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ABSTRACT

This document is a report on the attendance patterns and similarities of students enrolled at four-year colleges who attend community colleges primarily during the summer. The study surveyed 206 students who attended four-year institutions but enrolled in classes at East Los Angeles City College during the summer. Results indicated that 75% of the respondents were under the age of 21. Approximately 70% of the surveyed students were female. The majority of the respondents listed their ethnicity as Hispanic or Asian. Approximately 55% of the respondents stated they were freshmen or sophomores at their respective colleges. Most summer session students stated that saving money was the most important reason for taking courses at the community college. The next highest reason expressed by respondents was to take general education requirements during the summer to graduate sooner. The report offers recommendations to community colleges on how to better serve summer session students, such as adjusting course offerings in the summer and allotting a certain number of class spots to accommodate summer session students from four-year colleges. The report also suggests that two- and four-year colleges establish partnerships to assist the flow of students between the different systems. (Contains three tables and 17 references.) (MKF)

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Spending the Summer at a California Community College

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Abstract: Summer sessioners are students who enroll in four-year colleges or universities during the regular school year but elect to take courses at the community college during the summer. This study responds to the growing number of summer sessioners by answering questions related to why they are predictable seasonal visitors to virtually all community colleges. The study found that summer sessioners' top motive was saving money and time by taking required courses to finish college sooner. Also, the study recommends policies to better serve summer sessioners while continuing to provide "regular" community college students with expected services and privileges.

Spending the Summer at a California Community College

Linda Serra Hagedorn
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The label "summer sessioners" coined by Hagedorn and Castro (in press) designates the growing subset of non-traditional transfer students who regularly attend four-year baccalaureate institutions but elect to attend a community college during the summer. Typically, the summer credits are transferred back to the four-year institution and applied toward degree progress. Although many researchers include summer sessioners under the broad rubric of reverse transfer students (Townsend, 1999), they are a unique genre characterized by distinctive goals whose first allegiance naturally belongs to their four-year institution. Like migratory birds, they are predictable seasonal visitors at virtually all community colleges. Yet, despite growing numbers, summer sessioners have remained an understudied group. Thus, our present knowledge does not allow us to answer the following important questions:

- What attracts summer sessioners to the community college?
- What are their course enrollment patterns?
- Is the purpose of enrollment dependent on course type (for example, are the purposes for enrolling in a hard science different from those for courses in the fine arts)?
- Do course-taking patterns differ by gender or ethnicity?
- How can community colleges best serve summer sessioners?

While providing preliminary answers to these posed questions, the present study considers how summer sessioners fit into the mission of community colleges and

recommends policy to better serve them without compromising the quality or accessibility of education provided to the community college's regular student population.

Review of the Literature

In a recently published monograph about reverse transfer students, Townsend and Dever (1999) describe the summer sessioner student as a subset of reverse transfer, or "temporary reverse transfers" who take courses that transfer back to their four-year institutions (p.9)". They cite the failure of studies to distinguish between summer sessioners and other forms of reverse transfer students who attend community colleges during the regular academic year. A study in Oregon further dissected the reverse transfer definition by identifying as an "opportunity group" those students who periodically attend the community college to supplement their coursework and credits (Bach, Banks, Blanchard, Kinnick, & Stoering, 1999. Thus, the evidence indicates that our general, and limited, knowledge base of reverse transfer students may not apply to the summer sessioners. Townsend and Dever note that educational leaders, the general public, as well as state policy makers lack understanding about reverse transfer students, especially summer sessioners (1999). They voiced concern over possibly serious impacts of reverse transfer students on institutional funding and accountability. In particular they noted that two year college leaders must address the implications of reverse transfer students upon their original mission of serving students not served by other institutions" (Townsend & Dever, 1999). Administrators and policy makers may have good reasons to practice caution and to take steps to prevent reverse transfer enrollments from displacing regularly enrolled students who are more likely to be economically or academically disadvantaged.

On the other hand, Townsend and Lambert (1999) relate the benefits of integrating reverse transfer students. They cite their ability to "positively affect classroom dynamics" as well as "provide informal tutoring and academic advising" and "stimulate and challenge faculty academically" (p. 73).

Similar to other types of reverse transfer students, summer sessioners do not conform to the vertical transfer design – high school to community college to four-year university. Rather, they are aptly described by the picturesque phrase "transfer swirl" (de los Santos & Wright, 1990). However, since almost half of all college students will attend more than one institution prior to obtaining their degree (McCormick & Carroll, 1997), recognition and study of the "transfer swirl" is crucial to the success of large numbers of college students.

