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ABSTRACT

In an effort to define and test a practical methodology to measure community college transfer rates, the California College Chief Executive Officers commissioned the California Transfer Rate Study (CTRS). The CTRS calculated transfer rates for 65 participating community colleges by measuring the number of exiting students (i.e., not returning for the next term) who transferred to a four-year institution within one year. San Joaquin Delta College (SJDC) was one of the CTRS participants, and comparative transfer statistics for the 1988-90 period were calculated for the college based on CTRS findings for students who had accumulated at least 12 units and the Academic Performance Report of the California State University (CSU) system. Highlighted findings include the following: (1) SJDC showed an average spring transfer rate of 13%, compared to 10% for all the CTRS colleges; (2) of 11 colleges of comparable size, SJDC's transfer rate ranked sixth for the spring and ninth for the fall for the study period; (3) males and females at SJDC transferred at about the same rate (12% and 13%, respectively); (4) transfer rates for ethnic groups at the college were 14% for Whites, 13% for Asians, 10% for Hispanics, and 7% for Blacks; (5) 9 out of 10 SJDC students who transferred to CSU persisted into the following semester; and (6) on average, SJDC transfer students at CSU had higher grade point averages than both transfers from other community colleges and CSU native students. (MAB)

San Joaquin Delta College

RESEARCH NOTE

TRANSFER RATES AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF DELTA COLLEGE STUDENTS

The first report from the statewide study commissioned by the California Community College CEO's provides new comparative data on transfer rates. The improved method for computing transfer rates shows them to be generally higher than those produced from traditional methods. Delta College's transfer rate is about the same as those in comparable institutions. Transfer rates for black and Hispanic students are significantly lower than those for Asian and white students. Data from a second study, the CSU Academic Performance Report for 1991-92, indicate that Delta College students who transfer to CSU campuses achieve higher GPA's than both the average community college transfer student and CSU native students.

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Transfer Rates and Academic Performance of Delta College Students

I Transfer—Major Objective But No Good Measures

From the time of their origin as "junior" colleges, community colleges in the United States have been seen—and have seen themselves—as institutions whose primary role is to prepare students for transfer to four-year colleges and universities to get a bachelor's degree.

The education programs of community colleges have broadened greatly in recent years, with expanded emphasis on occupational training, but transfer usually remains a major objective.[1]

It is not inappropriate, then, that efforts to assess the effectiveness of community colleges have focused on their transfer rates. This parallels the practice of using graduation rates to measure the effectiveness or productivity of four-year colleges. However, commonly computed transfer rates have several problems:

- First, unlike the situation in four-year colleges where the objective of virtually all undergraduate students is to graduate with a bachelor's degree, a substantial proportion of community college students have no intention of transferring to a four-year college. Their objective may be to acquire a certificate in one of the many fields in which community colleges offer occupational training. These range from accounting and auto mechanics through computer science and electron microscopy to nursing and welding. (In 1990, while 60 percent of the graduates of California's community colleges received AA degrees, 40 percent received occupational certificates.) Or, these non-transfer students may be taking basic skills or English language courses to help them qualify for a job or additional education. All of these educational programs are now established parts of the curricula of most comprehensive community colleges.

  Since a common practice in computing transfer rates has been to simply divide the number of transfers by the college's *total* enrollment (T/E), this means that the denominator (total enrollment) contains a large number of students who are not planning to transfer. The result is to produce artificially low transfer rates which have been used to criticize the effectiveness and efficiency of community colleges.[2]

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[1]The Board of Governors Annual Agenda regularly lists transfer as a top priority of California's Community Colleges.

[2]See, for example, Fred Pincus and Elayne Archer, *Bridges to Opportunity*, Washington: Academy for Educational Development, 1989; and S. Brint and J. Karabel, *The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

- Second, apart from the fact that the denominator (total enrollment) is inflated with students who are not in a transfer program, it consists of students who are still enrolled at the community college and thus not able to transfer.

- Third, the computation of any proper transfer rate requires difficult and costly data collection. It is necessary to ask all the relevant four-year colleges to identify the students who transferred to their institutions (in specified years) and the community colleges from which they came. The magnitude and cost of this effort, plus the additional difficulty of doing it without violating privacy and confidentiality restrictions, has discouraged efforts to develop more valid transfer rates.

