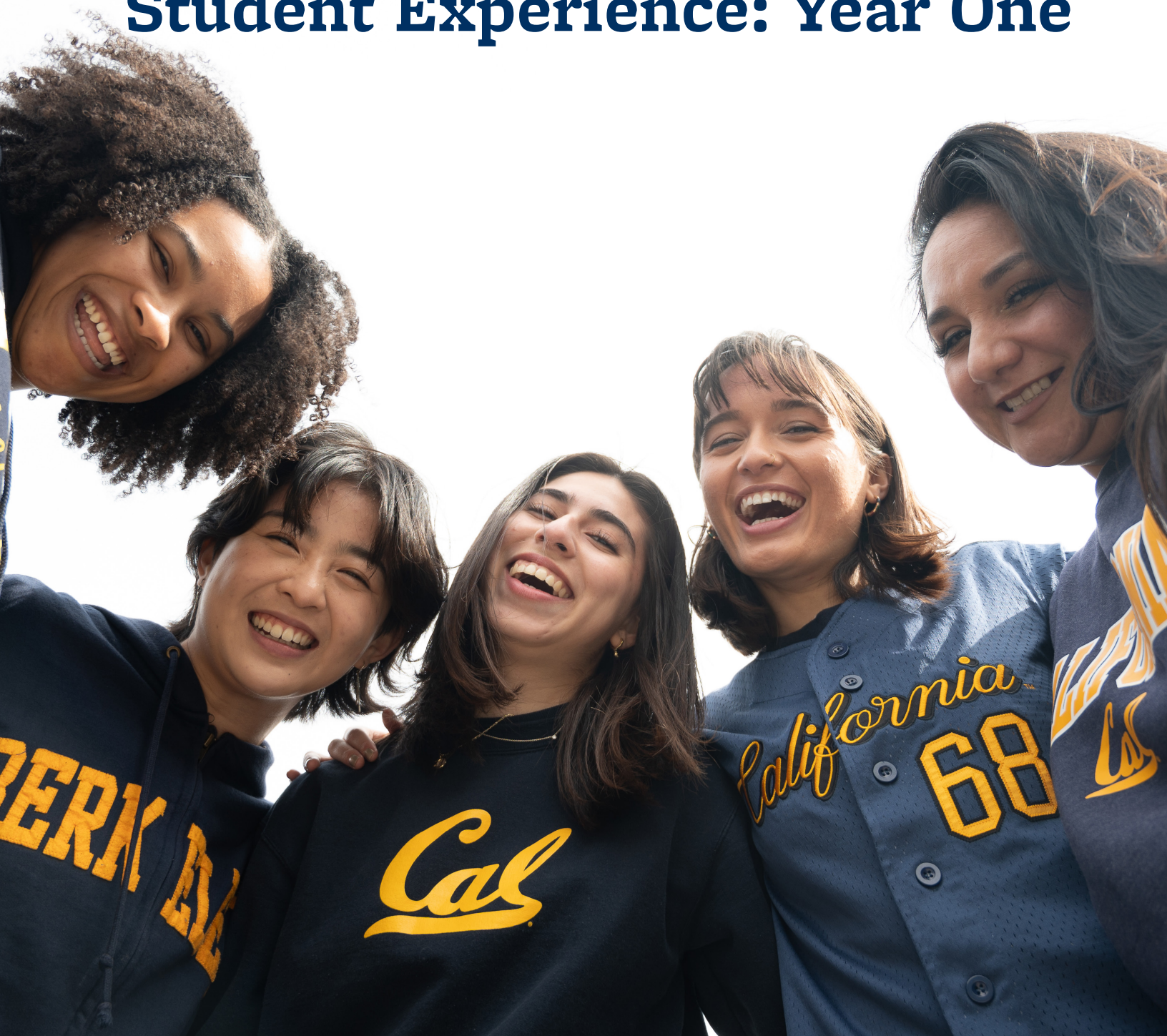# Joint Senate-Administration Task Force on the Transfer Student Experience: Year One

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

In the Fall of 2023 the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost convened a task force to analyze the current state of the transfer student experience at UC Berkeley and to make a set of recommendations for improvement. This task force - composed of staff, faculty, and students from throughout the campus student experience ecosystem - met monthly to engage in education, analysis, and discussion. This document is a summary of the task force's key findings after the initial year of the three year task force term, and is intended as a guide for the EVCP office and other campus leaders for future strategic direction.