Reverse transfer has a long and rich history. A 1980 study conducted for the University of California system concluded that the flow of students ***from*** the University of California system ***to*** the California Community Colleges (i.e. reverse transfer) was actually larger than the expected traditional flow from the 2 year colleges to the university (Kissler). Although exact numbers of reverse transfers are not regularly disseminated, it appears that the proportion of students flowing from the University of California system to the community college system is growing rather than shrinking. The implications of reverse and other non-traditional transfers was officially recognized by the state of California in the early 1990s and extraordinary action was taken to stem the tide. In January 1993, the state of California enacted a differential fee which charged community college students holding a bachelor's degree or higher an additional $50 per unit

(Hagedorn & Castro, 1999). Soon rescinded, the differential fee became an embarrassing example of public policy failure and a stark admonition of the need to address the complexity of reverse transfer.

California's experiences combined with the burgeoning growth of reverse transfer added little to the understanding of the phenomenon. Recently, Phelan (1999) challenged the community colleges' open-door mission to address and establish policy to effectively deal with all types of reverse transfer students. He examined the policy implications of eight specific challenges posed by reverse transfer students and noted that problems with limited funding and increasing enrollment naturally give rise to questioning the comprehensive mission of the community colleges. Phelan promoted the establishment of modifications to present enrollment practices such that both regular and reverse transfer students could be reasonably served. Thus, it may be that rather than fitting reverse transfer students into the present comprehensive mission of the community colleges, their presence and strong numbers will force an expansion of the mission.

Others argue that serving the needs of reverse transfer students fits the open access mission of the two year colleges in a dynamic process that will enhance the development of diverse new mission areas (Quinley & Quinley, 1999). Similarly, Barnes and Robinson believe that the "...reverse transfer phenomenon is essential to advancing the role, scope, and mission of the community college" (1999, p.64). Therefore while the opposition is concerned that reverse transfer students may absorb an unfair proportion of college services, others call for an expansion of the community college mission to better serve the needs of all students.

To explore the question of why summer sessioners systematically appear every summer, Reis (1987) studied summer sessioners at an Illinois community college. She found that students were more likely to enroll in the community college during the summer to lighten the fall semester, take advantage of substantial financial savings, and obtain transferable credits. In addition, students cited the community college's flexible scheduling and the quality of the courses as instrumental in their decision. The study described the typical summer sessioner as a college sophomore enrolled in mathematics, business, and/or communications.

In an inquiry where summer sessioners were depicted as savvy consumers, Hagedorn and Castro (1999) relate an interview with a college administrator who described summer sessioners as smart, students who "really know the system" and how to best use college services. The administrator cast the summer sessioners as manipulators who partake of the advantages of the community college without granting serious acknowledgement of its role in their degree process. In conjunction with the present study, we interviewed teachers of summer sessioners who described them as "more confident", "more assertive", and "not afraid to ask or answer questions in class." However these comments should be tempered by other responses indicating that many of the summer sessioners interact well with the regular students, have sound academic skills, and overall contribute to creating a positive classroom dynamic that optimizes learning.

Methodology

Description of the College and Community. The location for this project was a large, urban, southern California community college located about 10 miles east of downtown Los Angeles. Most facilities at the college are over fifty years old with many classrooms not yet retrofitted with heating or air conditioning. As many as 25% of the classes offered by the college are taught in "temporary" bungalows (formerly barracks) donated to the campus by the Defense Department at the end of World War II (ELACC, 1997-1998, p.4). Tight budgets and deferred maintenance contribute to the toll of age on many of the colleges' facilities. A walk around the campus provides an experience in contrasts; many classrooms in need of renovation in old fading buildings surrounded by graceful trees, nicely tended flower beds and colorful bougainvillea's.

College enrollment in the Spring of 1998 was approximately 16,000; of which approximately 60% were females. In terms of ethnic/racial representation, Hispanic students dominate (77.8%) while Asians occupy the second largest proportion (16.9%). The college student population includes a small proportion of White students (2.7%) and an even smaller proportion of African Americans (1.8%) (LACCD, 1996-98, pp. 10-13). The college has 27 departments that offer transfer courses in 68 disciplines, vocational education/workforce preparation certificate programs and opportunities for academic remediation (ELACC, 1998).

The community served by the college includes 11 communities. Collectively the college community is predominantly Hispanic (81%, mostly of Mexican descent) with a large representation of Asians (predominantly Chinese) (ELACC, 1997-1998).

