



Transfer Stories and Strategies:

How Six Student Groups Experience the Transfer Journey



Supported by:



THROUGH THE GATE

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Introduction

California has embraced transfer between the state's community colleges and universities as a key mechanism for ensuring a diverse and qualified workforce while simultaneously closing equity gaps and promoting economic mobility for its residents. Yet the RP Group's *Through the Gate* transfer study finds that each year, nearly 60,000 California community college students who demonstrate the determination and academic ability to transfer do not make it to university (see *What is Through the Gate?*, p. 21).¹ Who is more likely to get stuck? Students historically marginalized by our higher education systems.

These "high-leverage" learners—students whose course taking indicates they are close to transfer—commonly shared that four key factors impact their readiness for university (see *Figure 1. Student Transfer Capacity-Building Framework*, p. 2).

At the same time, **some factors carried more weight for certain groups of students than others** (see *Through the Gate Student Perspectives Research Quick Facts*, p. 2).² **This brief offers community college practitioners a snapshot of these differences and strategies for supporting these focal student groups** (see *In this Brief...* at right).

Each year, nearly 60,000 California community college students who demonstrate the determination and academic ability to transfer do not make it to university. Who is more likely to get stuck? Students historically marginalized by our higher education systems.



IN THIS BRIEF...

Drawing on a survey and interviews with over 800 California community college students exploring which factors impact their transfer journey, we offer for each focal student group:



Stories amplifying their transfer experiences*



Key survey results



A sampling of strategies for community colleges to use for building their transfer capacity

*These stories are composites representing the survey and interview findings for each focal student group. They cannot be attributed to any one student; all names are fictional.

Figure 1. Framework for Building Students' Transfer Capacity

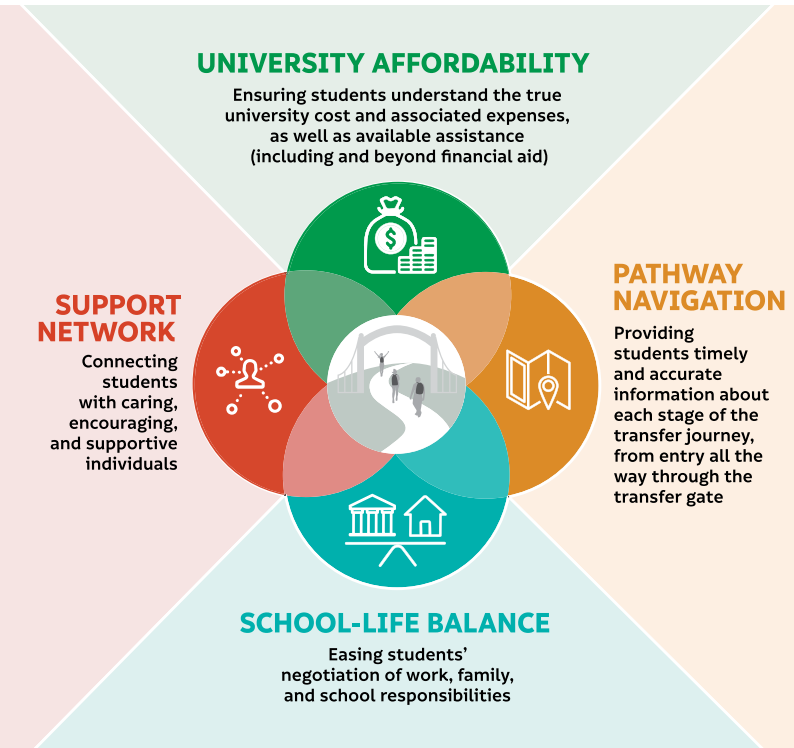


Photo: Stock Rocket



Through The Gate Student Perspectives RESEARCH QUICK FACTS

31
California
Community
Colleges (CCC)
Involved³

809
Student Survey
Participants

39
Student
Interviewees

Focal Student Groups	Survey Participants	Interviewees
Females	62%	49%
Older Students (>26)	32%	38%
Hispanic and Latina/o/x Students	56%	46%
African-American/Black Students	3%	5%
Students Who Reside in CA Central Valley Region	28%	15%
Exited Students Who Still Intend to Transfer	19%	28%

Student Group Profiles

Female Students



ALEXA'S STORY

Savvy with numbers and eager to earn more than minimum wage, Alexa enrolled in college a few years after graduating high school to pursue an accounting certificate. Yet, she quickly realized she wanted a bigger challenge, rekindling a love for math and physics that started in high school and setting her sights on a PhD.

