et al., 2012), many college students feel that their diploma provides them with limited career opportunities and view obtaining a degree as a way to enhance their career options. Indeed, research indicates that some of the most common reasons Ontario students transfer from college to university is because they want to prepare for future career opportunities, attain a credential, upgrade their training and skill set, and/or increase their earning potential (McCloy, Decock, & Steffler, 2017; ONCAT, 2013; Smith et al., 2016). Lack of work for college graduates, or changing their field of study were among the least cited reasons for transferring (McCloy, et al, 2017).

In addition to being a more diverse population, transfer students have been shown to be more academically engaged and academically confident (Pendleton & Lambert-Maberly, 2006) and more academically resourceful (Kennett & Maki, 2014) than direct entry students. However, qualitative research has shown that college transfers express concern about their preparedness academically (Gawley & McGowan, 2006; Carleton University, 2013).

College to university transfer students have been shown to be less interested in general orientation programs (which often target younger students) and to be more interested in program specific/academic orientation programs (Carleton University, 2013). This study also showed that college transfers experience difficulties integrating socially which, in addition to being older, may be associated with transfer student's upper year entry into programs in which peer groups may already be established.

Continued investigation into the characteristics and experiences of the college-to-university transfer pathway is needed, as those who aspire to transfer to obtain a degree do not necessarily reach their intended goals (Smith et al., 2016). Understanding why some achieve their goals while others do not may enable the creation of better supports that facilitate the college to university pathway, and help to reduce access inequalities (Kerr et al., 2010).

Improvement to the transfer system alone, however, does not guarantee that the transfer process will take place. Students' perceptions of real and/or anticipated opportunities and challenges may be influenced by factors such as institutional structure, academic standards, accessibility, financial assistance, and the availability of student services.

Research Method

The first phase of this project utilized 2010-2015 data from Academica Group's University/College Applicant Study (UCAS™)¹ database in order to compare college applicants who aspired to a university credential to those who did not, as well as to compare university applicants with previous college

¹ For more than a decade, Academica Group's UCAS™ study has been providing universities and colleges across Canada. Each year, approximately 15,000 to 20,000 applicants to Ontario colleges and universities participate in the online survey, undertaken in partnership with the Ontario Colleges Application Service (OCAS) and participating Ontario postsecondary institutions.

credentials to those without previous postsecondary experience. Descriptions of each group and the corresponding sample size are provided in Table 1 and

Table 1 Description of College Applicant UCAS™ Sample

| | College Applicants | | |
|-------------|---|--|---|
| | Aspire to a degree | Do not aspire to a degree | Remainder of sample (excluded from analysis) |
| n size | 22,600 | 35,239 | 14,579 |
| Description | Responses to the question “What is the highest level of education you plan to attain?”, were degree or postgrad credential; did not have a degree already | Responses to the question “What is the highest level of education you plan to attain?” were 1, 2, or 3 year cert/ diploma; did not have a degree already | Response to the question “What is the highest level of education you plan to attain?” was “don’t know” or indicated they already had a degree (separate question) |

Table 2 Description of University Applicant UCAS™ Sample

| | University Applicants | | |
|-------------|---|--|--|
| | Previous College Credential | No previous PSE | Remainder of sample (excluded from analysis) |
| n size | 2,759 | 68,054 | 7,249 |
| Description | Applicants to an Ontario university whose highest level of education was a completed college or trades credential | Applicants to an Ontario university whose highest level of education was a high school diploma | University applicants with incomplete PSE, or university degrees |

In the second phase, an online survey was conducted to track the pathways of applicants following their application to postsecondary education. The survey followed up with the college applicants who had “aspired to a degree”, and university applicants who indicated they had attended “previous college or university”, and university applicants who indicated they had “no previous PSE” groups. Of the group who initially indicated they had incomplete college or university, they were disqualified from the follow up survey if they indicated they had attended university rather than college. In addition to demographic questions, the survey asked about

students' decision making processes, application outcomes, motivations, postsecondary goals, access to support resources, and the transfer experience.

The survey invitation was sent to 51,132 college and university applicants who had completed the UCAS™ between 2010 and 2015, met the study criteria, indicated they were interested in participating in further research, and had provided a valid email address. 3,007 individuals responded to the survey. Of these, 914 were disqualified,² with the remaining 2,093 respondents completing the survey. The survey was in field from November 1 to December 9, 2016.

Respondents were organized into four pathways based on their survey responses:

- “No longer aspire”: respondents indicated that they had not enrolled in university and no longer planned to do so (n=185).
- “Still aspire”: respondents indicated that they had not yet entered university but that they still planned to do so in the future (n=221).
- “Transferred”: respondents indicated that they had entered university after attending college (n=122). This population includes those who were originally college applicants who aspired to university and indicated they were attending in the follow-up survey (n=63), as well as university applicants who indicated they previously attended college (n=59).
- “No previous PSE”: respondents indicated that they had entered university and did not have any previous PSE experience (n=1,449)
- A further 102 respondents indicated they had previously attended university or had attended both college and university and were not included in the present report.

² Respondents invited to the survey from the ‘university applicant’ pool were disqualified if they indicated that they ended up attending a university outside of Ontario or did not attend university. Respondents invited to the survey from the ‘college applicant’ pool were disqualified if they indicated that they did not end up attending college or if they indicated they previously attended university.

Results

Phase One – Applicant Profiles

In this section, we present the phase one research results, which involved an analysis of 2010 to 2015 UCAS™ data comparing college applicants who aspired to a degree to those who did not, as well as comparing university applicants with a previous college credential to non-transfer students.

Sociodemographic Characteristics

Error! Reference source not found. presents the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents. Compared to non-aspirants, significantly more college applicants who aspired to complete a university degree were female, under age 25, Black, Chinese, South Asian, and single or never married. There was a significantly smaller proportion who were Caucasian/White, born in Canada, spoke English at home, lived in a rural community, had a disability, were first generation, and had dependents under age 15.

For the university applicants, compared to those with no previous PSE, a significantly greater proportion of college transfer students were female, Caucasian/White, Indigenous, Black, and born in Canada. In addition, significantly more transfer students were from a rural area, identified as having a disability, were first generation students, supported dependents, had an income less than \$60,000, and were using government loans to pay for their education. Compared to college transfer students, a greater proportion of university applicants with no previous PSE were less than age 25, Chinese, South Asian, and single.

Table 3 Sociodemographic Characteristics

| | College Applicants | | University Applicants | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| | Aspire to a Degree | Do not Aspire to a Degree | Previous College Credential | No Previous PSE |
| % Female | 59.1% | 52.8% | 57.3% | 54.1% |
| % <25 years old | 86.1% | 81.8% | 72.8% | 99.7% |
| % Caucasian/White | 56.2% | 65.0% | 60.7% | 49.2% |
| % Indigenous | 5.5% | 6.5% | 4.9% | 2.0% |
| % Black | 11.1% | 8.6% | 9.6% | 6.6% |
| % Chinese | 5.3% | 3.9% | 5.7% | 16.3% |
| % South Asian | 7.8% | 4.3% | 8.1% | 15.3% |
| % Born in Canada | 78.9% | 86.4% | 71.5% | 67.6% |
| % English spoken at home | 79.0% | 86.3% | 82.0% | 71.8% |
| % International ³ | - | - | 5.8% | 6.1% |
| % Rural | 23.2% | 32.2% | 20.3% | 15.8% |
| % with a disability | 10.5% | 13.8% | 9.3% | 4.5% |
| % First generation | 19.9% | 25.0% | 22.0% | 10.6% |
| % Single, never married | 83.8% | 80.6% | 82.9% | 91.9% |
| % with dependents <15 | 7.2% | 9.5% | 8.4% | 0.7% |
| % income <\$60,000 | 35.9% | 37.1% | 40.9% | 23.2% |
| % using gov't loans | 24.6% | 24.7% | 24.0% | 17.0% |

