



E-Expectations[®] of Transfer Students: A 2020 Trend Report



ENROLLMENT

Research for this report was co-sponsored by:



PLEXUSS[™]



INTRODUCTION

Nearly 40 percent of all college students are transfer students, yet they may be the most overlooked student population in higher education.¹ While some campuses have begun to step up their recruitment of transfer students to counter the declining numbers of traditional college students, many have underpowered transfer recruitment strategies. They do not address the unique needs, behaviors, and expectations of a group that has already been through the enrollment process, often has very specific reasons for changing institutions, and tends to conduct very focused and accelerated searches for a new campus destination.

But what are those behaviors and expectations? How should an institution build a modern and robust transfer student recruitment program?

Cappex, OmniUpdate + Destiny Solutions, Plexxus, and RNL set out to answer those questions and provide insights into the transfer student search process. This report dives into key topics such as:



Which resources do transfer students use and trust for their searches?



Which channels are more likely to engage transfer students?



How do they prefer to communicate with institutions?



How do the e-expectations of transfer students compare to college-bound high school students?

ABOUT THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

1,125 participants | **44%** transfer students | **56%** prospective transfer students

BIRTH YEAR

28% 2001 | **37%** 2000 | **16%** 1999 | **4%** Before 1999 | **6%** Did not disclose

GENDER

72% Female | **25%** Male | **1%** Nonbinary | **1%** Transgender | **1%** Prefer not to disclose

ETHNICITY

44% White | **19%** African American | **18%** Hispanic/Latino | **9%** Asian/Pacific Islander

3% Multiracial | **2%** Middle Eastern | **2%** Native American | **3%** Other/did not disclose

REGION

18% Northeast | **18%** Midwest | **36%** South | **25%** West | **3%** Other



Results for high school students in this report are taken from the 2019 E-Expectations Trend Report, available at

RuffaloNL.com/Expectations.

¹Tugend, A. (2 Aug 2018). "Colleges and Universities Woo Once-Overlooked Transfer Students." *The New York Times*.

MOST INFLUENTIAL RESOURCES

HOW TRANSFER STUDENTS BECOME AWARE OF INSTITUTIONS



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Transfer students are more about the experience than the discovery

Compared to traditional students, transfer students are more aware of their target institutions. They are more focused on what those target institutions can do for their needs and goals, and therefore want information that's more relevant to their situation.

Your position in your local market is crucial, especially in a post-COVID environment

With half of transfer students looking at institutions in their local area, your campus must strengthen its local market position. This will likely be even more important in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic as more students look to stay closer to home rather than enroll at more distant institutions.

MOST INFLUENTIAL INFORMATION RESOURCES

(1-5 scale, 5=most influential)

RESOURCE	2020 TRANSFER STUDENTS	2019 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
College's website	4.16	4.09
Email from the school	3.84	3.51
Results from a financial aid or scholarship calculator	3.67	3.72
Videos of campus, classrooms, students, residence halls	3.50	3.63
Phone calls from admissions counselors	3.37	3.44
Transfer calculator	3.33	N/A
Testimonials from transfer students	3.28	N/A
Statistics on salaries of recent college graduates	3.19	3.53
Virtual tours	3.13	3.27



MOST INFLUENTIAL INFORMATION RESOURCES

(1-5 scale, 5=most influential)

RESOURCE	2020 TRANSFER STUDENTS	2019 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
Texts from admissions counselors	3.12	3.49
College planning websites	3.10	3.29
Virtual reality videos	2.88	3.35
Social media posts	2.88	2.99
Printed brochures about the school	2.83	3.25
Ads on websites, search results, or social media	2.77	2.99
Rankings found in magazines	2.58	3.12
Live chat tools on the school's website	2.57	2.96
Calls, texts, or emails from athletic coaches	2.44	3.25
Billboards or other public display ads	2.34	N/A
Ad campaigns on TV or radio	2.27	N/A

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Give transfer students clear paths to contact and next steps

Transfer students value resources that allow them to quickly learn about an institution's offerings and make connections with campus personnel—email, calling, and texting. Make sure you have clear calls to action for them and have staff trained to handle their specific requests.

Provide accurate estimates of the cost to attend

Your financial aid and scholarship calculators need to inform transfer students about all of the aid they are eligible for and what their true cost to attend will be. Generic calculators will not be able to do that.

Give less emphasis to direct mail and digital marketing for transfer students

Given the more rapid search process for transfer students, top-of-funnel digital advertising and especially direct mail may not be as effective for transfers. Prioritize your resources more on establishing quick, direct communication.