Alexa is determined to make it to university. While chipping away at her transfer requirements over the past six years, she has also juggled full-time work and care for her young son. Yet persistent financial hardships, competing demands on her time, and limited understanding about what to expect and how to get help post-transfer often leave her discouraged. Alexa is especially uncertain about what childcare might be available on campus at the university. She also does not know what attending university will actually cost and has maxed out her financial aid.



Photo: Ammentorp Photography

To juggle her multiple family and work responsibilities, Alexa hopes to attend a local California State University (CSU), understanding from her counselor that this option will have the best financial assistance. She also notes that she plans to apply for any and all financial aid, grants, and scholarships for which she is eligible, although she does not have a clear understanding how to go about this process.

Alexa is determined to make it to university. While chipping away at her transfer requirements over the past six years, she has also juggled full-time work and care for her young son.



FEMALE STUDENTS: SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS



University Affordability

Female students are **MORE LIKELY** than male students to...

- Identify the cost of university tuition as very challenging
- Express that getting enough financial aid to pay for their education is highly motivating



School-Life Balance

Female students are **MORE LIKELY** than male students to...

- Indicate that balancing school and family is very challenging
- Be motivated by the prospect of having universities they can attend near home



Support Network

Female students are **MORE LIKELY** than male students to...

- Voice concern about having too little support from universities if they transfer



TRANSFER STRATEGIES FOR FEMALE STUDENTS

For Alexa and female students like her who have financial pressures and competing family demands, consider...

- Working with university partners to proactively reach out with information about comparable and additional resources and services available once at the university, including childcare and other on-campus support for student parents
- Collaborating with university partners to specifically provide information to help them understand what university education will cost and identify all available assistance, including and beyond financial aid
- Channeling information on resources for managing university life and financing through majority female academic and support programs (e.g., health care, early childhood education, [CalWorks](#)⁴, Extended Opportunities Programs and Services ([EOPS](#))/Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE))⁵
- Working with regional universities to proactively inform students about current options for accessing university-level programming remotely and/or on the college campus
- Coordinating with public and private universities to develop innovative options for place-bound students to complete a bachelor's degree (e.g., university centers; 3+1, hybrid, and/or online programs) and proactively informing students about these offerings



Photo: Richard Levine



Photo: mauritius images

Older Students



WILLIAM'S STORY

Returning to college in his 30s after a five-year hiatus, William is a motivated computer science major. He thinks getting a baccalaureate will help him “seal the deal” professionally, but he *is* concerned about balancing school, work, and family.

While William's wife and two kids are proud of him, he sometimes wonders if spending his hard-earned money and limited time to get a bachelor's degree makes sense since he already has a tech support job. He lives an hour away from work, and the commute is taking a toll. Considering that he will need to stay employed once he transfers, he hopes to find a university campus near home to reduce as much stress as possible.

William thinks he only has a few classes to complete to be eligible for transfer, yet is unsure of what steps to take next. Deterred by a counselor who told him when he re-enrolled that transfer was a long shot given his prior GPA, he has not yet accessed any transfer resources on campus. He plans to start taking advantage of these supports next semester, but still worries that the transfer process will be complex.

William sometimes wonders if spending his hard-earned money and limited time to get a bachelor's degree makes sense since he already has a tech support job.



Photo: ESB



OLDER STUDENTS: SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS



University Affordability

Older students are **MORE LIKELY** than younger students to...

- Pay for their education with their own income



School-Life Balance

Older students are **MORE LIKELY** than younger students to...

- Feel more pressure to prioritize supporting their family over pursuing their education
- Report that their top priority in choosing a university is how close it is to their home



Pathway Navigation

Older students are **LESS LIKELY** than younger students to...

- Leverage the wealth of transfer-related resources provided by CCC
- Talk to others about transferring



Photo: public domain



Photo: digitalskillet



TRANSFER STRATEGIES FOR OLDER STUDENTS

For William and older students like him who may be more independent than their younger counterparts; less likely to speak to their peers; and balancing multiple competing work, school, and family demands, consider...