Academic Characteristics

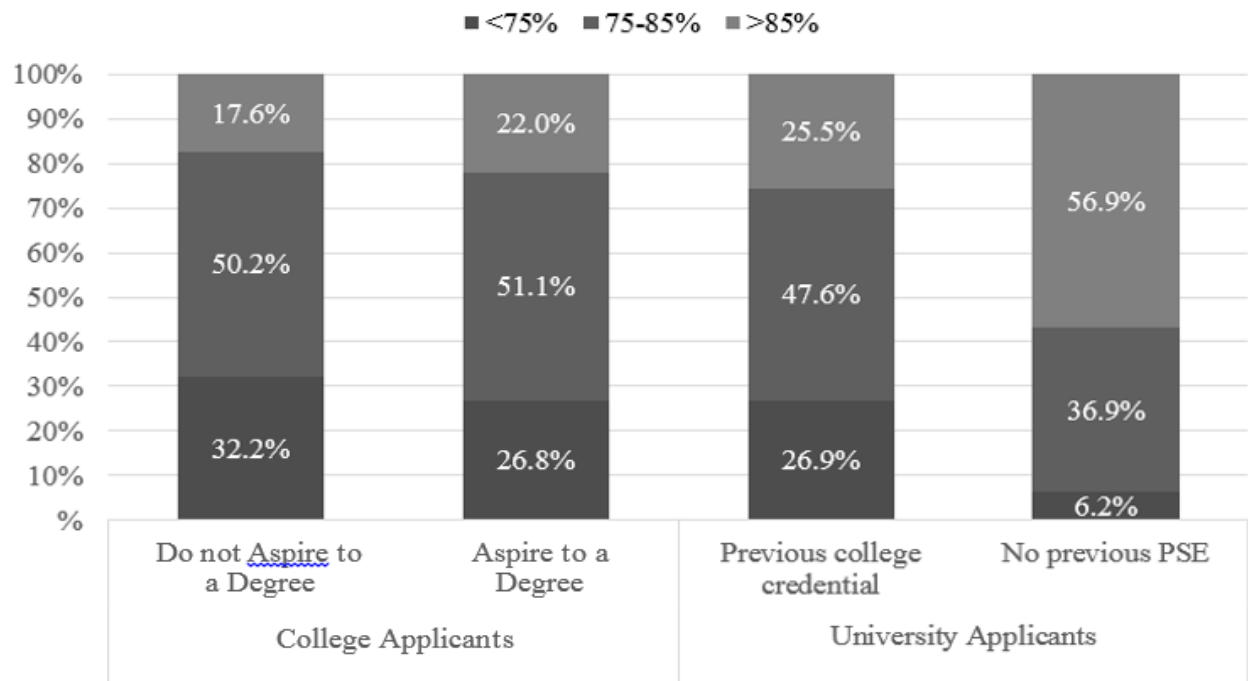
With respect to academic background, a significantly higher proportion of college applicants who aspired to a university degree indicated that they took mostly university preparatory courses while in high school (27.1%) than did non-aspirants (23.8%). Those who aspired to a degree were also significantly more likely to have obtained a high school GPA higher than 85% (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Significantly more university applicants who had no previous PSE indicated taking university preparatory courses (89.7%) while in high school compared to college transfer students (36.7%).

³ For Ontario colleges, international students do not apply through OCAS and therefore were not included in the survey results for college applicants.

Those with no previous PSE were also more likely to have a high school grade average greater than 85% (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Additionally, applicants without previous PSE were much more likely to apply to “selective universities” (entering average > 85%) than applicants with a previous college credential (59.8% vs 34.4%).

Figure 1 High School Grades by Pathway



With regards to preferred type of program delivery, differences between college applicants who aspired to a university degree and those who did not were not particularly noteworthy. However, there were some important differences between college transfer students and those with no previous PSE. While in-class/on-campus courses were heavily favoured by both groups, college transfer students showed a greater preference for hybrid/blended and online/distance courses than those with no previous PSE (

).

Table 4 Preferred Course Delivery Format

| | College Applicants | | University Applicants | |
|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| | Aspire to a Degree | Do not Aspire to a Degree | Previous College Credential | No Previous PSE |
| Online/distance | 2.3% | 2.7% | 4.7% | 1.8% |
| In-class/on-campus | 75.3% | 77.4% | 65.9% | 77.6% |
| Hybrid/blended | 18.4% | 15.8% | 26.4% | 15.3% |
| No preference | 4.0% | 4.0% | 3.0% | 5.2% |

Decision-Making Process

Career preparation was the most important reason for applying to PSE for college applicants regardless of whether they aspired to a university degree (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Not surprisingly, a significantly larger proportion of applicants with aspirations for a degree reported that completing courses necessary to transfer to a university was a reason for applying compared to those who did not aspire to a degree. There was also a much larger proportion of degree aspirants reporting that pursuing further graduate or professional study, giving back to society, and becoming actively involved in student life were reasons for applying.

Among university applicants, the most commonly selected reasons for pursuing PSE were similar between college transfer students and those with no previous PSE; however, the no previous PSE group tended to have a larger proportion of respondents selecting each reason (Table 5). When compared to those with no previous PSE, applicants with a college credential were significantly

more likely to state that one of their reasons for applying to PSE was to advance in their current career, to complete courses necessary to transfer to a different college or university, or because they could not find a job. Applicants with no previous PSE were much more likely to state that they were pursuing PSE to become actively involved in student life and campus activities, because their friends or teachers expected/encouraged them to go, and to meet new people. Interestingly, university applicants who already have a college credential were more likely to indicate they were applying to advance their career than those without PSE (37.4% vs 19.8%), but less likely to indicate they were applying to prepare to enter their chosen career (68.7% vs 82.6%), indicative of the career laddering aspect of college to university transfer.

Table 5 Reasons for Applying to PSE

| | College Applicants | | University Applicants | |
|---|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| | Aspire to a Degree | Do not Aspire to a Degree | Previous College Credential | No Previous PSE |
| To prepare to enter my chosen career | 81.5% | 80.6% | 68.7% | 82.6% |
| To explore options for my future | 66.5% | 62.7% | 64.0% | 76.3% |
| For personal and intellectual growth | 68.7% | 60.6% | 72.3% | 79.3% |
| To increase my knowledge and understanding of an academic field | 68.6% | 59.9% | 72.1% | 80.0% |
| To increase my earning potential | 61.4% | 57.5% | 64.9% | 66.9% |
| To pursue future graduate or professional study | 59.6% | 39.2% | 62.8% | 69.8% |
| To meet new people | 48.8% | 45.2% | 39.9% | 65.0% |
| To enhance my self-confidence and self-esteem | 42.0% | 39.9% | 40.4% | 43.1% |
| My parents/friends/teachers expected or encouraged me to go | 36.8% | 33.3% | 28.2% | 52.3% |
| To improve my leadership skills | 37.5% | 31.7% | 36.9% | 48.1% |
| To enable me to "give back" to society | 34.6% | 26.0% | 35.9% | 39.4% |
| To become actively involved in student life and campus activities | 29.6% | 23.4% | 24.6% | 50.0% |
| To advance in my current career | 22.9% | 20.9% | 37.4% | 19.8% |
| To improve my social status | 24.2% | 20.7% | 25.4% | 27.5% |
| To complete the courses necessary to transfer to a (different) university | 23.9% | 7.2% | 10.2% | 4.9% |
| I could not find a job | 4.6% | 6.7% | 7.5% | 1.5% |

| | | | | |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| To complete the courses necessary to transfer to a (different) college | 6.7% | 4.0% | 4.5% | 2.1% |
| I could not think of anything else to do after high school | 4.1% | 4.0% | 2.4% | 7.2% |
| None of the above | 0.3% | 0.4% | 0.2% | 0.2% |

In terms of information sources used when researching their PSE options, more college applicants who aspired to a university degree reported using almost every information source than those who did not aspire to a degree (Table 6). The largest differences were in relation to the use of Maclean's rankings, university/college fairs, talking to a professor, and high school presentations/visits.

Among university applicants, those who were transferring from college were more likely to report talking to a professor or accessing an institutional calendar as sources of information. However, they were less likely to report accessing almost every other information source, with the exception of institutional websites.