COMMUNICATING WITH TRANSFER STUDENTS

HOW STUDENTS WILL CONTACT AN INSTITUTION

ACTION	2020 TRANSFER STUDENTS	2019 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
Email	42%	46%
Fill out a form on the website to get more information	38%	76%
Call the institution	24%	13%
Go to the campus	24%	n/a
Schedule a campus visit through the website	21%	40%
Register for a virtual open house/virtual enrollment session	14%	n/a
Complete an online cost/scholarship calculator	11%	28%
Respond to brochures or letters mailed from specific institutions	7%	39%
Fill out a form on the athletics page of the website	2%	8%

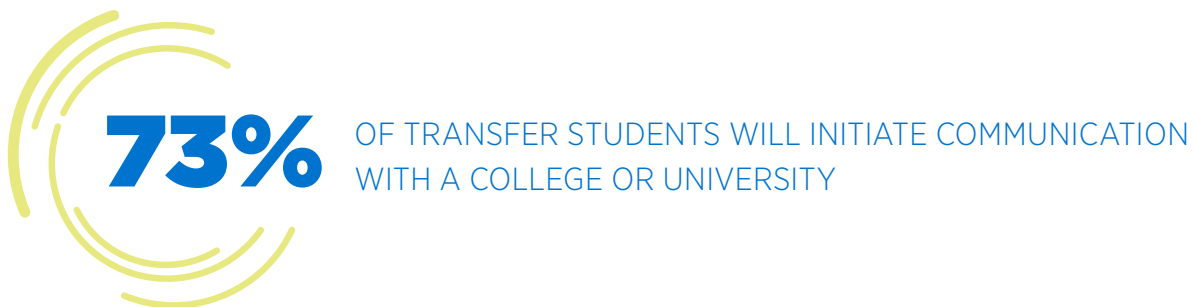
KEY TAKEAWAYS

Make it easy for transfer students to make direct contact quickly

Transfer students are more likely to email an institution than fill out a web form, and one in four will call as a first contact or even go to the campus. Make sure they can find that contact and visitation information on your website.

Be prepared for the “pop-in” visit

With transfer students more likely to go to a campus versus scheduling a formal visit, your signage and maps should show the way to the admissions office—and once there, the way to a knowledgeable transfer student representative.



BEST WAY FOR COLLEGES TO GET BACK TO STUDENTS AFTER SUBMITTING A FORM

ACTION	2020 TRANSFER STUDENTS	2019 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
Send an email with recommendations for next steps and links to other online resources	66%	61%
Have an admissions counselor email them	59%	56%
Text them	34%	46%
Show a confirmation screen with recommendations for next steps and links to other online resources	34%	29%
Send brochures in the mail	26%	63%
Call them	26%	17%
Connect with someone on campus through a live chat tool	9%	7%
Message them through a social media app	6%	11%

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Have actionable emails ready to go when transfer students raise their hand

Once a transfer student makes contact through a form, they are ready for the next step. Have automated emails that will deliver relevant and actionable content right away to keep them engaged and moving forward.

Support email with texting and calling

While email is their highest preference, incorporating texting and calling provides additional channels to expand your chances of making a connection and generating a response from a transfer student.

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY WEBSITES

HOW TRANSFER STUDENTS FIND A COLLEGE WEBSITE



66%

Search engine
(Google, Bing, Yahoo)



33%

Type the address
directly



SEARCH BY VOICE

47%

Use search by voice
(Google, Alexa, Siri, etc.)

MOST IMPORTANT CONTENT/FEATURES ON COLLEGE WEBSITES

38%

List of available academic programs

30%

A guided path of courses for their program of interest (guided pathway)

29%

Content and tools specifically created for transfer students

28%

Details about academic programs

25%

Ability to find the website when conducting an online search

22%

Details about prior learning assessment/credit transfer

HOW TRANSFER STUDENTS INTERACT WITH COLLEGE WEBSITES

73%



Clicked on a particular major and like to be led through the program details

15%



Clicked on random links to discover new majors or activities

11%



Clicked on a student profile that resembles them (for example, transfer student or first-generation student) to see what path they have taken through college

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Put your academic programs front and center

Transfer students really prioritize academics—what they can study and how they can complete their degree. Provide clear details on your programs and also provide calls to action for them to reach out and interact with campus staff who can answer questions about programs of study.

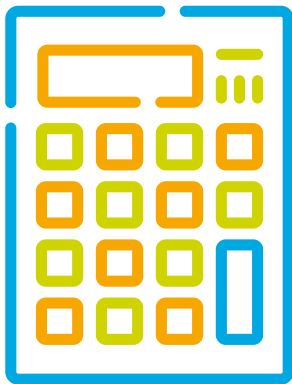
Dominate SEO for your institution and key academic programs

It is critical that your search rankings rise to the top—not just for your campus, but location-based searches, program-based searches, and combinations (e.g. “best business program in the Midwest”).