- Clearly articulating the value proposition for continuing their education and completing a bachelor's degree
- Proactively “pushing” them important information about transfer deadlines and requirements
- Providing on-demand transfer advising and counseling that allow them to “self-service” at times and in ways that do not necessarily require face-to-face interaction
- Engaging counseling faculty in professional development on how to specifically encourage and advise non-traditional students who may be returning to college after multiple years away and/or juggling numerous responsibilities
- Involving instructors in professional development on how to specifically support non-traditional students in the classroom, including offering flexibility and compassion while valuing their life experience as an asset as they work toward transfer
- Developing options for working students, such as weekend and/or evening offerings or online programming with integrated academic and nonacademic student supports
- Working with regional universities to proactively inform students about current options for accessing university-level programming remotely and/or on the college campus
- Coordinating with public and private universities to develop innovative options for place-bound students to complete a bachelor's degree (e.g., university centers; 3+1, hybrid, and/or online programs) and proactively informing students about these offerings

Hispanic and Latina/o/x Students



SOFÍA'S STORY

Sofía has attended her community college since 2013 while also working at a nonprofit. First in her family to attend college, she hopes to pursue a bachelor's degree and become a school psychologist. However, finances are a big hurdle. While Sofía's family supports her educational goals, they are not able to help her financially. Yet her financial aid is impacted because she reports her parents' income on her FAFSA. Finding a way to secure more financial assistance will be essential for Sofía to make the transition to university.

As she explores her options, Sofía can only practically consider universities near home. In addition to both work and school, she takes care of her sister's two young children. Her confidence wavers and sometimes she thinks about "dropping out and just getting a vocational degree," but she is determined to keep going to set a good example for her nieces. Her transfer counselor and a favorite psychology professor have provided her with vital sources of encouragement and practical guidance about what she needs to do to reach her academic and career goals.

Finding a way to secure more financial assistance will be essential for Sofía to make the transition to university.

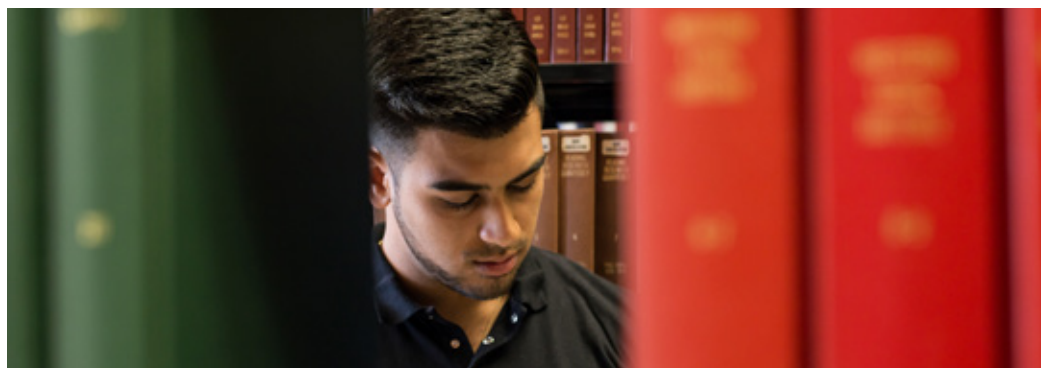


Photo: Manuela Durson



HISPANIC AND LATINA/O/X STUDENTS: SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS



University Affordability

Hispanic and Latina/o/x students are **MORE LIKELY** than Asian and White students to...

- Indicate that getting enough financial aid to pay for their education is highly motivating
- Share that the cost of university tuition is very challenging when considering transfer



School-Life Balance

Hispanic and Latina/o/x students are **MORE LIKELY** than Asian and White students to...

- Report that having universities they can attend near their home is highly motivating



Pathway Navigation

Hispanic and Latina/o/x students are **MORE LIKELY** than Asian and White students to...

- Identify that they used and found helpful a wide range of transfer-related resources, including counseling sessions focused on transfer, online resources, and their CCC transfer center



Support Network

Hispanic and Latina/o/x students are **MORE LIKELY** than Asian and White students to...