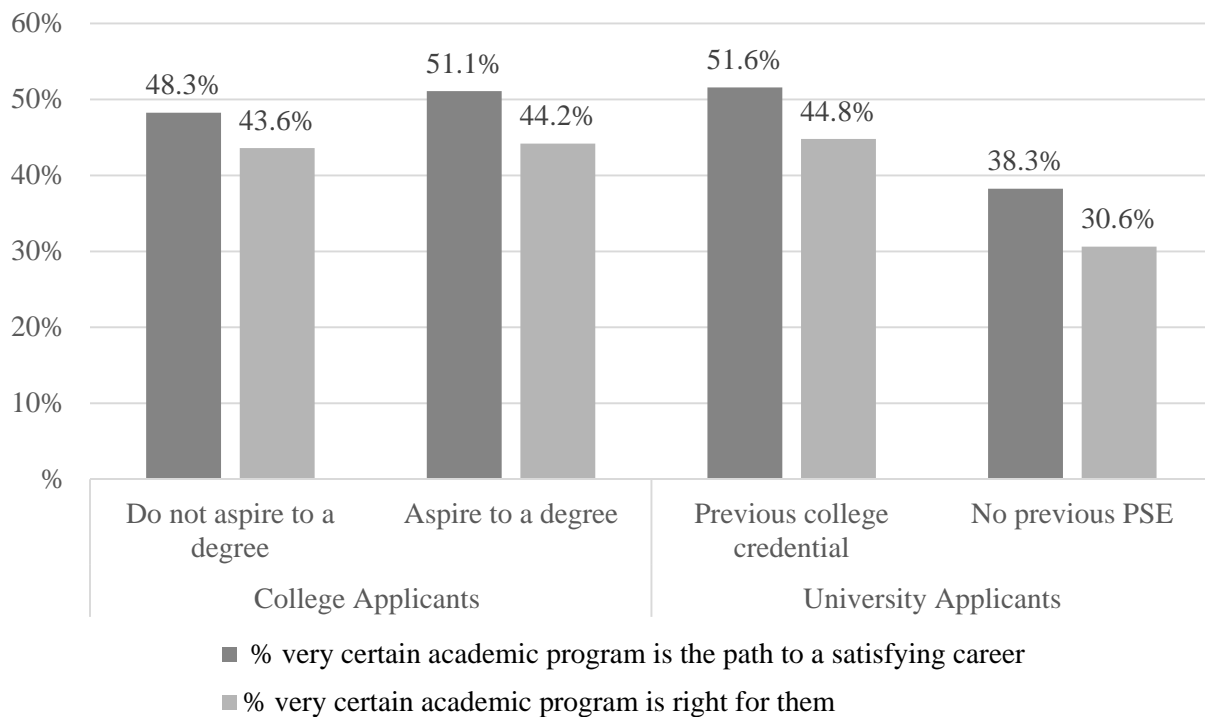
Table 6 Information Sources

| | College Applicants | | University Applicants | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| | Aspire to a Degree | Do not Aspire to a Degree | Previous College Credential | No Previous PSE |
| Institution website | 87.3% | 82.6% | 89.9% | 90.9% |
| Viewbook | 68.3% | 59.9% | 58.5% | 87.1% |
| Education-related web-portals | 78.9% | 74.7% | 63.7% | 83.3% |
| Brochures | 54.5% | 45.7% | 53.4% | 76.6% |
| Current students/graduates | 55.6% | 47.3% | 61.2% | 72.7% |
| Emails after application | 60.3% | 55.8% | 63.4% | 69.9% |
| HS presentations/visits | 42.8% | 34.8% | 24.5% | 67.0% |
| Friends | 50.6% | 45.2% | 56.3% | 66.0% |
| Parents/family members | 42.6% | 37.1% | 41.5% | 64.8% |
| Guidance counsellor | 45.3% | 40.7% | 20.5% | 53.4% |
| Teacher | 35.7% | 29.7% | 18.2% | 53.1% |
| Mail received after application | 43.7% | 40.1% | 45.7% | 52.1% |
| University/college fair | 28.8% | 21.6% | 21.7% | 51.2% |
| Maclean's ranking | 12.8% | 5.9% | 25.7% | 48.9% |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Open house | 36.4% | 36.3% | 22.4% | 44.4% |
| Formal tour | 27.8% | 25.0% | 20.2% | 44.2% |
| Calendar | 35.7% | 30.5% | 47.7% | 42.9% |
| Informal/unofficial visit | 28.8% | 24.5% | 34.0% | 38.5% |
| Facebook | 29.6% | 27.8% | 24.0% | 35.1% |
| Phone calls after application | 33.5% | 28.4% | 32.3% | 33.2% |
| Talking to a professor | 27.8% | 22.5% | 39.1% | 29.1% |

When asked about their certainty that their academic program would lead to a satisfying career, the difference between college applicants who aspired to a university credential and those who did not was statistically significant but small and there was no difference in the level of certainty that their academic program was right for them (Figure 2). Among university applicants, however, a much higher percentage of college transfer students indicated that they were very certain that their academic program would lead to a satisfying career, and that their academic program was right for them, when compared to those with no previous PSE (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Program Certainty



For all respondents, the single most important factor in their decision process when considering PSE options was program reputation (Table 7). Overall academic reputation was slightly more important to college applicants who aspired to a degree than those who did not, while proximity of the institution to home was slightly more important to applicants who did not aspire to a degree.

Differences between university applicants with no previous PSE and college transfer students were more pronounced. When compared to university applicants with no previous PSE, a significantly greater percentage of transfer students indicated institutional proximity to their home as the single most important factor. In contrast, university students with no previous PSE were significantly more likely to have made their decision based on factors such as academic reputation and campus experience.

Table 7 Factors Contributing to PSE Options

| | College Applicants | | University Applicants | |
|--|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| | Aspire to a Degree | Do not Aspire to a Degree | Previous College Credential | No Previous PSE |
| Strong reputation in my specific program of interest | 36.3% | 32.9% | 36.1% | 37.6% |
| Strong overall academic reputation | 11.3% | 7.9% | 15.8% | 21.1% |
| Institutions were close to home | 17.1% | 21.5% | 17.8% | 7.0% |
| Strong reputation for graduates having good careers | 17.7% | 19.3% | 12.4% | 15.6% |
| Financial reasons | 5.3% | 6.1% | 5.1% | 3.5% |
| Strong reputation for campus experience | 2.8% | 2.6% | 1.7% | 6.7% |
| Strong reputation for teaching | 3.2% | 2.7% | 2.1% | 2.5% |
| Where my friends are going | 1.0% | 1.3% | 1.0% | 0.6% |
| None of the above | 5.4% | 5.7% | 8.1% | 5.2% |

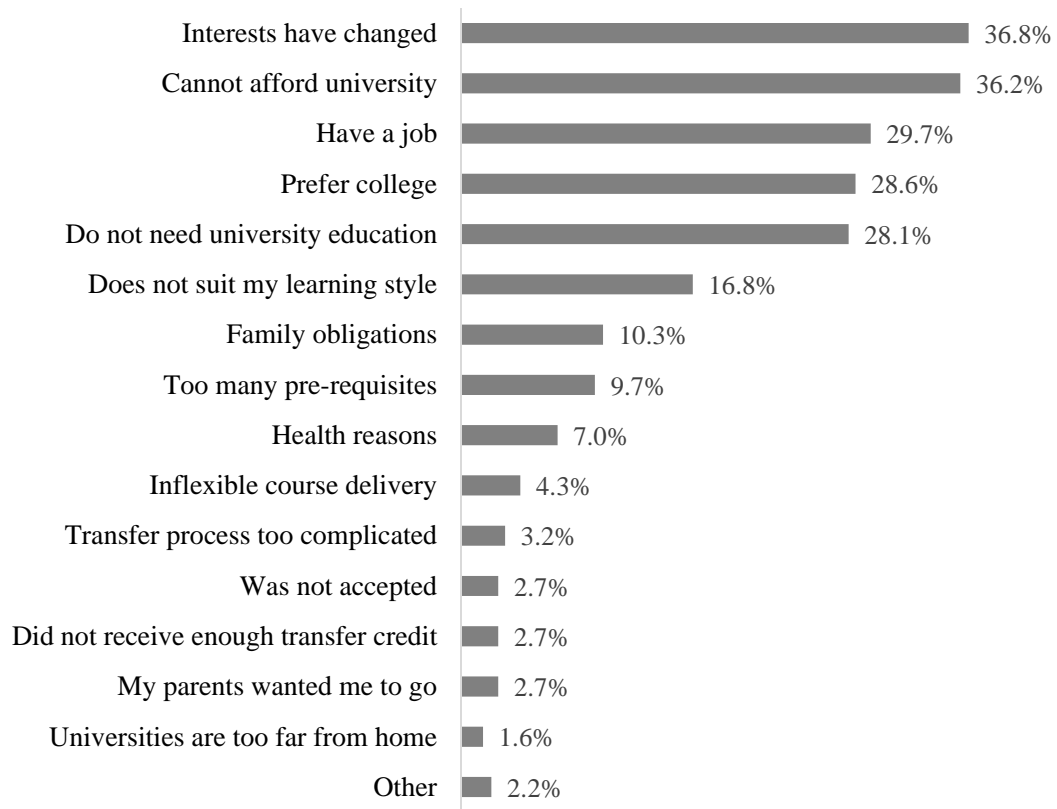
Phase Two – Follow-up Survey Results

Results of the follow-up survey conducted with college applicants who aspired to a degree, university applicants with previous college, and university applicants with no previous PSE are presented in this section.