- Finally, some argue that all of the commonly debated measures of transfer are fundamentally flawed because they are all based in one way or another on the number of students who actually transfer rather than the number of students the college has prepared for transfer. This is an incorrect procedure, it is asserted, because whether or not a student actually transfers is dependent on a large number of conditions outside the control of the community college, including personal factors in the student's life, changed career plans, and the difficulty of getting admitted to increasingly selective four-year colleges. Therefore, community colleges' performance on transfer should be measured by *transfer eligibility*, i.e., the number of students they successfully prepare for transfer, not the number who actually transfer.

The failure to reach any broad agreement on how transfer should be defined and measured, and the consequent inability to launch the data collection efforts that would provide improved, comparable transfer rates, have left community colleges without the ability to evaluate their effectiveness in achieving one of their primary missions.

II Some Progress Toward the Development of New Measures

These problems have not been ignored, but neither have they been solved. Educational journals display a flourishing literature on how transfer rates should be defined and measured, and there is even a National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer supported by the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Ford Foundation. But until recently the efforts to deal with the transfer problem have been more academic than operational.

Nevertheless, significant progress is being made. Several thoughtful proposals have been advanced which attempt to deal with the extremely complex issues related to defining transfer; and data utilizing these alternative definitions are being collected on groups of community colleges. Principal among these efforts are those of the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) and its Transfer Assembly at UCLA under the direction of Arthur Cohen, the National Effective Transfer Consortium (NETC) initiated by BW Associates, and the work being carried out by the Intersegmental Coordinating Council (ICC) in conjunction with the Chancellor's Office MIS Staff.

The definitions of transfer and the techniques for measuring it utilized by these groups do not agree. For example, the CSCC bases its definition on a cohort of students who entered community colleges in a given year, whereas the NETC uses the exiting cohort, or "Leavers." However, although they are not the same, the definitions of all three

groups are major improvements over the simplistic and misleading T/E formulation.

III Moving to Action

Frustrated by the seemingly endless debate over the definition and measurement issues, and feeling increased pressure to meet state and federal accountability mandates, the California College Chief Executive Officers commissioned BW Associates to "define and test a practical methodology that could be used by every community college and the Chancellor's Office to measure college transfer rates." The study, called the California Transfer Rate Study (CTRS), included 65 community colleges who volunteered to participate and who were able to supply the necessary data. The study has been completed, and the first results were published in August 1993.[3] Other reports will follow.

Delta College is not part of the UCLA-based Transfer Assembly. It will begin receiving data from the ICC-Chancellor's Office system next year. It is part of the CTRS carried out by BW Associates, and the transfer rates presented below come from the first report of that study.

IV Major Findings on Transfer Rates

A. HOW DELTA COMPARES TO OTHER COLLEGES

The CTRS's approach to the problem of defining and measuring transfer begins by asking: "Of those students who *exit* a community college—students enrolled in a given term who do not return for the next term—what fraction transfer within one year? In other words, the [CTRS] measurement focuses only on those students who are in principle able to transfer—the exiting cohort, or 'Leavers.'" A period longer than one year could have been used, but the CTRS study designers felt that college administrators, legislators, and others will require more timely measures.

Using this definition and the data collected from the 65 community colleges, **Figure 1** shows the transfer rates for Delta College, the average for the Consortium XVI schools,[4] and the average for all 65 study schools for the fall and spring for the combined years of 1988, 1989, and 1990.

The transfer rates in **Figure 1** are based on students who had accumulated 12 or more units before leaving school. The decision on what cut-off level, if any, should be used is a difficult choice. To use no cut-off, i.e., to include all students who left college regardless of how many units they had accumulated, would result in a denominator that included casual students who took only one or two courses and had no serious intention of pursuing a degree or certificate.

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[3] D. Banks, P. Berman, S. Santhanam, and D. Weiler, *Measures of Transfer at San Joaquin Delta College: A Report to Colleges Participating in the California Transfer Rate Study*, Berkeley: 1993. [As indicated by the title, each participating college received a tailored report on its own transfers.]

[4] Consortium XVI comprises 16 single-college districts similar in size to Delta in enrollment, staff, and budget. The Consortium XVI average is used here and in other research and accountability studies to provide a more meaningful basis for comparison than the much more heterogeneous state average. In the present case, the Consortium average is based on 11 of the 16 districts who participated in the CTRS study.

On the other hand, to move the cut-off level up to 24 or 48 units (the equivalent of one or two years work) would be self-serving in that it would inflate the transfer rate by leaving out students who start out to pursue a degree but fail to continue.