- Share that encouragement from their family as well as support from their CCC is highly motivating
- Say that most people they grew up with never attended a university



Photo: Jeffrey Isaac Greenberg



TRANSFER STRATEGIES FOR HISPANIC AND LATINA/O/X STUDENTS

For Sofía and other Hispanic and Latina/o/x students who get a motivational boost from their communities on and off campus and who are simultaneously concerned about financing their education post-transfer and securing a university option near their homes, consider...

- Engaging with K-12 partners to involve students and their families before they get to college, once they arrive on campus, and throughout the entire transfer process through information sessions, workshops, university tours, and meetings with university representatives
- Connecting them to programs such as [Puente](#),⁶ [TRiO](#),⁷ and [EOPS](#)⁸ that support transfer, while at the same time, determining what works well and scaling effective approaches to ensure the vast majority of Hispanic and Latina/o/x students learn about transfer expectations and receive hands-on support navigating the transfer process
- Proactively and continually communicating the college's support for their transfer goal, including recognizing their baccalaureate aspirations, celebrating completion of specific milestones, and providing clear and timely transfer information as they achieve those milestones
- Connecting students to Hispanic and Latina/o/x graduates who successfully transferred to help them learn about what is possible and what the movement to university is like
- Collaborating with university partners to specifically provide information to help them understand what university education will cost and identify all available assistance, including and beyond financial aid
- Working with regional universities to proactively inform students about current options for accessing university-level programming remotely and/or on the college campus
- Coordinating with public and private universities to develop innovative options for place-bound students to complete a bachelor's degree (e.g., university centers; 3+1, hybrid, and/or online programs) and proactively informing students about these offerings

African-American/Black Students



CHRISTOPHER'S STORY

Christopher spent some time wandering after graduating from high school, unsure of his path. While some friends went on to community college, he did not know anyone who attended a university. Christopher eventually enrolled at his local community college, but wound up exiting without a degree after a few semesters.

Then, he landed a job at an afterschool program for elementary-aged kids, and three years later, he is now back and driven to graduate and transfer. With a goal of ultimately achieving a master's degree in social work, his long-term plan is to work with at-risk youth in his community. He has narrowed his focus on local universities that are easily accessible to public transportation.

Since returning, he has developed a relationship with a counselor who has been an incredible support and champion, helping him navigate the transfer journey. He also credits his participation in Umoja, where he is inspired by his peers' own transfer goals.

Christopher wound up exiting without a degree after a few semesters. Now he's back and driven to graduate and transfer, with a goal of ultimately achieving a master's degree in social work.



Photo: fizkes



AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK STUDENTS: SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS



School-Life Balance

African-American/Black students are **MORE LIKELY** than white students to...

- Voice that transportation to and from university campus is very challenging when considering transfer



Pathway Navigation

African-American/Black students are **MORE LIKELY** than white students to...

- Indicate use and helpfulness of a wide variety of transfer-related resources



Support Network

African-American/Black students are **MORE LIKELY** than white students to...

- Share that most of the people they grew up with never attended a university



Photo: JOPWELL



TRANSFER STRATEGIES FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK STUDENTS

For Christopher and African-American/Black students like him who may have practical concerns about the logistics of attending university as well as limited exposure to higher education, consider...

- Working with regional universities to highlight various modes of transportation options available, for instance, campus bus routes and rideshare opportunities with other university students living off campus
- Proactively “pushing” information about the array of in-person and virtual transfer resources available on campus
- Connecting students to programs such as [Umoja](#)⁹, [TRiO](#)¹⁰, and [EOPS](#)¹¹ that support transfer, while at the same time, determining what works well and scaling effective approaches to ensure the vast majority of African-American/Black students learn about transfer expectations and receive hands-on support for navigating the transfer process
- Connecting students to African-American/Black alumni who successfully transferred to help students learn about what is possible and what the movement to university is like



Photo: Jon Parker Lee

Central Valley Students



JESSICA'S STORY

Jessica enrolled at her community college in 2016 right out of high school. She lives in a small, rural Central Valley town with her parents. She is the first in her family to attend college, and growing up, most of her friends did not plan for postsecondary education, so she too thought she would get a job after high school. However, Jessica's grades caught the attention of her high school counselor, who recommended her for a summer bridge program. She saw the campus for the first time when her parents drove her to the orientation.