College applicants who aspired to a degree

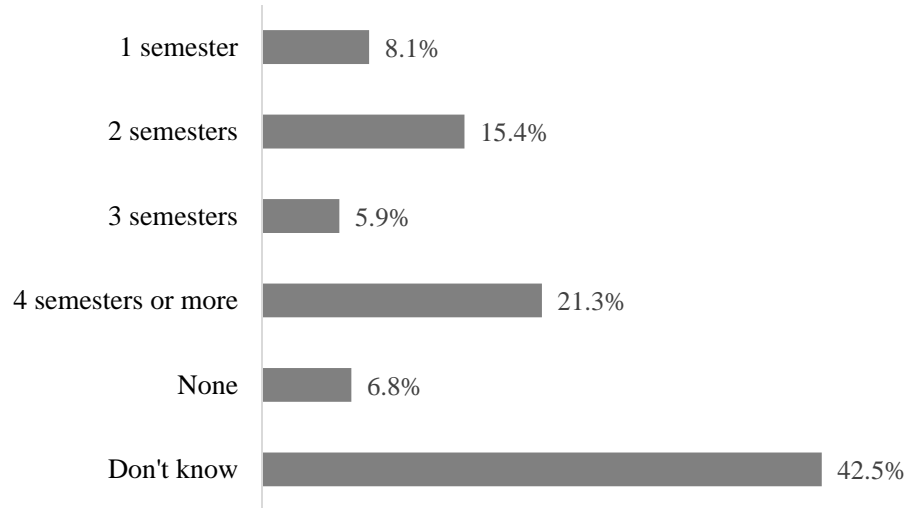
Of the 469 college applicants surveyed who had originally aspired to complete a university degree, 13.4% indicated that they had transferred to a university, 47.1% indicated that they still aspired to complete a university degree, and 39.4% no longer had aspirations for a degree. Differences in gender, age, and first generation student status were examined, but only gender was found to be significantly related to aspiration outcomes; 63.4% of women still aspired to a degree or had transferred to university compared to 52.9% of men.

Of those who no longer intended to pursue a university degree, the top two most commonly reported reasons were a change in their interests and an inability to afford university (Figure 3). Other reasons reported by at least one-quarter of respondents were that they had a job, preferred college, and felt they did not need a university education. Interestingly, reasons related to the transfer process itself, such as its complexity, pre-requisites, provision of transfer credit, or receiving an offer, were far down the list.

Figure 3 Reasons for No Longer Wanting to Attend University

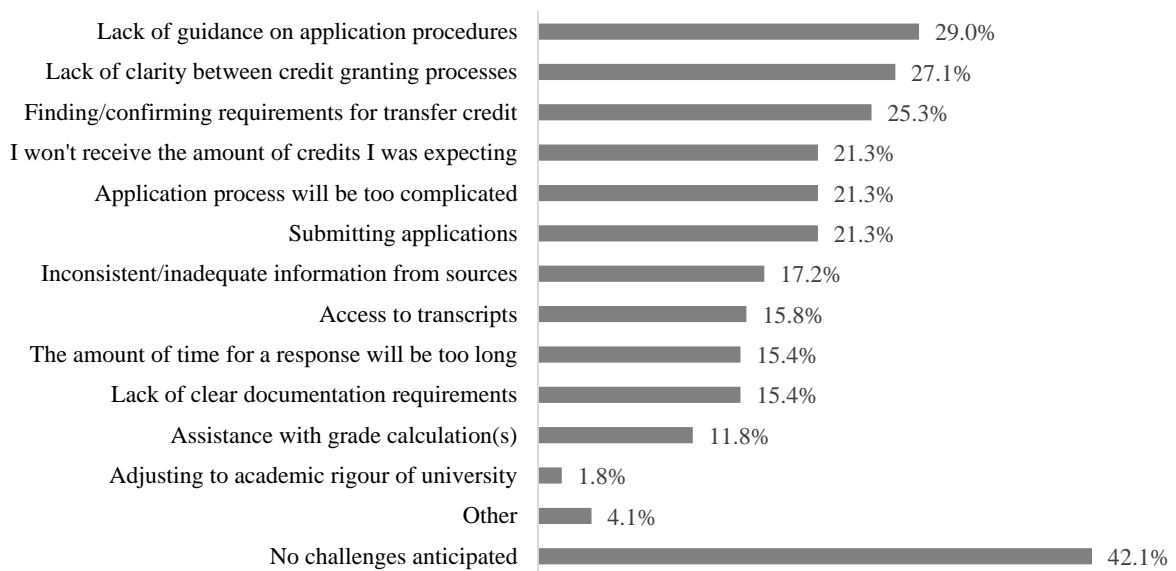
Among those who still planned to pursue a university degree, most said that the university program they intended to take was related to their previous program (86.0%) and half were aware of a formal transfer agreement between their current/past college program and the university program they would apply to (50.7%). One third of respondents, however, did not know if there was a formal transfer agreement (33.9%). While respondents varied in how much credit they estimated they would receive, two-fifths reported that they did not know (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Estimated Transfer Credit Expect to Receive



Over half of those who still aspired to a university degree said that they anticipated experiencing challenges when transferring to a university program from college (57.9%). The most commonly anticipated challenges associated with transferring were a lack of guidance on application procedures, a lack of clarity between various credit granting processes, and finding/confirming requirements for transfer credits (Figure 5).

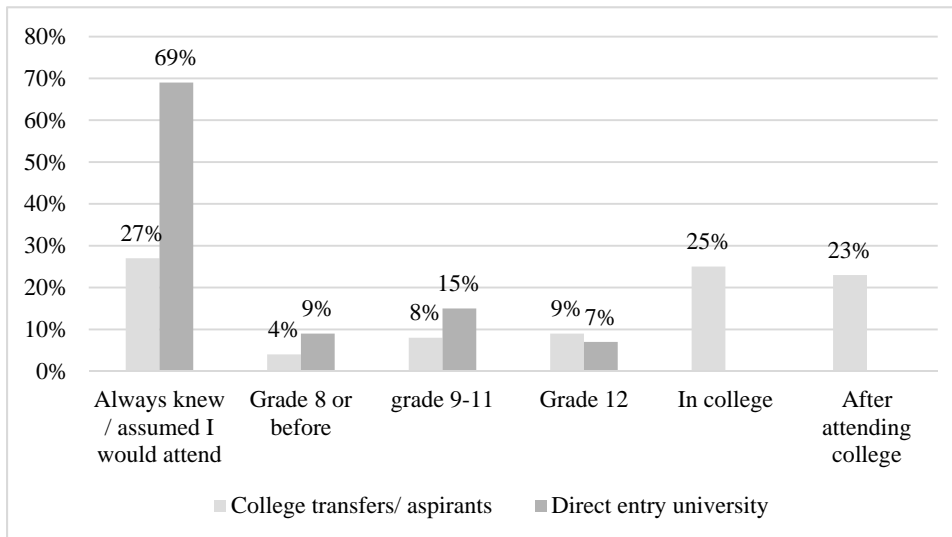
Figure 5 Anticipated Challenges when Transferring to University



Timing of decision to attend university, university transfers/aspirants vs direct entrants

Stark differences are seen by pathway in terms of when the decision to attend university was made (Figure 6). The vast majority of non-transfer students (69%) always assumed they would go to university, with a further 9% deciding before high school. In contrast, only 29% of students who transferred from college, or were planning to transfer to university “always knew”, with almost half deciding either during or after college.