The CTRS Report provides the transfer rates for Leavers with six, 12 and 24 units, but only the transfer rates for the 12-unit group are presented in this summary report.

The most important overall finding in **Figure 1** is that all the transfer rates are substantially higher than the typically very low rates produced by the T/E formula, which often are as low as 3 or 4 percent. But even as comparatively high as the new rates are, they understate the actual rates of transfer because they do not include transfers to private colleges and universities, they do not include transfers which may have taken place after one year, and, as noted above, the denominator includes a large number of occupational students who are serious, certificate-seeking students but who are not attending school with the purpose of transferring.

As shown in **Figure 1**, Delta's average spring transfer rate (when most students transfer) is higher than the 65 Study Schools Average (13 vs. 10 percent), but it is the same as the average for the more comparable Consortium XVI schools (13 vs. 13 percent).

Figure 1

Transfer Rates at Delta College, Consortium XVI, and the 65 Districts Participating in the California Transfer Rate Study (for Students With 12 or More Credits)*

	Average Spring Transfer Rate (88, 89, 90)	Average Fall Transfer Rate (88, 89, 90)
Delta College	13%	6%
Consortium XVI Average**	13%	8%
65 Study Schools Average	10%	7%

*Source: D. Banks, P. Berman, S. Santhanam, and D. Weiler, "Measures of Transfer at San Joaquin Delta College: A Report to Colleges Participating in the California Transfer Rate Study," Berkeley: 1993.

**This average is based on the 11 Consortium XVI districts which participated in the study.

Figure 2 shows the rank order of the Consortium schools. Among the 11 comparable schools, Delta ranks 6th for the spring and 9th for the fall. (The other 10 schools are not identified because, by agreement at the outset of the study, all participating institutions were guaranteed anonymity.)

Figure 2

Rank Order of Transfer Rates Among the 11 Participating Schools of Consortium XVI (For Students With 12 or More Credits)

College*	Average Spring Transfer Rate (88, 89, 90)	College*	Average Fall Transfer Rate (88, 89, 90)
A	21%	A	13%
B	17%	C	10%
C	14%	B	9%
D	14%	E	9%
E	13%	F	9%
Delta	13%	D	8%
F	13%	H	7%
G	12%	G	5%
H	9%	Delta	6%
I	7%	I	6%
J	6%	J	4%
Consortium Avg	13%		8%
65 Study Schls Avg	10%		7%

*Data supplied to each institution contained indentifiable information only on its own transfer rates. By agreement at the outset of the study, all participating institutions were guaranteed anonymity in reports displaying comparative data.

B. TRANSFER RATES FOR MEN AND WOMEN AND THE DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS

As shown in Figure 3, men and women at Delta College transfer at about the same rate (12 and 13 percent, respectively, in the spring). Whites and Asians have the highest transfer rates (14 and 13 percent), followed by Hispanics (10 percent) and blacks (7 percent).

Figure 3

Transfer Rates at Delta College, By Gender and Ethnicity, Spring 1988 to Fall 1990		
Group	Spring Average	Fall Average
Overall	13%	6%
Male	12%	6%
Female	13%	6%
Whites	14%	7%
Asians	13%	7%
Hispanics	10%	3%
Blacks	7%	4%
Other	9%	4%

V Where Do Students Go, and What Happens After They Transfer?

Of the Delta Colleges students who transfer to one of California's public four-year universities, about 85 percent go to CSU institutions, and 15 percent go to a UC campus.

The CSU President's Office publishes annual reports for each community college on the performance of its transfer students. The principal findings from the latest (1991-92) report (as shown in **Figures 4 through 7**) indicate that:

1. Access and convenience are major factors in determining where students transfer. Of those transferring to CSU, more than half go to the two nearest campuses, Sacramento and Stanislaus (**Figure 4**).

2. Early drop-out after transfer does not appear to be a major problem for either Delta students or those from other community colleges. Roughly nine out of ten of those who transfer to CSU persist into the following semester (**Figure 5**).

3. Moreover, it does not appear that Delta's minority students are dropping out at a greater rate after transfer than white students. The ethnic composition of those who persist into the second semester is the same as the original transfer group (**Figure 6**).

4. Delta College transfer students do better—in terms of GPA—than, on average, both the transfers from other community colleges and CSU native students (**Figure 7**).