Everything changed after summer bridge, which introduced her to different pathways at the college and the possibility of transferring. Several semesters in, she really enjoys her classes and has set her sights on a bachelor's degree in business administration. While she considers herself on the transfer path, she has not been able to utilize campus transfer resources given a long commute. Back home, the college's website and ASSIST.org are her go-to resources. However, she finds the transfer information available on the college's website to be difficult to find and hard to navigate.

With very few universities in the area, she is also unsure what she will do once she is ready to transfer. Moving away from her parents and home seems daunting.

Jessica considers herself on the transfer path.

However, she has not been able to utilize campus transfer resources given a long commute.



Photo: Jillian Cain



CENTRAL VALLEY STUDENTS: SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS



School-Life Balance

Students in the Central Valley relative to students in other regions were **MORE LIKELY** to...

- Express that having an absence of universities they can attend near their home is very challenging AND
- Report there are only a few universities near them within driving distance



Pathway Navigation

Students in the Central Valley are **LESS LIKELY** than students in other regions to...

- Talk to friends (both in and outside their community college) about potentially transferring
- Report the use and helpfulness of many transfer-related resources, most notably online resources



Support Network

Students in the Central Valley are **MORE LIKELY** than students in other regions to...

- Agree that most of the people they grew up with never attended a university



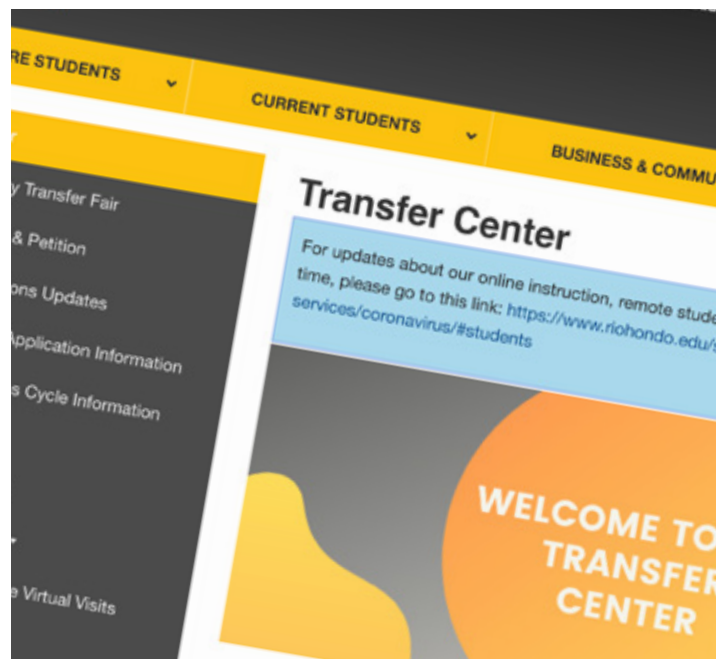
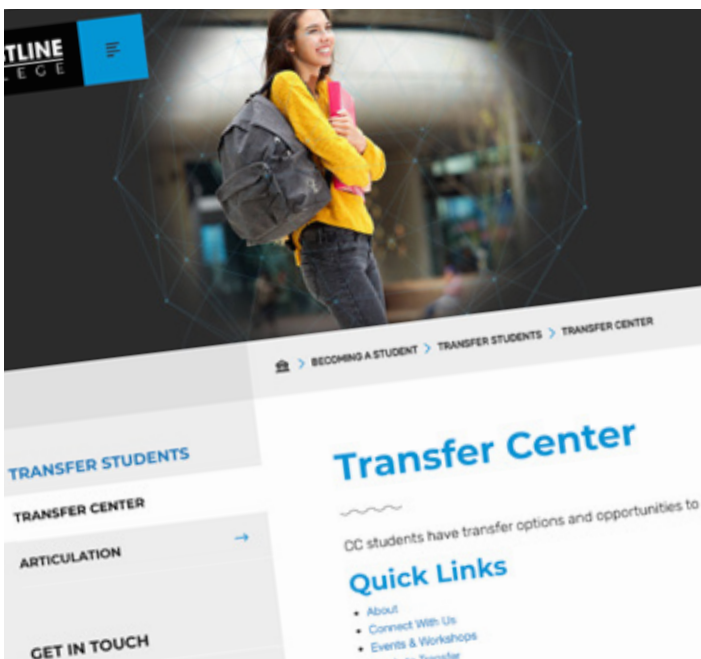
Photo: Jennifer G. Lang



TRANSFER STRATEGIES FOR CENTRAL VALLEY STUDENTS

For Jessica and other Central Valley students who may have less exposure to higher education, limited engagement with transfer-related resources, and concerns about proximity to regional university options, consider...