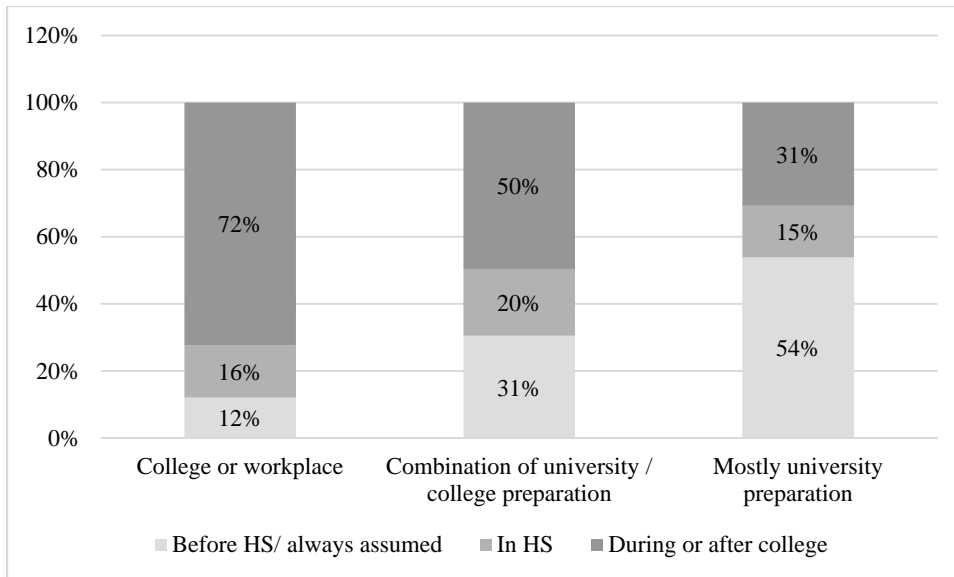
Figure 6 Evolution of university plans by pathway



*College transfers/ aspirants include both those who “still aspired” to university and those who had transferred, n=343; Direct entry university include those with no prior PSE, n=1449

Since Ontario high schools have a destination based curriculum, with university, college and workplace streams it is informative to compare the timing with the decision to apply to university with the type of preparatory courses taken in high school for those who transferred to university or were planning to transfer (Figure 7). When the decision to attend university is analyzed by course selection, it is evident that transfer students who decided before high school also chose university preparatory courses. Students deciding later are far less likely to have taken the required courses to enter university directly and would need to take the college transfer route in order to be eligible for university.

Figure 7 Timing of decision to attend university by courses taken in high school, university transfers and students who aspire to transfer



Transfer Experience of College-to-University Transfer Students

Current or former university students who indicated they had previously attended college were asked a series of questions about their transfer experience. These results are presented here.

Transfer Credits

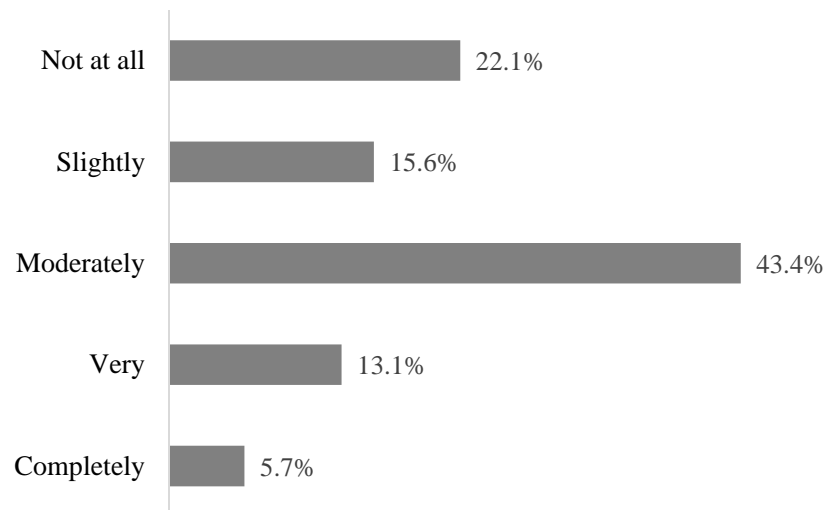
College-to-university transfer students most commonly found out they were receiving credit when they received their offer of admission, or at/before registration, and most said that the timing was acceptable to them (Table 8). The actual amount of credit received varied, although the most common scenario was for students to have received credit for two semesters of their university program, followed by no credit (Table 8). Among those who applied for credit, almost half received the same amount of credit as they expected (48.4%), while one in three students indicated that they received less than expected (33.0%), and 11.0% received more than expected. Just under half of college-to-university transfer students stated that there was a formal transfer agreement between their past college program and the university program they enrolled in (45.9%).

Table 8 Approval Process, Amount of Credit, & Timing

| | | % |
|---|---------------------------------|-------|
| How much credit did you receive? | None | 23.0% |
| | 1 semester | 15.6% |
| | 2 semesters | 23.8% |
| | 3 semesters | 6.6% |
| | 4 semesters or more | 18.9% |
| | Don't know | 12.3% |
| When did you find out you were receiving credit? | With offer of admission | 32.0% |
| | At or before registration | 25.4% |
| | After registration | 17.2% |
| | Have not heard yet | 1.6% |
| | Have not applied for credit yet | 2.5% |
| | Am not applying for credit | 6.6% |
| Was this timing acceptable to you? | Yes | 87.1% |
| | No | 12.9% |
| Relative to what you expected, the amount of credit you received was: | Less than expected | 33.0% |
| | Same as expected | 48.4% |
| | More than expected | 11.0% |
| | Don't know | 7.7% |

When asked to reflect back on how well they understood the transfer process before they applied to university, transfer students were four times more likely to indicate that they did not understand the process at all before applying (22.1%) than to say that they completely understood (5.7%) (Figure 8).

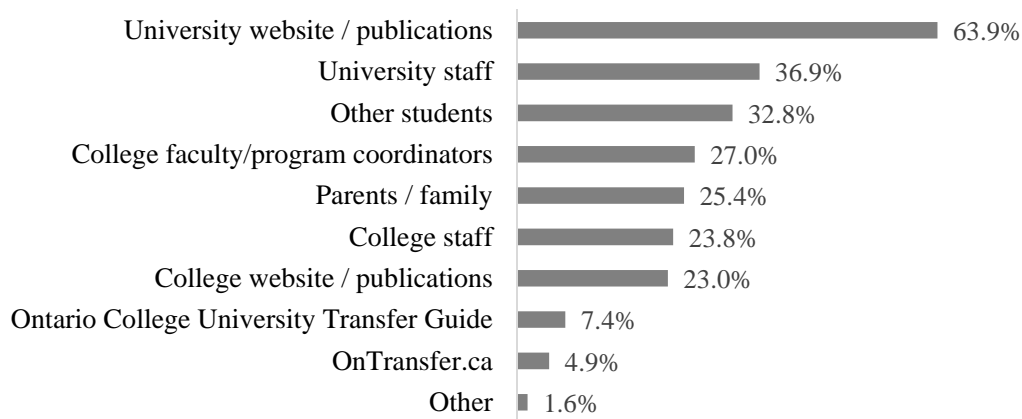
Figure 8 Understanding of Transfer Process before Applying to University



Resources

The three most commonly used resources for information on transferring to university were a university website or publication, university staff, and other students (Figure 9).

Figure 9 Sources of Information Used Regarding Transferring to University



Use of, and satisfaction with, transfer advising services

Only 37.7% of college-to-university transfer students said that their college offered advising with respect to helping students transfer to university. Of these, about half used the services at their college (54.3%), and most found the services to be very or extremely helpful (72.0%).

With regard to the university that they transferred into, more than half stated the university offered student advising to help them with the transfer process (55.7%). Of these, 70.6% said they used this service and 66.7% rated the overall helpfulness of these services as either extremely or very helpful.

