

# Transfer Odds: Examining Factors that Impact Whether Students Achieve Transfer or Get Stuck Near or At the Gate



THROUGH THE GATE TRANSFER STUDY | RESEARCH BRIEF 2 | MARCH 2019

## Introduction

When students make significant progress toward a transfer goal, what impacts their likelihood for making it to university? Which student groups are more likely to achieve transfer success and which ones may need strategic support to make it across the finish line? The RP Group is exploring these questions as part of our **Through the Gate transfer study, which aims to identify strategies for increasing transfer among “high-leverage” learners — students who complete all or most of their transfer requirements but who do not make it to university** (see sidebar, *Through the Gate Transfer Study Overview*).

During the first phase of this research, the RP Group mapped the transfer landscape across California’s community colleges — examining a sample of over 875,000 students enrolled during a recent five-year period (2010-2015) whose course-taking signaled a transfer goal and measuring their transfer outcomes through spring 2016.<sup>1</sup> In examining this group of students, we identified a “transfer continuum” — underscoring that transfer is a nuanced journey that a diverse and varied group of students take.

While our transfer continuum identifies a broad spectrum of students, our research zeroed in on the nearly 300,000 high-leverage learners who were stuck either “near” or “at” the transfer gate (students closest to a transfer goal) and compared them to “transfer achievers” (see *Figure 1. Through the Gate Study Populations*, p. 2). With this

### Through the Gate Transfer Study Overview

The RP Group’s Through the Gate Transfer Study includes:

#### Phase 1: Mapping the Transfer Landscape (2016 – 2018)

Quantitative research to understand the transfer landscape, determining: (1) how many students in California arrived at or near the transfer gate, but did not go through, and (2) who they are and where they reside

#### Phase 2: Getting Better Directions (2019)

Qualitative research with students who are ready or nearly prepared to transfer to understand what factors impact their journey and how policy and practice might change to propel them through the transfer gate

The RP Group is conducting this research with support from the College Futures Foundation. For more information, visit [www.rpgroup.org/through-the-gate](http://www.rpgroup.org/through-the-gate).

<sup>1</sup> For a full technical report of our initial Phase 1 findings, visit *Mapping the Transfer Landscape for California Community College Students* at <http://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/Through-the-Gate-Phase-I-Technical-Report.pdf>.

approach, we were able to profile who these students are, begin dispelling some transfer myths about who does and does not achieve transfer, and preliminarily identify points of intervention that might help propel different student groups further along the continuum.

Building on this initial analysis, the RP Group further explored what student and college characteristics and regional factors increase or decrease students' transfer odds. We **highlight these results below, first summarizing the factors associated with high-leverage learners who are more likely to stop near or at the transfer gate, then identifying those factors linked to transfer achievers.** In this brief, we focus on discussing what our statistical model found to be significantly related to increasing students' transfer odds (a description of the entire model can be found in the full technical report).<sup>2</sup> We conclude with key takeaways and next steps colleges can take based on this new analysis.

This extended quantitative research lays additional groundwork for the study's second phase, which is focused on gathering perspectives from students who are currently near or at the transfer gate and identifying opportunities for improving their transfer success. The RP Group anticipates that educators, executives, and system-level leaders in the state's community college and university systems can glean insights from both phases of the Through the Gate study — informing equity-focused transfer initiatives and Guided Pathways redesign.