- Developing cohorts and support groups where students learn about transfer expectations and resources and receive hands-on support navigating the transfer process
- Connecting students to transfer achievers attending universities in the region
- Proactively “pushing” important information about transfer deadlines and requirements to students
- Ensuring transfer-related sections of the college website are accessible and navigable
- Working with regional universities to proactively inform students about current options for accessing university-level programming remotely and/or on the college campus
- Coordinating with public and private universities to develop innovative options for place-bound students to complete a bachelor’s degree (e.g., university centers; 3+1, hybrid, and/or online programs) and proactively informing students about these offerings



Exited Students with Transfer Goals



DAVID'S STORY

David started out planning to transfer when he first enrolled at his community college, and recently completed his associate degree in psychology after nearly six years. Now, with a baby on the way, he is taking a break from school to secure a new job with better wages. Given this turn of events in his family, David does not plan to transfer for at least another year or two. Finding a university campus near home will be essential, close to his in-laws who will take care of his daughter once she arrives. Moving to another part of the state is not an option.

David felt little encouragement or support from his campus when he was enrolled—an additional deterrent to his transfer plans. He is unsure about what he needs to practically do to get into his local CSU, how to transfer units, and what the application process will include. He received minimal help from counselors and the transfer center. When he was attending classes, he struggled academically and regularly tapped tutoring services; he worries about what to expect in terms of course rigor once at university and feels he would need academic support.

David felt little encouragement or support from his campus when he was enrolled—an additional deterrent to his transfer plans.



Photo: Brookdale CC



EXITED STUDENTS WITH TRANSFER GOALS: SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS



Exited students are **MORE LIKELY** than students still enrolled to...

- Feel pressure to prioritize supporting their family over pursuing their education
- Indicate that their family would be upset if they moved away to attend a university
- Share that their top priority in choosing a university is how close it is to their home
- Report that an absence of universities they can attend near home is very challenging
- Think they cannot get into the universities in their area



Exited students are **LESS LIKELY** than students still enrolled to...

- Discuss transfer with family members, community college counselors, and community college professors
- Use and find helpful most transfer resources (e.g., counseling sessions focused on transfer, online resources, their CCC's transfer center, and guidance from CCC professors)



Exited students are **MORE LIKELY** than students still enrolled to...

- Indicate that getting support from their community college is very challenging



Photo: Cavan Images



TRANSFER STRATEGIES FOR EXITED STUDENTS

For David and exited students like him who may feel disconnected from their college, pulled by their off-campus responsibilities, and uncertain about their university options, consider...

- Proactively identifying these students and outreaching to them to:
 - » Understand why they left the college before transferring,
 - » Determine what support they might need to return and complete transfer,
 - » Instruct them on the steps to take to get back on path, and
 - » Connect them to the supports that can help them achieve this milestone, including direct linkages to the transfer center and/or transfer-focused advising
- Intentionally connecting students who have recently returned to the college with at least one college personnel who will serve as an anchor in their support network, structuring a system of encouragement and brokering connections to campus-based resources designed to promote transfer success
- Providing student-centered course and programming options that recognize the multiple demands on students' time off campus, such as weekend and/or evening offerings or online programming with integrated academic and nonacademic student supports
- Working with regional universities to proactively inform students about current options for accessing university-level programming remotely and/or on the college campus
- Coordinating with public and private universities to develop innovative options for place-bound students to complete a bachelor's degree (e.g., university centers; 3+1, hybrid, and/or online programs) and proactively informing students about these offerings

Continuing this Work

Truly increasing the transfer success of students of color, women, older students, students who have exited, and students from historically underserved communities such as the California Central Valley will require a rethink of structures, policies, and practices at both the community college and university levels. More and more, institutions and systems of higher education across the country are stepping up to this challenge, undertaking the important work required to ensure every student receives the support they need to reach their baccalaureate goal.

As *Through the Gate* demonstrates, students from these groups are experts in their own transfer experience and can inform this transformation.