Satisfaction with transition process

Only three-fifths of those who transferred said they were satisfied overall with the transition from college to their university program (60.7%), with 12.8% saying that they were dissatisfied.

Challenges

Transfer students were asked the same set of questions regarding challenges in the transfer process as those who planned on transferring as described previously. The most commonly

experienced challenge that students faced when transferring to university was a lack of guidance on application procedures (25.4%), followed by not receiving the amount of credit they were expecting (23.0%) (Table 9). Overall, 37.7% of transfer students reported no challenges when transferring to university, slightly lower than the proportion of pre-transfer students who anticipated challenges (42.1%) (Figure 5). One of the largest differences in anticipated and actual barriers was that the “application process would be too complicated”, cited by 21.3% of students pre-transfer, versus only 4.1% post-transfer. Caution needs to be exercised when comparing the population aspiring to transfer and the population who did transfer, since the challenges cited by the aspirants may reduce their likelihood of transferring.

Table 9 Challenges experienced by college to university transfers

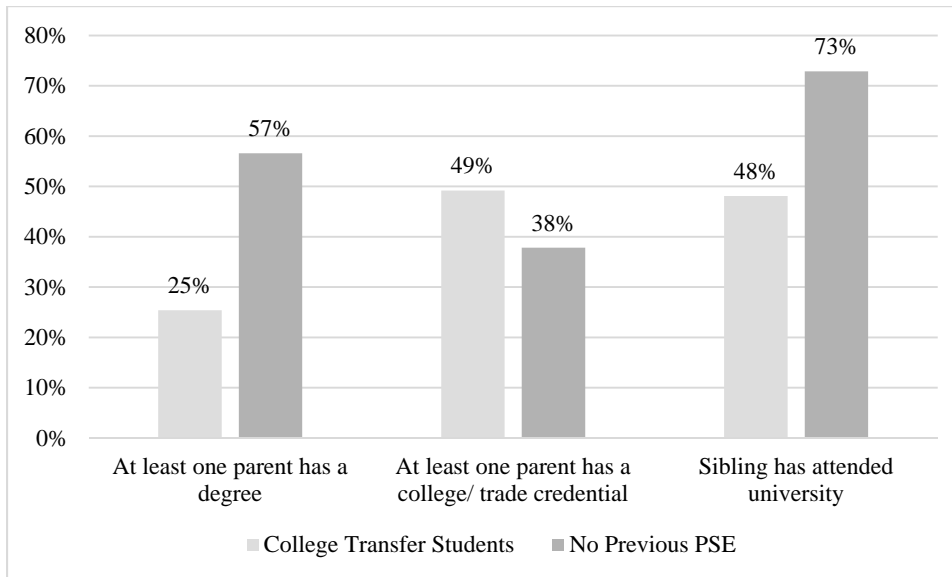
| Challenges Experienced | % |
|---|----------|
| Did not experience any challenges | 37.7% |
| Lack of guidance on application procedures | 25.4% |
| I didn't receive the amount of credits I was expecting | 23.0% |
| Inconsistent or inadequate information from various sources | 18.9% |
| Finding/confirming requirements for transfer credit | 18.0% |
| Lack of clarity between various credit granting processes | 16.4% |
| Submitting applications | 14.8% |
| Lack of clear documentation requirements | 13.9% |
| The amount of time it took to get a response was too long | 11.5% |
| Access to transcripts; multiple transcript requests for course credits applied in different areas of same institution | 11.5% |
| Assistance with grade calculation(s) | 9.0% |
| The application process will be too complicated | 4.1% |
| Other | 1.6% |

*Multiple response question, respondents selected all that applied

Postsecondary attendance of family members, college transfers vs. those with no previous PSE

In Phase two, the follow up survey, college students and graduates who transferred to university were asked more detailed questions about their parents and siblings previous education (Figure 10). College transfer students are far less likely to have a parent with a university degree, but more likely to have a parent with a college credential compared to those without previous PSE. Likewise, for those with siblings, transfer students are much less likely to have sibling who have gone to university, than students who entered directly.

Figure 10 Postsecondary attendance of family members, college transfers vs direct entry university students.



University Transition Experience of College Transfers vs. those with No Previous PSE

The Phase 1 results showed that university applicants with a previous college credential are a very different population than university applicants with no previous PSE. This section follows up with transfer students after their entrance to university to compare the transition experience with those who had no previous postsecondary experience.

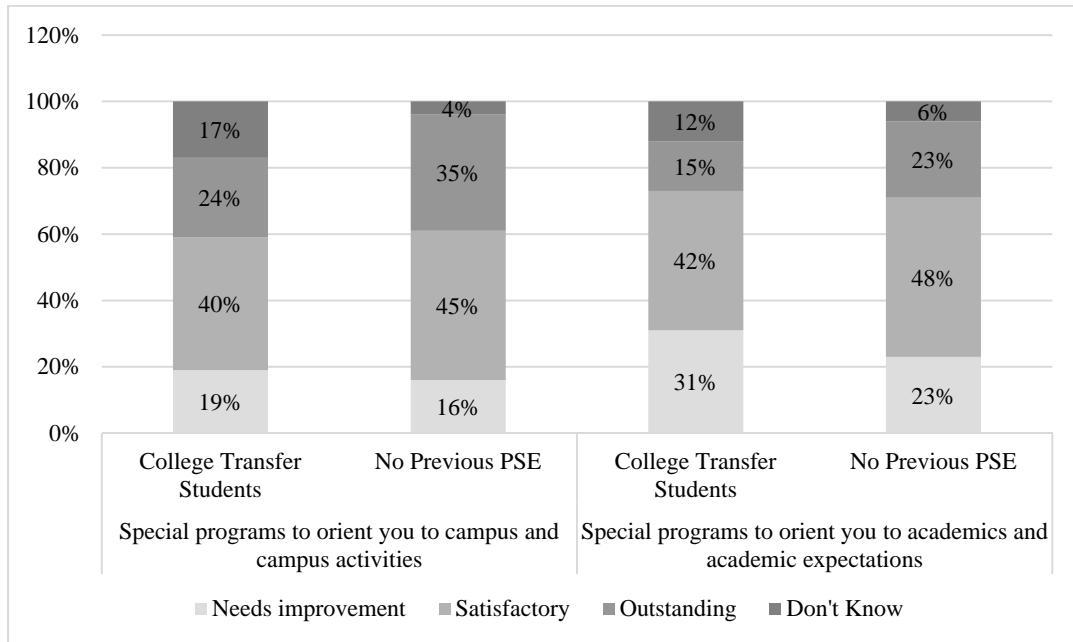
Satisfaction

When asked to rate their university with respect to various factors related to orientation, and information provision around applications and course requirements, university students with no previous PSE experience rate their university much more favourably than college transfer students (Figure 11-Figure 13).

In terms of campus orientation, 80% of non-transfer students rated “special programs to orient you to campus and campus activities” as outstanding or satisfactory compared to 64% transfer students (Figure 11). An additional 17% of college transfers reported “don’t know” versus only 4% of those without previous PSE. For satisfaction with academic orientation, only 71% compared with 57% found the programs satisfactory or outstanding. Additionally, 12% of college transfers versus 6% without PSE responded “don’t know” when asked about “special

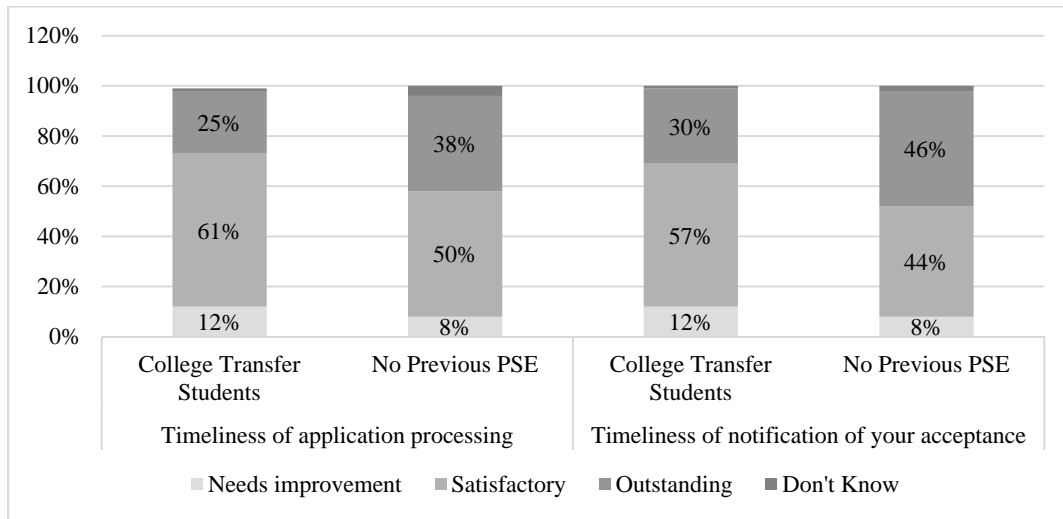
programs to orient you to academics and academic expectations”. These findings likely indicate that most orientation and transition processes are centered on more traditional students than students coming from other pathways.