The Academic Calendar. Historically, the college summer session consisted of one six week term. However, in the Summer of 1998, the college initiated a new triple summer session calendar. The first session extended from May 26 to July 3 and consisted of 106 classes. The second session, anticipated to be the most popular, consisted of 116 courses and was conducted from June 22 to July 31. Session 3, with 64 courses, covered the time period of July 6 to August 14. Note that the second session overlapped both session one and three by two weeks. Although the majority of offerings provided transferable credit, the college offered a mixture of vocational and remedial courses. Classes were balanced evenly between morning and evening time frames with lab sections scheduled in the afternoon to best accommodate the needs of both day and evening students.

Sample. With the approval of the college administration, the researchers sorted the summer admission applications by enrollment status. All applications indicating reverse transfer activity were flagged. On the second sort, the researchers differentiated between regularly enrolled reverse transfer students and summer sessioners. For purposes of this study, we included those students who had completed at least 15 but not more then 59 college units by the first day of the summer term and listed as their educational goal, obtaining a Bachelor's degree without completing an Associate's degree. The resulting sample consisted of 206 summer sessioners; students that were regularly enrolled at four-year colleges or universities who enrolled during the summer for supplemental credits or coursework.

Survey Instrument

We designed the questionnaire to query students about their reasons for taking coursework during the summer at the community college as well as to provide a means for comparing experiences and course particulars of the community college with that of the four-year college. In addition students also provided information on demographics, grades, and financial aid. The questionnaire included a series of 21 possible reasons for taking summer classes at the community college. Respondents rated their agreement with the series of enrollment reasons and purposes via a 5-part Likert scale (1=strong disagree to 5=strongly agree). To allow for differences by course type, space was provided to allow students to rate their agreement or disagreement with the statements for up to 3 summer courses.

Administration of the Survey. We developed a database of students fitting our criteria. We included information such as names, addresses, phone numbers, session numbers, class schedules, and instructors. During the third week of the first session, we prepared and sent a survey package to each of the identified students who was enrolled at that time. The package included an introductory letter co-signed by the two project researchers and the college president, the questionnaire, and a stamped envelope for easy return. We telephoned each of the students to verify receipt of the survey package, to remind them to complete and return the survey, as well as to stress the importance of their participation. Despite gallant efforts, the return rate was slightly less than 50%. To increase the return rate for the second and third summer sessions we employed a different data collection technique. We contacted the instructors of each of the flagged students

and explained the purpose and importance of the study and stressed our need for their cooperation. We requested that they administer the survey to their student(s) and return it to us[1]. The rate of survey return for the second and third sessions dramatically improved to 92%.

Analyses

Initial analysis. Our initial analyses included descriptions of the sample by age, ethnicity, institution attended during the regular school year, college placement, college GPA, receipt of financial aid, gender, as well as variables pertaining to campus life activities. Our second goal was to ascertain the overall reasons why summer-sessioner students enrolled for summer classes. Using the mean response, we ranked the 21 reasons rated by students. Finding, saving money as the strongest reason for enrolling, we compared it to the average response for all other cited reasons using a paired sample t-test.

Differences by course-type. We next sought to discover if the reasons students take specific types of courses differed by student type. After collapsing the summer courses into three categories or general disciplines; 1) science and mathematics, 2) social sciences, and 3) humanities, we tested the hypothesis that the courses chosen by summer sessioners differed by course type, gender, ethnicity, college standing, GPA, or regular four-year college. To test this hypothesis we performed chi-square analysis shifting the unit of analysis from the student to the course type. We then investigated if the reasons for enrolling differed by course-type. Using the students' stated reasons for signing up for

[1] The surveys came with an envelope thus allowing the student to maintain anonymity when handing it back to his/her respective instructor.

courses, we performed confirmatory factor analysis and subsequent reliability analyses to construct scales. We then performed a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine differences for signing up for courses by course-type. Table 1 lists the items and scales with their respective Cronbach alpha value.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results