## Characteristics Associated with High-Leverage Learners

In exploring what characteristics are associated with students' transfer odds, we identified several commonalities among the high-leverage students who stopped near and at the gate. Our analysis found that students who were **older, first generation, from Asian or Hispanic backgrounds, or who had limited English proficiency (LEP) were more likely to get stuck near or at the gate than transfer.** Moreover, individuals with any recorded **disability** and those involved in **Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) at their college were more likely to be in the high-leverage student group.** Additionally, students who stated an **education goal of transferring, and students who had earned an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree (not Associate Degree for Transfer) were less likely to make it through the gate.**

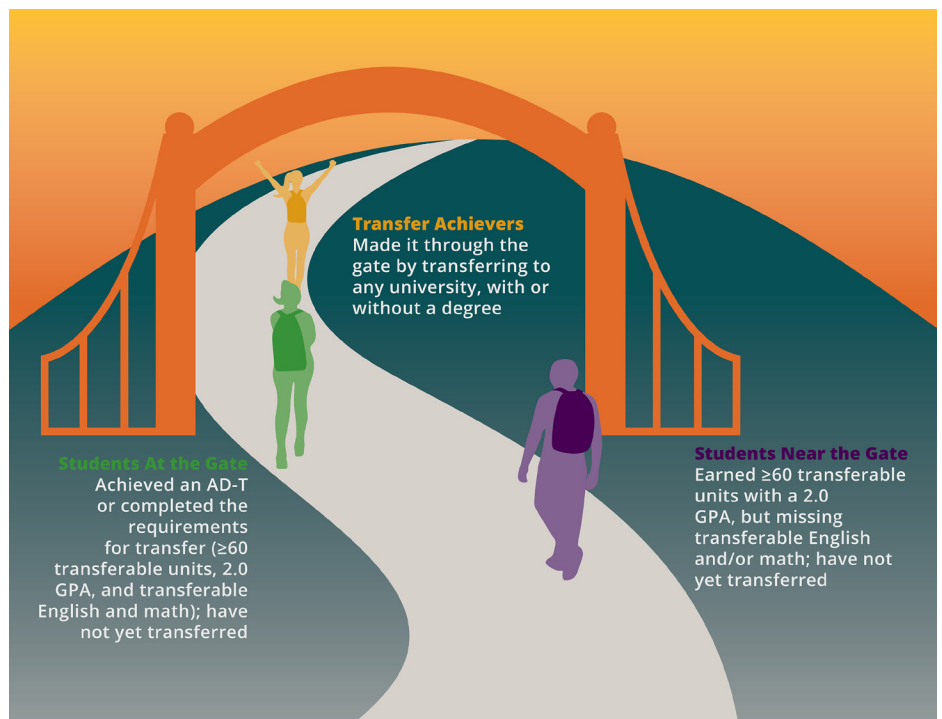


Figure 1. Through the Gate Study Populations

<sup>2</sup> Find full analysis in *Transfer Odds: Technical Report Examining Factors that Impact Whether Students Achieve Transfer or Get Stuck Near or At the Gate* at <https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/Through-the-Gate-Transfer-Odds-Technical-Report.pdf>.

## Emerging Regional Differences

We also further explored regional differences related to students' likelihood of transferring or being stuck near or at the gate. We used the San Diego/Imperial region as the comparison region since, in our sample, it had the highest proportion of transfer-achieving students.

Similar to the regional differences emerging from our initial quantitative analysis, results revealed that compared to students enrolled in the San Diego region, **students in the Inland Empire, Northern Coastal, and San Francisco Bay Area regions may be facing unique barriers to transfer as they are more likely to get stuck at the gate than transfer. Moreover, students in the Central Valley were more likely to be at the gate or near the gate than to have transferred compared to students enrolled in the San Diego region.**

## Characteristics Associated with Transfer Achievers

When examining what characteristics are linked with transfer achievers, results revealed that **students with higher GPAs are more likely to make it through the gate.** While this result seems to confirm what we would already presume, findings also demonstrated that **veterans and African-American students are more likely to transfer** than non-veteran students and students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds, respectively. What is important to note with these findings is that the students in this study are those who reached certain advanced milestones, which means it does not account for the many students who do not get this far in their education.

## Key Takeaways and Conclusions

This additional quantitative analysis bridges our Phase I transfer mapping analysis and our Phase 2 student perspectives research, surfacing three key takeaways at this stage of our research.