Where Berkeley is Excelling

Transfer students at UC Berkeley (UCB) benefit from **tailored programs and resources** designed to support them in and beyond the classroom. These include courses, academic/navigational counseling, orientation, new student programs and events, living communities, and community-building activities. Some examples include transition courses provided by The Transfer Student Center and the Centers for Educational Equity and Excellence, New Student Services' dedicated Golden Bear Orientation, Berkeley Connect (e.g. mentoring), the Office of Undergraduate Admissions Golden Bear Welcome, the Haas School of Business PreCore Program, and T-Prep in the College of Engineering. All of these programs are designed to provide a welcoming environment as students begin navigating our campus.

Overall, UCB has **stable, high graduation rates** for both freshmen and transfer entrants.The four-year graduation rate for transfer students is 91.2% as compared to the freshman 6-year graduation rate of 92.7%.

The average time-to-degree for freshmen is 4.06 years and the average time-to-degree for transfers is 2.36 years.

A new housing option at Anchor House will open in Fall 2024. This residential building will set **a new standard for dedicated transfer student residential living**. It will serve as a hub of connection and belonging for transfer students and will offer residents multiple community spaces and resources. Anchor House will provide 772 beds for new and continuing transfer students and include amenities such as single bedrooms, large openable windows, a full kitchen with appliances, central air conditioning, an in-unit washer and dryer, a fitness center, and more.

Faculty, staff, and students alike are **committed to continually improving the transfer student experience** to best serve the needs of this diverse campus community. The Joint Senate-Administration Task Force on the Transfer Student Experience provides a unique opportunity to highlight successes and areas for further exploration and development.

Where Berkeley Can Improve:

The task force identified three primary areas for improvement:

- Admissions, Yield, and the Transfer Student Transition - The declaration of a major at the point of admission varies among our colleges. Campus websites vary greatly in their levels of attention to prospective and accepted transfer students.
- Advising and Academic Experience - If not admitted directly into their major of choice, transfer students may not have a sufficiently specific curricular path in their first semester at Berkeley, possibly leading to delays in graduation and loss of motivation. Uneven access across academic programs to timely advising jeopardizes transfer students' progress.
- Sense of Belonging - Transfer data from the UCUES survey shows that transfer students are slightly less likely to rate Berkeley as a welcoming campus and are less likely to have a positive social experience than freshman entrants. For example, Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) do not tend to honor and accept student leadership experience and success at a transfer student's community college, creating a barrier to maximal participation and/or participation in general. Data from the Fall 2023 Pulse survey shows that 80% of transfer students join RSOs in order to build community and make friends and 44% of transfer students said it is hard to get into clubs.

Key Recommendations:

This report outlines key recommendations for consideration that address these three areas for improvement while advancing our ultimate goal of providing and connecting students to the resources that will enable their success at UCB. Some of our key recommendations include:

- A more intentional and direct line of communication from our Chancellor and other senior leaders to newly admitted transfer students upon admission.
- A guaranteed path to graduation within two years, including entering as a transfer student with a declared major across all majors should be developed..
- Conducting website reviews and updating website language to be more inclusive of transfer students, especially among those students who are DSP eligible.
- More engagement in GBO transfer student specific programming from the colleges and majors.
- Creation of an easier system to navigate the various majors within L&S; one that includes tools, timelines, and resources for transfer students.
- Resolving inconsistencies across the colleges and majors in pre-enrollment advising.
- Conducting an end-to-end assessment of the entire course articulation process.
- Development of a campus strategy for connecting with advisors at California Community Colleges to streamline transfer pathways and articulation.
- Expansion of Transfer Student Center resources within and beyond the Center to collaborate with other departments that offer transfer student services, further maximizing transfer students' sense of belonging over time.
- Revision of the RSO leader/signatory training to hold more inclusive practices of recognizing and embracing prior RSO experience from other institutions.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Joint Senate-Administration Task Force on the Transfer Student Experience convened in September of 2023 and was charged with delivering a set of recommendations over a period of three years on ways to enhance the transfer student experience. The Task Force identified three main areas of investigation to focus on: 1) Admissions, Yield, & the Transfer Student Transition; 2) Advising & the Academic Experience; and 3) Sense of Belonging.

The Task Force considered recommendations that take into account the entire life cycle of transfer students. Transfer students have a relatively limited time on campus and a short window to make decisions that can significantly impact their experience at UCB.

UCB typically enrolls over 2200 new transfer students each year. In total, transfer students account for approximately 21% of our undergraduate population (6,968 total students). Examining the demographics of this group for Fall 2023, we find that:

- 42% are first-generation college students
- 41% received a Pell Grant
- 33% are from underrepresented minority groups (African American, Chicanx, Latinx, and Native American)
- More than 95% are from California community colleges.