Figure 11 Satisfaction with orientation programs, college transfers and non-transfers, university students, 2010-2016



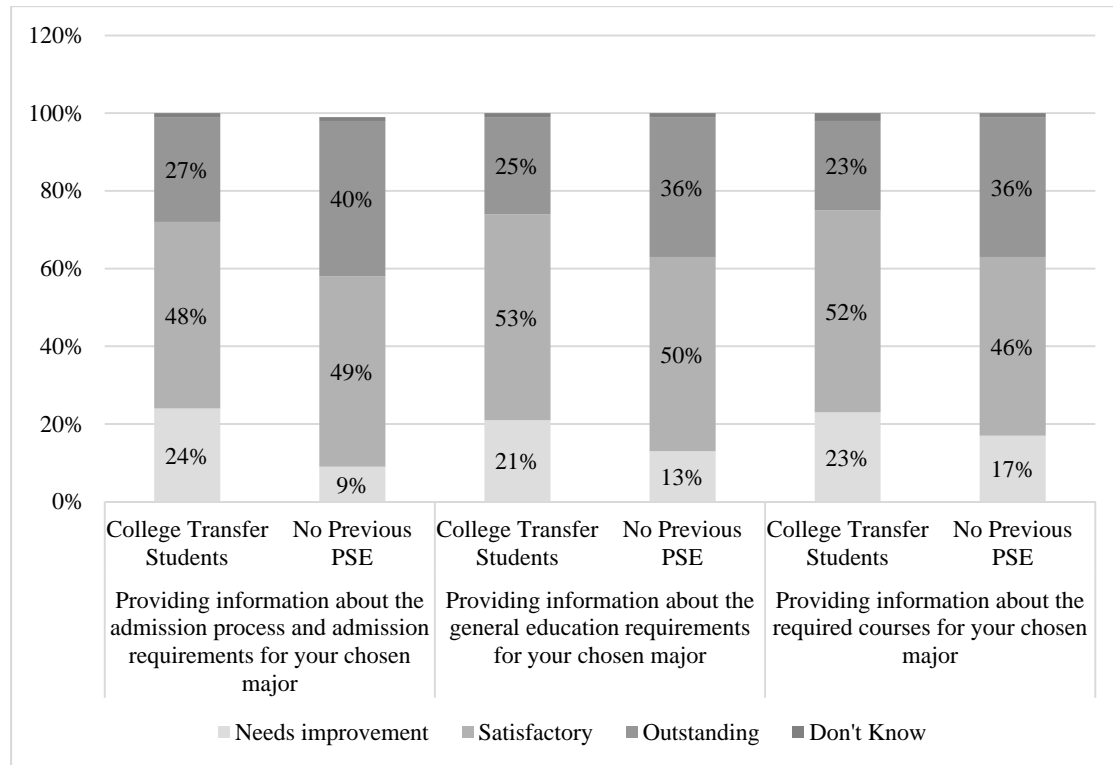
Overall both transfer and non-transfer students were satisfied with the timeliness of their application processing and notification of acceptance (Figure 12). However, transfer students were much less likely to rate their satisfaction as outstanding for each measure.

Figure 12 Satisfaction with application process, college transfers and non-transfers



About one-quarter of transfer students felt their university needed improvement in the area of providing information about the admission process and admission requirements (24%), compared to only 9% of university students with no previous PSE (Figure 13). Transfer students were also much less likely to consider information provided on course requirements for their majors to be outstanding.

Figure 13 Satisfaction with information provision for requirements of chosen major, college transfers versus non-transfers



Academic Preparation

Looking back to when they began university, the majority of respondents from both groups tended to say that they felt they were moderately or completely prepared for university (Table 10). The only significant difference was that a larger proportion of college transfer students said they were ‘moderately’ prepared compared to those with no previous PSE.

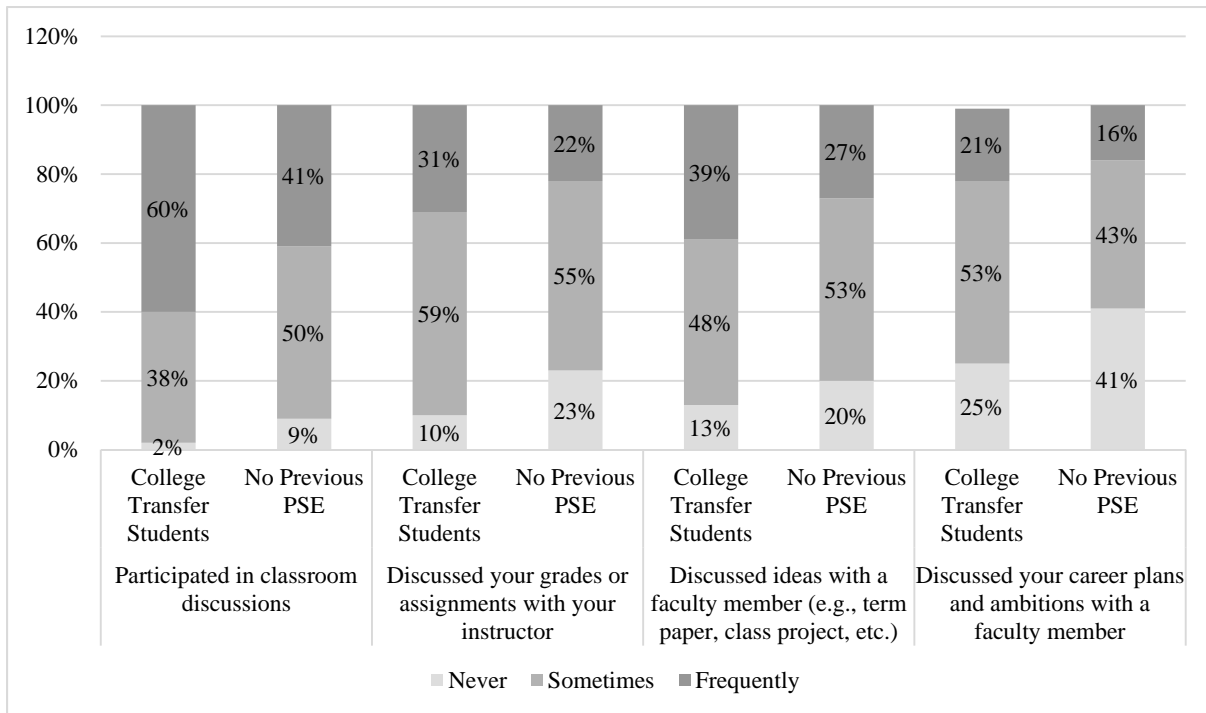
Table 10 How Academically Prepared Do You Feel You Were for University?

| | College Transfer | |
|------------|------------------|-----------------|
| | Students | No Previous PSE |
| Completely | 11.5% | 12.4% |
| Very | 23.8% | 29.0% |
| Moderately | 50.0% | 38.6% |
| Slightly | 10.7% | 13.5% |
| Not at all | 4.1% | 6.4% |

Engagement

Transfer students were more likely to be academically engaged than students without previous PSE (Figure 14). Transfer students were much more likely to participate in classroom discussion (59.8%) than non-transfer students (40.2%). They were also more likely to discuss their assignment and/or grades with instructors (31.1% vs. 21.9% non-transfer students), discuss ideas with a faculty member (38.5% vs. 26.5% non-transfer students), or discuss their career plans and ambitions with faculty (21.3% vs. 16.4% non-transfer students). Both groups of students reported similar rates of completing homework and assignments on time.