Figure 4

Delta College Transfers to CSU, by Campus, Fall 1991

CSU Campus	Percent of Delta College Transfers
Sacramento	34%
Stanislaus	23%
Fresno	9%
Chico	8%
San Jose	5%
San Luis Obispo	5%
San Francisco	4%
San Diego	3%
Long Beach	2%
Hayward	2%
Humboldt	2%
Northridge	1%
Sonoma	1%
Pomona	1%
Bakersfield	<1%
Dominguez Hills	<1%
Fullerton	<1%
Los Angeles	<1%
San Bernadino	<1%
San Marcos	<1%

Total Transfers (Upper and Lower Divs) N=485

Figure 5

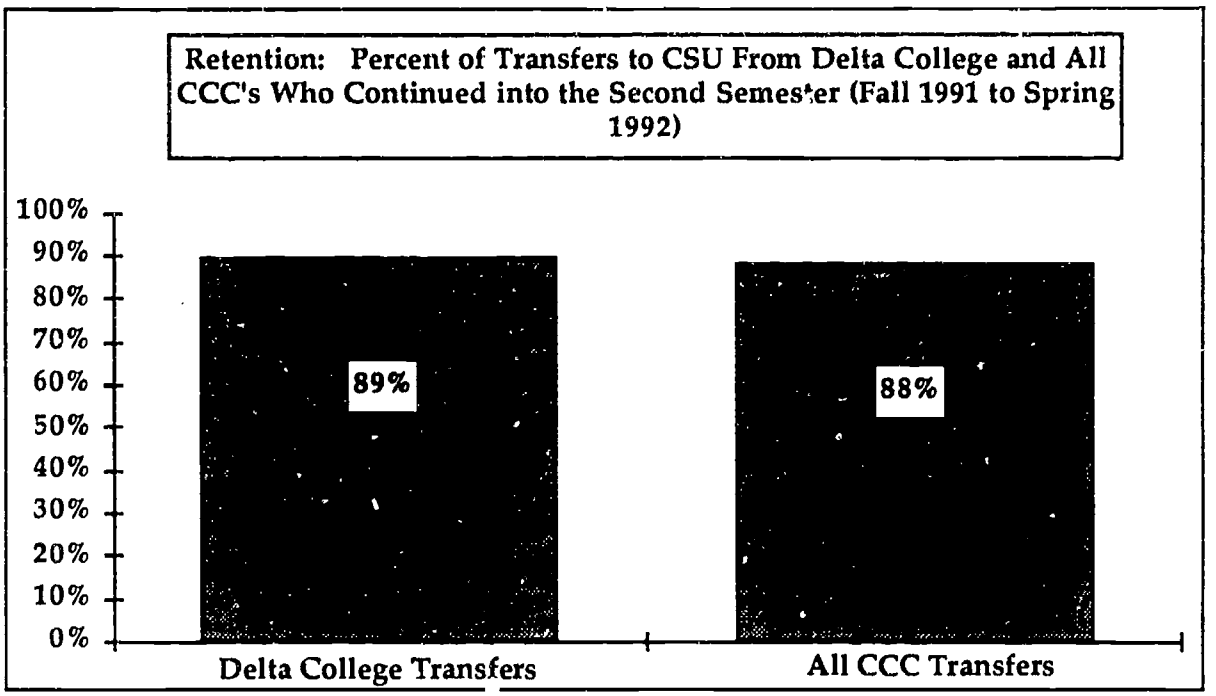
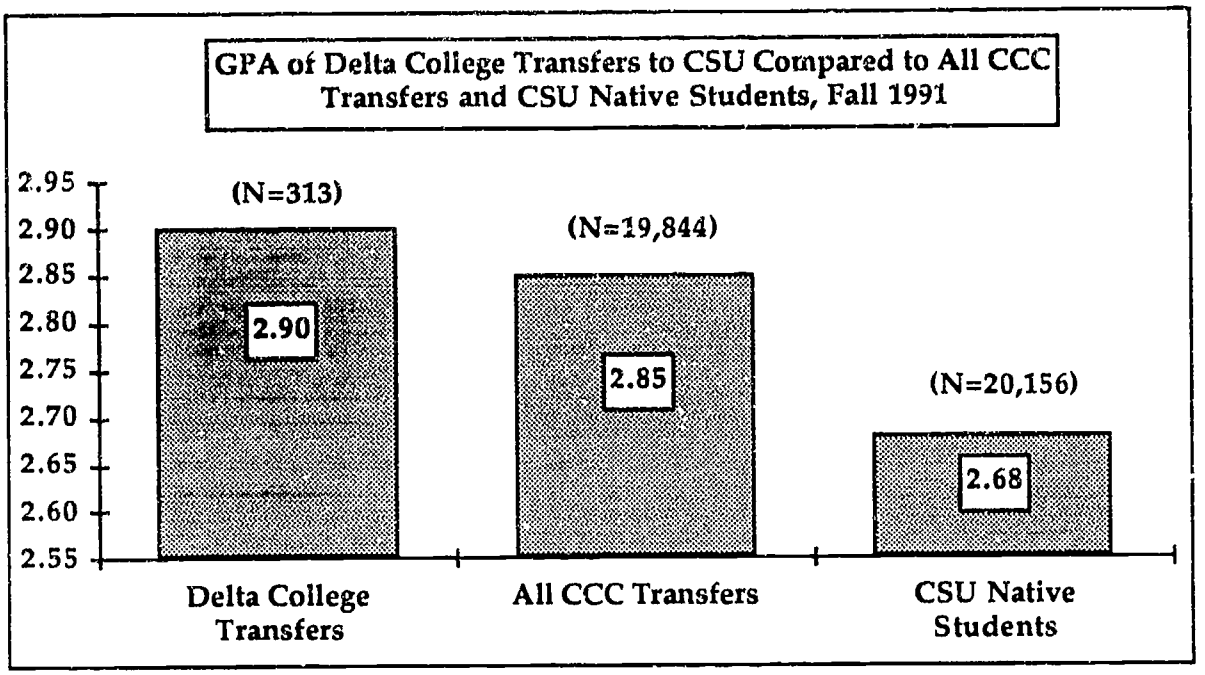