Initial analyses. The respondents ranged in age from 17 to 46, with the majority (75%) in the traditional college age interval (17 to 21 years). There were significantly more women (69.9%) than men. With respect to college standing, 14.1 % (n=29) were first year students, 40.8% (n=84) were sophomores, 17% (n=35) were juniors, 17% (n=35) were seniors, and 6.3% (n=11) were graduate students. The majority of the sample regularly attended one of the California State campuses (51.9%) while 19.4% were from campuses in the University of California system and 29.2% were from private colleges. This distribution was expected as the California State system has approximately 326,00 students as compared to the approximately 163,700 students at the University of California system (California Citizens Commission of Higher Education, 1998). Similar to the community, student ethnicity was predominantly Latino/Hispanic (59.2%), but the proportion of Asian students was higher than anticipated (36.4%). Half of the sample (49.5%) had never taken a community college course before. About one half of the sample was taking one course (48.5%) while 42.8% were enrolled in two courses and 8.7% were enrolled in three courses. The majority of students (77.2%) received some

form of financial aid. About half had loans (51%), 69.4% were receiving aid from a grant or scholarship, and 31.1% were involved in a workstudy program. Further analyses indicated that slightly less than half (47.1%) of the sample received multiple forms of aid. For example, 26.2% received scholarships, loans, as well as workstudy.

With respect to other college-related variables, only a minority of students (12.6%) reported being members of a sorority or fraternity, 18% were members of college honors programs, and 5.3% participated in intercollegiate sports. Educational aspirations were high. For example 41.3% aspired to a master's degree and another third of the sample (32.5%) aspired to a doctorate.

Of this total sample of summer sessioner students, 72 were enrolled in at least one history course, 49 took at least one course in the social sciences, while 33 took a political science course. There were 30 students taking a science course, 24 students taking a class in psychology, 16 students taking a mathematics course, 14 took an English course, 9 enrolled in a fine arts class, and 1 student took a foreign language course.

Differences by course type. Table 2 provides a rank-ordering by the means of the reported reasons for taking classes at the community college during the summer. Note that each mean represents the average of up to 3 courses. A comparison between saving money against the average response of all other cited reasons (paired-sample t-test) indicated that saving money was statistically the most important reason to be a summer sessioner ($t=20.135$, $df=203$, $p < .0001$).

Include Table 2 About Here

After collapsing the summer courses into three broad categories (Science/math, social sciences, humanities), all tests for homogeneity of proportions (chi-square analyses) were not significant. Therefore, for this sample of summer sessioners the type of course enrolled was not dependent on gender, ethnicity, college standing, regular college, or grades. Table 3 provides complete results of these comparisons.

Insert Table 3 About Here

Implications for Practice

Taking one or more courses during the summer at the local community college is a practice gaining momentum among traditionally aged students. Our findings reveal that summer sessioners are both goal oriented and consumer savvy. The evidence suggests that the summer sessioners are clever shoppers in the educational marketplace. In the words of Townsend and Dever they "know that the education they receive at a two-year college is a bargain hunter's delight" (1999, p. 12). Because the community college transfer courses are generally equivalent to those offered in the first and sophomore years of study at four-year institutions, it is not surprising that the largest group of students partaking of coursework self-classified as sophomores[2]. In the present study, we found that taking a summer course was more appealing to women than to men. However, other studies have found conflicting results (Townsend & Dever, 1999). The lower than expected proportion of men most likely explains why so few student athletes took advantage of the summer offerings at the study site.

The comparisons of proportions of students taking different types of courses was not significant by gender, ethnicity, college standing, regular four-year college, or grades. Although we expected to find differences across at least some of these variables, the distributions indicate that students' choices of courses do not depend on the tested divisions. Therefore, it appears that the college can offer courses most popular to the students without serious regard to demographic or other student descriptors.

By far, the most prevalent reason for taking a summer course at the community college was to save money. The tuition at California community colleges at the time of the survey(Summer 1998) was $12.00 per semester unit, significantly lower than the cost of taking a course at the four-year college (public or private)[3]. A very important factor related to the pervasiveness of cost for this sample may be due to the relatively lower socioeconomic status of the area served by the college. Other reasons such as taking a course that was required and to decrease the time to graduation were also salient reasons for the summer course enrollment. However the results of our analyses revealed that far and above all other reasons, saving money was the most prevalent.