Create specific content and tools for transfer students

Give transfer students supportive content such as testimonials and outcomes specific to transfer students, as well as easy-to-use tools to help with requirements and credit transfer questions.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TRANSFER CREDIT CALCULATORS



34%

of transfer students have used a credit calculator

88%

who used one were satisfied with the results

Transfer students clearly love credit calculators, yet only one-third reported using them. Don't miss this opportunity—add a credit calculator to your site or make yours more visible/searchable if you have one.

MOST FRUSTRATING BARRIERS ON A WEBSITE

57%

Poor navigation/important information hard to find

35%

Not enough detail about academic programs

23%

No details for recent transfer students

23%

No details about how to transfer credits

22%

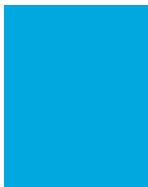
Hard to find a list of available academic programs

20%

Hard to find contact information such as email addresses or phone numbers

HOW STUDENTS RESPOND TO A FRUSTRATING WEBSITE EXPERIENCE

29%



I'll call to get what I need

17%



I'll ask (someone) to help me find the information I need

16%



I'll look on other websites

14%



I'll just keep trying to use the website

9%



I'll remove that school from consideration

KEY TAKEAWAYS

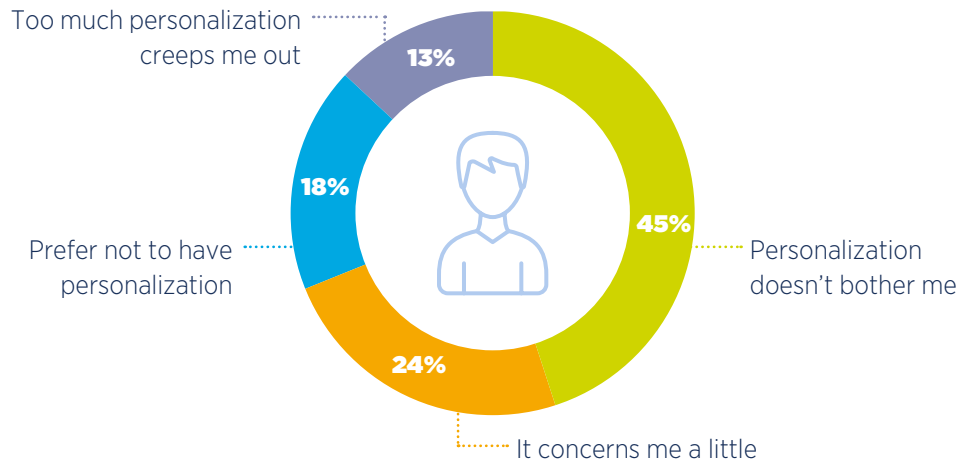
Assess your web user experience (UX) from a transfer student perspective

UX testing is a key strategy for every college website, but consider assessing your site from the perspective of transfer students. Can they quickly find information on academic programs, transferring credits, and other topics specific to their experience?

Be prepared to make a save if they contact you after a poor web experience

Nearly half of transfer students (46 percent) said they would call or ask someone to help them find the information they need. If they do contact your institution, it's imperative that they receive great assistance from someone who can either answer their questions or can direct them to the right resource fast.

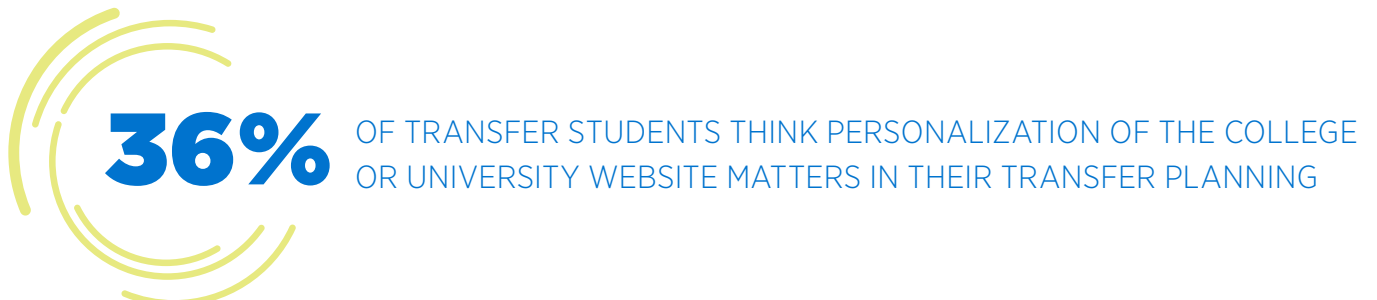
PERSONALIZED MESSAGES ON WEBSITES



KEY TAKEAWAY

Use personalization when it enhances the enrollment journey

Transfer students are split on personalization, with 45 percent accepting it and 55 percent concerned with it or preferring not to have personalization. Look at how you use personalization and make sure it's accomplishing strategic objectives like serving content that's tailored to student interests—and isn't just generically dropping in a student's name in random places.