Figure 6

Ethnic Composition of the Original Delta College Transfers to CSU and Those Who Persisted Into the Second Semester, Fall 1991 to Spring 1992

	Delta College Transfers to CSU (N=485)	Continued Into Second Semester at CSU (N=432)
White	54%	55%
Asian & Other	27%	26%
Hispanic	14%	14%
Black	5%	5%

Figure 7



VI Summary

Formidable problems remain before California's community colleges will be in a position to readily evaluate their effectiveness in achieving one of their primary missions—transfer. Debate continues over how transfer should be defined and measured. Symptomatic of the persisting lack of consensus and the pursuit of disparate efforts is the Chancellor's Office's development of a transfer data system based on the definition developed by the Intersegmental Coordinating Council while the community college CEO's commissioned a major study using the quite different definition developed by BW Associates.

Nevertheless, important progress is being made, particularly in discrediting the traditional efforts to compute transfer rates by dividing the number of transfers by a college's total enrollment. While the new and competing measures of transfer are fundamentally different from one another on such basic dimensions as the definition of the cohort, they are all sophisticated advances over the simplistic and misleading T/E formulation which produces artificially low transfer rates and subjects community colleges to unfair criticism.

Moreover, data are now being collected using these much improved definitions and measures. Colleges which belong to the UCLA-based Transfer Assembly or the BW Associates National Effective Transfer Consortium have been receiving comparative transfer data for sometime. The Chancellor's Office will soon be distributing comparative data on all California's community colleges using the ICC definition. The CEO-sponsored study by BW Associates has recently issued the first report from its study.

The present report summarizes the key findings from the BW Associates study as they apply to Delta College, and incorporates data on the academic performance of Delta College transfers from CSU's Academic Performance Report of 1991-92.

The most important overall finding from the BW Associates report is that transfer rates in general are substantially higher than those produced from the T/E computation. Even so, they still underestimate the actual rates of transfer because they do not include transfers to private colleges and universities or transfers which may have taken place after one year, and the denominator for their calculation includes a large number of occupational students who are not attending school with the purpose of transferring.

Delta College's transfer rate is higher than the 65 Study Schools Average (13 percent vs. 10 percent), but the same as the average for the more comparable Consortium XVI schools.

The familiar pattern for ethnic groups is present in these latest transfer rate findings: Hispanic and black students (with rates of 10 and 7 percent) lag substantially behind white and Asian students (14 and 13 percent). But after transfer, all minority students persist into the second semester at the same rate as white students.

The universities Delta College students choose to transfer to make clear the importance of access and convenience. Of those transferring to CSU, more than half go to the two nearest campuses, Sacramento and Stanislaus.

The Delta College students who transfer to CSU campuses achieve higher GPA's than, on average, both the transfers from other community colleges and CSU native students.