We see several policy implications for community colleges regarding the dual presence of summer sessioners and college's emphasis on transfer. First, the evidence strongly suggests that the traditional transfer paradigm (vertical pipeline) upon which educational leaders, state, and federal policymakers base their decisions is much too exclusionary. Rather, than a narrow pipe, a wide funnel may better symbolize the transfer

[2] Since the data was collected during the summer, most likely those students who self-classified as sophomores would be between their first and second year of college.

function. Indeed, there are multiple and wide paths to successful transfer of credits to the four-year college. Second, despite periodic criticism about low transfer rates, community colleges actually play a significant role in preparing an increasing percentage of reverse transfer students for degree completion. Thus, educational leaders and public policymakers should augment and acknowledge the community college's mission in meeting the transfer needs of multiple types of students including summer sessioners. Of course, acknowledgement is empty if it does not also include additional resources that effectively serve the transfer needs of both its regular and reverse transfer students. Third, in order for policy to benefit all students, the role of the college in serving summer sessioners should be established and enforced. A fair method of registration that clearly allots registration preference for continuing students without discouraging summer sessioners is fair to all. However, the positive attributes summer sessioners bring should not be discounted. Summer sessioners may bring new life into the college and its curriculum while exposing the regular students to individuals who are acculturated members of four-year colleges and universities. Fourth, four-year and two-year colleges should establish partnerships that develop common student information systems, articulated transfer courses, and services that assist the flow from the multiple paths flowing through the wide funnel of transfer to the narrow pipeline of transfer success.

[3] In 1998, the summer tuition at the University of California campuses was $98 per unit plus a $260 registration fee. At the California State University campuses the cost was $150 per unit. The University of Southern California (private institution) charged $706 per unit.

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Table 1. Reasons for Enrolling in Summer Courses - Scales and Items.

Scale name (Cronbach's Alpha)	Item
CC course is a Service (.5741)	I had extra time and I wanted to spend it productively
	I am interested in the subject
	I need a review of the material
Better Here (.5300)	I will get more personal attention here
	The instructors are better (nicer) than at regular school
Save	Single item
Easier path (.6351)	The course will be easier
	Easy "A"
Convenience and Scheduling (.5994)	This course did not fit into my schedule during the school year
	It was offered at a convenient time
	I can concentrate on this subject better during the summer
	It wouldn't mix well with my other subjects during the year
	I want (need) more free time during the regular school year
	I am afraid of this course at my regular school
	It is too much work at my school

Table 2. Reasons for Taking Courses at the Community College[1]

	Mean	Std. Deviation
To save money	4.4273	0.9139
A required course	4.1108	1.1964
To finish college sooner	3.9770	1.0538
Offered at a convenient time	3.8108	1.0007
Necessary credits	3.6864	1.3334
Course will be easier	3.3325	1.0667
For interest in subject	3.2884	1.0462
For better concentration	3.2348	1.0394
To spend extra time productively	3.1823	1.3200
To provide more free time during the year	3.1122	1.1128
Didn't fit during the regular year	3.0429	1.2705
Instructors are better at CC	2.9861	0.8620
Didn't mix well in the regular year	2.9417	1.0924
Requires too much work at regular school	2.8922	1.0380
Easy "A"	2.7915	1.0328
Pre-requisite for course during the year	2.7459	1.2672
More personal attention at CC	2.7397	1.1254
For a review of the material	2.7214	1.1327
Serves as an elective	2.5166	1.3200
Afraid to take the course at regular school	2.0829	1.1559
Failed the course at regular school	1.4401	0.8840

[1] Measured on 5-part Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree)

Table 3. Percentage of Courses by Gender, Ethnicity, College Standing, College Type, and Grades

		Science/ Math	Social Sciences	Human-ities
Gender[1]	Male	12.1%	81.8%	6.1%
	Females	17.6%	73.9%	8.6%
Ethnicity[2]	Asian	13.4%	78.2%	8.4%
	Latino/Hispanic	16.7%	76%	7.3%
College Standing[3]	First Year	10.9%	73.9%	15.2%
	Sophomore	17.2%	74.6%	8.2%
	Junior	14.8%	83.3%	1.9%
	Senior	18.8%	73.4%	7.8%
Regular 4-year college[4]	California State	15.1%	75.3%	9.6%
	University of California	6.3%	89.1%	4.7%
	Private College	23.6%	69.7%	6.7%
Grades[5]	A's and B's	16%	76.5%	7.5%
	B- and below	15.9%	75.7%	8.4%

[1] $\chi 2 = 2.393$, df=2, $p>.05$, $\Phi=.086$

[2] Since the majority of the sample consisted of Hispanic and Asian students, these were the only ethnicity's included in the analysis $\chi 2 = 0.654$, df=2, $p>.05$, $\Phi=.046$.

[3] $\chi 2 = 8.845$, df=8, $p>.05$, $\Phi=.168$

[4] $\chi 2 = 11.424$, df=6, $p>.05$, $\Phi=.189$

[5] $\chi 2 = 0.80$, df=2, $p>.05$, $\Phi=.016$

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