Among our high-leverage population, it continues to be **difficult to nail down which students (based on quantitative data) are truly transfer-seeking.** While students with a stated transfer goal were more likely to stop short of this milestone, these students were also more likely to earn an associate degree and not transfer. Jointly, these two findings lead us to question whether these students were ever really on a transfer path, and if they were, when, if, and why their education goal changed.

We also must continue to **challenge our assumptions about which student groups are more likely to achieve transfer, and where our intervention points are located along their transfer path.** Our initial analysis<sup>3</sup> followed by the additional quantitative research summarized in this brief demonstrate that some factors align with the existing narrative about which students reach their transfer goal, while others challenge common stereotypes.

These results support **further exploration of the factors responsible for certain groups of students having higher odds of transferring**, while at the same time, point to specific student groups that may need additional assistance moving through the transfer gate. For example, why are Asian, Hispanic, and Native-Americans likely to stop short of their transfer goal? For what reasons are students in the Central Valley/Mother Lode region getting stuck? What barriers do first-generation students grapple with as they traverse their transfer journey? What struggles are students with limited English proficiency encountering? What can be done to support older learners who want to transition to a university

<sup>3</sup> Find full analysis in *Mapping the Transfer Landscape for California Community College Students* at <http://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/Through-the-Gate-Phase-I-Technical-Report.pdf>.

but may have life circumstances that limit their options? What issues do these student populations uniquely encounter and what can be gleaned across these different groups?

The quantitative data have taken us as far as we can go in identifying who gets stuck, who makes it through the transfer gate, and what factors impact students' transfer odds. As we conclude Phase 1 of our Through the Gate study and move onto Phase 2, we are reminded that to truly understand students' decision-making process, we **need to learn from students themselves about what impacts their transfer progress and how to improve their success.**

## Next Steps: Listening to Students to Get Better Directions

During Phase 2, Through the Gate will explore *why students who are so close to transferring do not make the transition to a university*. Through an online survey of high-leverage students and interviews with former students who were at the gate but did not transfer, the RP Group will be able to inform the field of what factors students say most affect their transfer journey and decisions.

At the same time, colleges do not have to wait for Through the Gate's conclusion to make use of study findings and methodology. **Your campus can act now — taking your own steps to leverage Through the Gate's findings and methodology to help more students on your campus transfer** (see sidebar, *Let's Get to Work!*).

## LET'S GET TO WORK!

Colleges are already turning this research into action on their campuses to help more students transfer. Here are some ways to support high-leverage learners through the gate on your own campus:

1. Start by identifying students who are near and at the gate at your college using *Identifying High-Leverage Transfer Students on Your Campus – Through the Gate Methodology Tool 1*<sup>4</sup>
2. Build a model based on your students' characteristics and the supports available at your college to understand which groups need support and when to intervene using *Determining Students' Transfer Odds on Your Campus – Through the Gate Methodology Tool 2*<sup>5</sup>
3. Compare your college's findings to the statewide results in *Mapping the Transfer Landscape for California Community College Students Research Brief*<sup>6</sup> and the modeling analysis described in this brief
4. Determine how the findings of your self-study can contribute to your college's work to address:
  - Vision for Success goals (local goal setting)
  - Guided Pathways development
  - Student Equity and Achievement planning

## LEARN MORE:

Visit [www.rpgroup.org/through-the-gate](http://www.rpgroup.org/through-the-gate)

Contact Alyssa Nguyen, Project Director, [anguyen@rpgroup.org](mailto:anguyen@rpgroup.org).

<sup>4</sup> View *Identifying High-Leverage Transfer Students on Your Campus* at <https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/Through-the-Gate-Transfer-Study-Population-Methodology-Tool.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> View *Determining Students' Transfer Odds on Your Campus* at <https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/Through-the-Gate-Transfer-Odds-Modeling-Tool.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> View *Mapping the Transfer Landscape for California Community College Students Research Brief* at <https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/Through-the-Gate-Transfer-Odd-Brief.pdf>.

