

Published June 9th, 2010

7 Steps to Success: The College Transfer Path: Part II

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ideally planned well in advance. Now more than ever it takes MORE planning to be a successful transfer student.

Each year I receive calls from high school seniors who want help with the transfer path. Although I have been an advisor for years, my heart still skips a beat when I get this type of call, particularly when it arrives at the tail end of the student's senior year, or worse, mid-summer. Thanks to the California budget crisis, my heart now skips two beats. The benefits of attending community college, such as smaller classes and lower tuition, are most beneficial if you can enroll and progress through the system in a timely way. And that has become a challenge.

Part I of this series, (in the April 28th issue, <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0404/The-Transfer-Path-in-College-Admissions-Part-I.html>) emphasized the critical role of California's Community Colleges (CCCs) to a healthy transfer function between the junior colleges and California's public four-year institutions (nine University of California campuses, UCs, and 23 California State Universities, hereafter, CSUs). The CCCs represent the single largest system of higher education in the nation; this system is suffering a huge blow from cuts in state funding. The UCs and the CSUs have shifted towards far more competitive admissions, and this year many boosted admission of non-residents and international students in order to generate revenue. Fewer seats were available for California residents and wait-lists were instituted at seven UC campuses. The only guaranteed space for UC eligible students was at UC Merced. These factors, along with the economic downturn, increased the numbers of students trying to enroll in CCCs, thus compounding the effects of the budget crisis.

Nationwide research shows most students who begin at community college do not transfer or earn a degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Still, everyone knows a story about a student who transferred successfully in just two years and went on to earn a four-year degree. Here are my recommendations for how to beat the odds and be one of those success stories:

1. Don't Make Community College an Afterthought. The community college option should not be a late addition to your college admissions plan. Transfer to a 4-year school is a process that is
2. Go Beyond Your High School's Requirements for Graduation: If you meet minimum requirements for the UC/CSU at the time you graduate, you are guaranteed admission to at least some universities, after completion of 60 transferrable semester units (or 90 quarter units) and a specific GPA. Earning a grade of 'C' or better in UC/CSU required coursework in high school will also increase your chances of passing the required assessment exams that place you in college English and math coursework. That could mean skipping over remedial classes which have no transfer credits. Finally, if you decide to try and transfer early (lower division transfer is the technical phrase), your high school transcript will still be reviewed. So don't slack off!
3. Identify Your Transfer Path in High School: At the end of your junior year or early in your senior year begin to research both the CCCs as well as the 4-year public or private universities you are interested in attending to complete your degree. Visit the campuses and make appointments with the counseling departments. Then really zero in on the schools that make it to your final list.
4. Discover Articulation Agreements: Most CCCs have what are called articulation agreements in place, often with both private and public 4-year schools. These matriculation agreements specify the required general education courses as well as prerequisites for your intended major. Select classes with your articulation plan clearly in mind. But BEWARE! Many universities, especially state schools, change their transfer requirements on a regular basis. Staying up-to-date on the changes is your responsibility. And now with the state's budgetary challenges, the transfer path can become a moving target. Your best bet is to identify a counselor you can work with at the CCC early. Then stay in touch by meeting regularly.
5. Take A College Success Class: Learning how to balance academics with the other obligations in your life is critical. Taking a college student success course during the summer before you start classes will focus your attention on the development of an academic plan with associated milestones. These classes are becoming more popular, although they are called by different names. If your CCC does not offer one, find one at a different school and enroll. New evidence indicates that students who take such a course have more success.
6. Don't Let Life Get in The Way: Students who can attend CCC full-time are more likely to earn a degree. Try to build

your life around your academic priorities.

7. Your Grade Point Average (GPA) Is the Best Predictor of Success: Just as in high school, your GPA (in classes that have transfer credits) is the single most important factor in the transfer admissions decision. Study hard and get tutoring help early. Don't wait to fail or drop a class. That only delays your transfer plans. This past admissions cycle witnessed a 20% increase in UC applications and a 32% increase in applications to the CSUs. Minimum eligibility will not longer make the grade.

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