In comparison, looking at Fall 2023 data for Freshman entrants:

- 30% are first-generation college students
- 23% received a Pell Grant
- 25% are from underrepresented underrepresented minority groups (African American, Chicanx, Latinx, and Native American)

To help guide our conversations and provide data-informed recommendations, we requested and analyzed transfer student-specific data provided by Institutional Research Analysts in the Divisions of Student Affairs, Undergraduate Education, and Equity & Inclusion. Our short and longer-term recommendations below highlight areas where we believe we can have a tangible impact. These recommendations include an examination of how our current policies and practices may hinder our ability to provide the best possible services and experience for our transfer students.

This Task Force is made up of the following staff, faculty, and students:

Dania Matos, Vice Chancellor for Equity & Inclusion (co-chair)

Oliver O'Reilly, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (co-chair)

Stephen Sutton, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs (co-chair)

Lorena Valdez, Deputy Director, Transfer Programs, CE3 (Senior Advisor to the Task Force)

Lauren Beilin, Project/Policy Analyst, Student Affairs (staff to the Task Force)

Jasmine Kamariotis, Director, Transfer Student Center (staff to the Task Force)

Micki Antovich, Director of New Student Services

John Arnold, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Affairs, College of Chemistry

Jessica Bauer, Director of Summer Sessions

Susan Cass, Manager, Central Evaluation Unit

Oscar Dubon, Associate Dean of Students, College of Engineering & Professor of Materials Science & Engineering

Terrence Hendershott, Professor of Business

Lynn Huntsinger, Professor of Rangeland Ecology and Management

Michael Cerda Jara, Associate Director of Berkeley Underground Scholars Program

Bona Lee, Senior Resident Director

Geoffrey Lee, Associate Professor of Philosophy

Tomie Lenear, Director of the Student Parent Center

Tom McEnaney, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Spanish & Portuguese Literature

Fabrizio Mejia, Associate Vice Chancellor, Student Equity & Success

Olufemi Ogundele, Associate Vice Chancellor of Enrollment & Dean of Undergraduate Education

Colette Patt, Assistant Dean, DEIBJ, MPS, and & CDSS

Omar Ramirez, Director of Academic Advising Service, College of Environmental Design

Hayden Taylor, Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering

Ashley Tigue, ASUC Undergraduate Transfer Student Representative

In addition to members of the Task Force, we would like to acknowledge the campus partners that provided valuable insight to guide the recommendations:

Andrew Eppig, Director of Equity Data Initiatives, Division of Equity and Inclusion

Audrey Thomas, Institutional Research Analyst, Division of Undergraduate Admissions

Justin Louie, Data Analyst, Enrollment Management

Adriana Galvan, Dean, Undergraduate Education, UCLA

Rosalind Johnson, Director of Enrollment, Equity and Success

Jo Mackness, Associate Vice Chancellor, Residential & Student Service Programs

Dana Bache, Executive Director, Cal Housing Administration

Background

In addition to the short and long-term recommendations outlined in this report, the Task Force continues to examine the needs of transfer students and identify areas of high impact and practices that help strengthen partnerships with California Community Colleges given the group's membership. Over the past year, this Task Force has taken opportunities to engage with campus partners to provide input, recommendations, and develop tools.

As a collective, this Task Force has accomplished the following thus far:

- Created an Anchor House information sheet. The development of this document was led by members of the Task Force in collaboration with the Residential and Student Services Housing office and the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships. This internal document is intended to be utilized as a tool for campus staff to discuss housing options for newly admitted transfer students, especially those from low-income backgrounds.
- Provided recommendations for student prioritization for housing placement at Anchor House. Our prioritization recommendation recognizes housing needs and the disproportionate impact of securing housing for transfer students.
- Collected and reviewed data related to the transfer student experience. In this first year, the Task Force recognized data as necessary to inform the development of our recommendations.

Previous Accomplishments

We acknowledge the many developments over the past few years that have been made to improve transfer student experience. Below is a sampling of such improvements:

- The Fall 2024 opening of Anchor House, a student housing option for new and continuing transfer students. The partnership and collaboration between Residential & Student Services Programs (RSSP), Residential Life, and the Transfer Student Center in opening Anchor House highlights a successful collaborative effort across units. Anchor House residents will have the opportunity to develop a community on and off campus that

supports their personal wellbeing as well as their academic pursuits at UCB.