Community colleges can leverage the student perspectives and insights shared in this brief to improve transfer outcomes for specific student groups experiencing disproportionate impact. Consider using this resource in tandem with [*Determining Students' Transfer Odds on Campus*](#)¹², a tool for identifying who at your college is more likely to make the transition to university and which student groups to prioritize with additional support to ensure they achieve transfer.

Quantifying the transfer population on your campus, disaggregating these data by different student characteristics, and examining which factors uniquely impact these student groups can help you better understand who your high-leverage students are on your campus. Just as important, consider connecting directly with these focal student groups to understand their stories and determine which strategies can address their unique transfer experience in your local context—essential steps in improving their transfer journey and closing equity gaps.



Learn more about *Through the Gate's* student perspectives research by...

Reading [*Students Speak Their Truth about Transfer: What They Need to Get Through the Gate*](#)¹³, featuring student perspectives on the factors impacting their readiness for university and how to boost their transfer capacity

Reviewing [*Through the Gate Phase 2 Technical Report*](#)¹⁴ for detailed methodology and findings from the student survey and focus groups

■ ■ ■ *Through the Gate* Transfer Study Overview

The RP Group’s *Through the Gate* transfer study 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. The 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 the transfer gate, but did not go through, and (2) who they are and where they reside

Phase 2: Getting Better Directions (2019)

Quantitative and qualitative research with students who are close to transfer to understand what factors impact their journey and how policy and practice might change to propel them through the transfer gate

Phase 3: Engaging for Action (2020)

Convenings with CCC, CSU, and UC leaders, educators, researchers, and advocacy groups to identify strategic opportunities to strengthen transfer success based on findings

The RP Group is conducting this research with generous support from the College Futures Foundation.

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

The RP Group strengthens the ability of California Community Colleges to discover and undertake high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and success for all students.

Project Team

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www.rpgroup.org/through-the-gate

Endnotes

1 Cooper, D., Fong, K., Karandjeff, K., Kretz, A., Nguyen, A., Purnell-Mack, R., & Schiorring, E. (2017). *Through the Gate: Mapping the transfer landscape for California community college students*. San Rafael, CA: The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges. <https://rpggroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/Through-the-Gate-Phase-I-Technical-Report.pdf>.

2 The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges. (2019). *Transfer odds: Technical report examining factors that impact whether students achieve transfer or get stuck near or at the gate*. San Rafael, CA. <https://rpggroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/Through-the-Gate-Transfer-Odds-Technical-Report.pdf?ver=2019-04-02-083808-677>

3 <https://rpggroup.org/Through-the-Gate/Participating-Colleges>

4 CalWORKS can help students on public assistance get access to vital services such as work study, job placement, childcare, curriculum development, skills training, and more. For more information, visit <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/Student-Service/What-we-do/CalWORKS>.

5 EOPS makes sure students disadvantaged by social, economic, educational or linguistic barriers get the resources they need to enroll and succeed at any California community college. EOPS students who are single parents receiving public assistance can also access the Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) program. For more information, visit <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/Student-Service/What-we-do/Extended-Opportunity-Programs-and-Services>.

6 Puente is co-sponsored by the California Community Colleges and the University of California and seeks to improve the transfer rates of students from all ethnicities and backgrounds. For more information, visit <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/What-we-do/Curriculum-and-Instruction-Unit/Puente-Project>.

7 TRiO is a federally-funded program that provides counseling and information on college admissions to qualified adults who want to enter or continue a program of postsecondary education. For more information, visit <http://www.cacollegepathways.org/find-campus-support-programs/additional-support-programs/>.

8 <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/Student-Service/What-we-do/Extended-Opportunity-Programs-and-Services>.

9 Umoja is a community and critical resource dedicated to enhancing the cultural and educational experiences of African American and other students through a curriculum that is responsive to the legacy of the African and African American Diasporas. For more information, visit <https://umojacommunity.org/>.

10 <http://www.cacollegepathways.org/find-campus-support-programs/additional-support-programs/>.

11 <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/Student-Service/What-we-do/Extended-Opportunity-Programs-and-Services>.

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14 <https://rpggroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/TTG-Phase2-Technical-Report.pdf?ver=2020-08-27-221551-220>.



Photo: MBI



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***Through the Gate* Transfer Study**
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