PAID INTERACTIVE MEDIA



78%

of transfer students have seen a paid interactive/digital ad online



48%

of those transfer students who saw ads clicked on them



64%

of high school students who saw ads clicked on them

SITE WHERE THEY CLICKED	2020 TRANSFER STUDENTS	2019 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
Google search	59%	44%
Instagram	47%	27%
Facebook	43%	62%
YouTube	25%	31%
Display ad on a web page	13%	20%
Other social media or blog posts	8%	22%

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Paid digital still pays off for transfer students

While transfer students are less likely to click on paid digital ads, nearly half who see them do click.

Create ads, landing pages, and content specifically for transfer students

Use transfer-specific ads to retarget students who visit transfer-related content (web pages, transfer calculators, etc.) so that those students receive relevant messages that will keep them engaged.

Optimize where you're spending time and resources

Transfer students are more likely to click on Google search ads than display ads on social media, so be sure your paid search ads have relevant keywords, use actionable copy, and use A/B testing so you can find the best messages to generate results.

4 BIG TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Keep your transfer student content focused on action and experience vs. discovery.**
Transfer students have been through the enrollment process before. They are not likely to conduct a broad exploration of an institution, but instead look for specifics about what they can study and how they can transfer.
- 2 Act quickly when transfer students inquire.**
Transfer students are on an accelerated and more focused search timeline and will likely make their enrollment decisions quickly. Speed is key in responding to them, engaging them, and providing a frictionless path toward transferring.
- 3 Optimize content and SEO for your academic programs.**
This is a good strategy for both first-time-in-college students and transfer students, but transfers in particular tend to focus on what they will study and how quickly they can complete the program.
- 4 Use transfer credit calculators.**
Only one-third of transfer students say they have used these calculators, yet nearly 9 out of 10 have favorable opinions of them. Campuses are missing a big opportunity to engage more transfer students if they don't have these calculators or they are hard to find.

LET'S TALK TRANSFERS! ASK FOR A FREE CONSULTATION

How can you best meet the expectations of transfer students, elevate their engagement and interest, and increase their enrollment? Talk with our marketing and enrollment experts. We'll share strategies that are working for other colleges and universities nationwide.



Visit RuffaloNL.com/Transfers
Email ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com
Call **800.876.1117**

ABOUT THE SURVEY SPONSORS



About RNL

RNL is the leading provider of higher education enrollment, student success, and fundraising solutions. The firm serves more than 1,900 colleges and universities through data-driven solutions focused on the entire lifecycle of enrollment and fundraising, assuring students find the right program, graduate on time, secure their first job in their chosen field, and give back to support the next generation. With a deep knowledge of the industry, RNL provides institutions the ability to scale their efforts by tapping into a community of support and resources.

Visit RuffaloNL.com



About Cappex

Cappex is dedicated to connecting students and colleges. Since its founding in 2006, they've helped over 9 million students achieve their college dreams, and more than 1,000 colleges with recruiting and enrollment business solutions. Every year, more than 1.2 million new users register for Cappex. They offer colleges and universities several solutions that allow them to build their brands, connect with prospective students, generate qualified inquiries, and meet their enrollment goals. Student targeting capabilities such as location, diversity, specific majors, and GPA make Cappex the most efficient way to start relationships and build online engagement with college-bound students.

Visit Cappex.com



About OmniUpdate + Destiny Solutions

OmniUpdate + Destiny Solutions is a leading software provider in higher education with a best-of-class SaaS platform. The platform includes the OU Campus® web content management system, which is used by colleges and universities campus-wide, and the Destiny One® student lifecycle management system, which caters to administrators serving non-traditional students. Backed by first-rate training and support, the platform allows institutions to support revenue and enrollment growth, deliver education across the lifelong learning lifecycle, secure sensitive data, and deliver the agility needed to be competitive in today's higher ed market.

Visit OmniUpdate.com



About PLEXUSS

PLEXUSS is a mission-driven digital platform impacting how prospective students and post-secondary institutions connect. Since 2015, the PLEXUSS Global Student Network™ has grown to over 6.1 million student users and nearly 18,000 post-secondary institutions worldwide. By leveraging proprietary AI technology, PLEXUSS engages students over longer periods, getting to know each student's individual needs and goals.

Visit Plexuss.com/solutions



Visit RuffaloNL.com/Enrollment
Email ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com
Call 800.876.1117

How to cite this report

RNL, Cappex, OmniUpdate + Destiny Solutions, & Plexuss (2020). *E-Expectations of Transfer Students: A 2020 Trend Report*. Cedar Rapids, IA: Ruffalo Noel Levitz. [Available at RuffaloNL.com/Transfer2020](https://RuffaloNL.com/Transfer2020)

All material in this document is copyright © 2020 by RNL. Permission is required to redistribute information from RNL either in print or electronically.