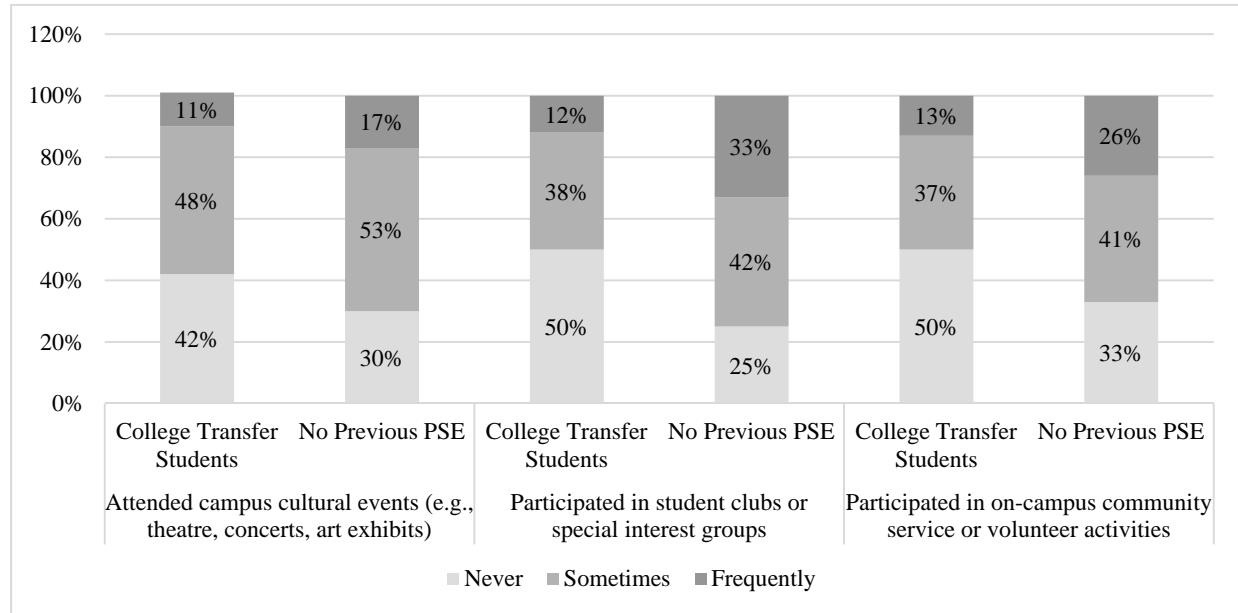
Figure 14. Academic engagement of college transfer students and non-transfer students



In contrast, university students with no previous PSE were more likely to participate in on-campus community service or volunteer activities (25.4% vs. 13.1% transfer students), engage in student clubs or special interest groups (32.6% vs. 12.3% transfer students), and/or attend campus cultural events (16.7% vs. 10.7% transfer students) (Figure 15). These results align with the earlier results in this report (Table 5) for university applicants, which showed that applicants with no previous PSE were much more likely to state that one of the reasons they applied to

university was to become actively involved in student life and campus activities, and/ or to meet new people.

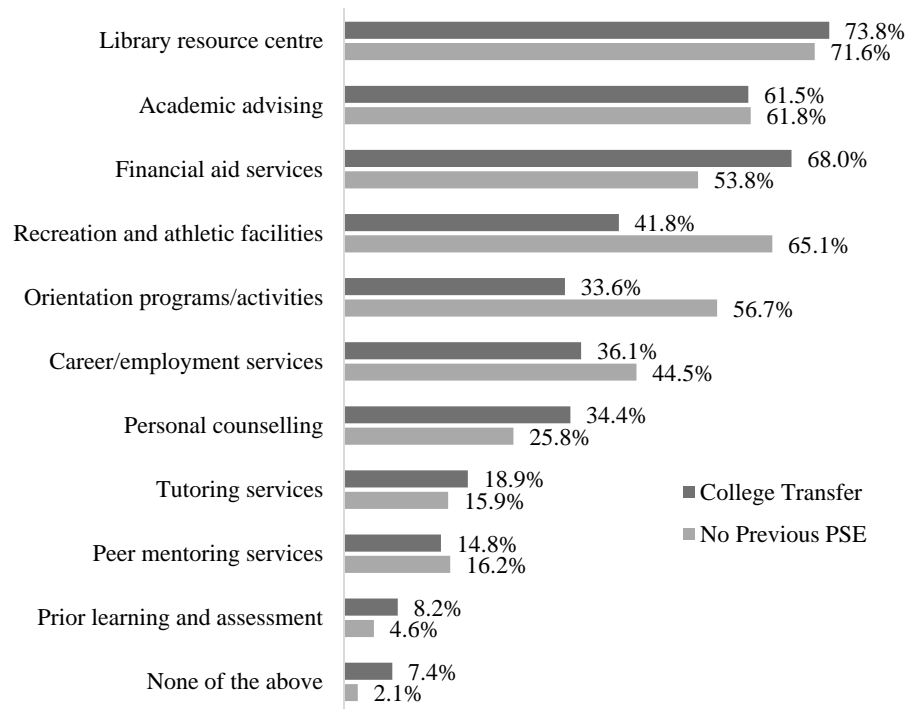
Figure 15 Social engagement of college transfer students and non-transfer students



Resources

In terms of types of services used, university students with no previous PSE were fairly similar to transfer students in terms of academic advising, library resources, tutoring and peer mentoring (Figure 16). Notable differences include being significantly more likely than college transfer students to use recreation/athletic facilities and orientation programs/activities. These results fit with the results presented earlier, which also showed that transfer students were less likely to know about orientation programs, and were also less satisfied with them (Figure 11). Transfer students were also more likely to use financial aid services (68% vs 54%) which is likely associated with their greater use of government loans as well as their lower annual income (Table 3) and slightly more likely to use personal counselling, which may be associated, in part, with the high numbers reporting a disability⁴.

⁴ The survey did not include Disability services in the list of resources.

Figure 16 University Resources Used

Conclusion

A growing body of literature has documented the motivations, experiences and challenges of Ontario postsecondary students who have transferred from college to university (e.g., Decock, 2006; ONCAT, 2013; Sidhu et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016). The present investigation contributes to this literature by examining the profiles and experiences of college-to-university transfer students and college students who aspire to complete a university degree in order to expand upon the current knowledge base.

The results of this study confirm previous research showing that the college-to-university transfer student population has a relatively large proportion of traditionally under-represented groups compared to those who are entering university directly from high school. This supports the idea that the college-to-university pathway may serve as a vehicle for under-represented students to access university (Kerr, McCloy & Liu, 2010). These students were shown to be highly engaged in their learning and academically confident, a finding also supported in previous

research (Pendleton and Lambert-Maberly, 2006). This is positive news for retention, as greater student-faculty interaction has been shown to be positively correlated with student persistence (Dwyer, 2015). However, the results also suggest that more work needs to be done to support both the admissions process and the university transition experience. Traditional university channels for information provision, such as viewbooks, brochures, open houses, and university fairs are not being heavily accessed by college-to-university transfer students. Rather these students seem to rely more on interpersonal contact for their individual circumstances, such as emails and phone calls with university staff, talking with a professor, and informal visits to campus. Similarly, university orientation programming is often geared primarily to the direct-entry student and transfer students are much less likely to participate. Orientation, particularly to the academic expectations of university, was a key area where transfer students felt their university needed to improve.

While college-to-university transfer students tend to be highly academically engaged, engagement outside of the classroom is a challenge. This is likely related in part to age differences, as college-to-university transfer students tend to have more outside responsibilities such as dependent children, as well as less financial support. Even at the applicant stage, university applicants with a college credential were far less likely to cite meeting new people, or becoming involved in student life and campus activities as reasons for going to university, than applicants without previous PSE. Developing flexible ways to enrich the non-academic experience of college-to-university transfer students should be a priority.

Overall, this study, as well as previous research, suggests that increasing the number of students utilizing the college-to-university transfer pathway should enhance the diversity in the student population in university, and at the same time increase numbers of academically engaged students. Both of these factors would likely enrich the university environment overall.

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