- Progress toward streamlined transfer pathways for students from California Community Colleges.
- The Haas School of Business' PreCore Program, which serves to include newly admitted transfer students in transitioning from another institution to the academic rigor and recruitment expectations of the Haas School of Business.
- The transition from the CalSO (new student orientation) model to the revised Golden Bear Experience new student orientation model in 2017 has led to an improved transfer student experience. In the old CALSO model, transfer students were disproportionately underserved.
- Curated content by college and admit status in Golden Bear Advising (GBA), an online bCourse focused on academics, advising, and first semester enrollment.
- The variety of programs curated for transfer student needs within Golden Bear Orientation (GBO). Such programs include:
  - » Golden Bear Express - offers flights to campus from five Southern California airports and including shuttles to campus.
  - » Transfer student specific GBO Small Groups (e.e. Re-Entry and Student Parent groups) led by continuing transfer student Orientation Leaders.
  - » Transfer Welcome hosted by the Transfer Student Center.
  - » Alumni Mixer co-sponsored by New Student Services and UDAR Alumni Engagement.
  - » Cal to Career Connections hosted by Career Engagement.
  - » College programming dedicated to transfer students varies based on college. Transfer students in COE, Rausser, CoC, CED, and Haas had dedicated programs during Fall 2022 and Fall 2023. L&S hosts a transfer student welcome but the majority (60%) of majors do not host programming during the designated time.

III. ADMISSIONS, YIELD, AND THE TRANSFER STUDENT TRANSITION

Findings

We acknowledge the significant experiential differences among transfer students based on which college they are a part of. The declaration of a major at the point of admission varies among our colleges. For example, our transfer students in all non-L&S colleges come in with a declared major whereas L&S transfer students do not. The process and timeline to declare a major varies greatly within each L&S department as well. This is different from UCLA, where L&S students come into the university with a major already declared.

The Office of Undergraduate Admissions and individual colleges and schools each take an unique approach to the admissions process, including outreach and application reviews. The UCB transfer admission process is the most complex of any UC for both students and staff. For example, we have a supplemental form used by colleges that is not required by any other UC. This form is designed to help colleges both review applications and ensure applicants meet admission requirements.

There have been significant improvements over the past five years by OUA to develop and curate transfer yield experiences that better align with the transfer student timeline. For example, Golden Bear Welcome is a version of Cal Day that is tailored exclusively towards transfer students. However, engagement by departments in Golden Bear Welcome varies each year. This is largely due to the timing of Golden Bear Welcome, as it typically falls during RRR Week, and many staff responsible for yield activities are also managing commencement, move out, etc. during this time.

Currently, campus websites vary in their levels of attention to prospective and accepted transfer students. Rarely are transfer students explicitly named on websites, and if so, often do not appear at the same level or navigation as first year students. The GBO and SONS survey data shows an overall positive transfer student experience, but our large-scale programming for transfer students does not always serve the needs of those transfer students with multiple identities.

Recommended Immediate Actions (implemented within one year)

- Conduct website reviews and update website language to be more inclusive for transfer students. Edits should focus on all points of the transfer student experience (pre- admission, admission, yield/transition).
- Identify the different pathways and processes to major declaration within L&S. Document using a gap analysis to find trends, opportunities and challenges with the current status.
- Update GBO for 2024-2025 to include:
    » Check-in to occur at Residence Halls for those residential students, allowing the central GBO Check-in to serve commuter students (largely transfers). This will significantly reduce lines.
    » A Transfer Symposium, an on campus coordinated event including a Department Resource Fair, Career Engagement program, and an on site career/pathways fair.
    » GBO groups that are focused on Cal Veterans, Student Parents, and Re-Entry students led by orientation leaders who share similar identities.
- More outreach from multiple levels to L&S majors regarding engagement in GBO L&S transfer specific programming. Communicate the value for departments and the positive impact on transfer student retention/time to graduation.
- Upon completion of the 2024 onboarding cycle, compare engagement in yield (Golden Bear Welcome, receptions, etc.) and onboarding (CalCentral, Golden Bear Advising, Golden Bear Orientation) to those resources geared towards transfers in the 2023 cycle. Recognize groups who have continued to engage and show appreciation for those who started to participate in the 2024 cycle. Investigate those still not participating to determine barriers.

Long-Term Recommendations (1-3 years to implement)

- The differing capacity and workloads of existing staff within schools and colleges may stifle their ability to engage with students. Invest in technologies so that work being spent on processing can be more automated, leaving staff available to engage in outreach, student interaction, and/or high level incidents.
- Propose a system (tools, timeline, resources) needed to either have a single starting point and/or easier central navigation to various majors within L&S.
- Collaboration by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, the Office of the Registrar, and colleges/majors to explore resource investment (time, systems, staffing) that will reduce the need for additional admissions processes for transfer students and decrease staff burden of review.

IV. ADVISING AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Findings

We identified the transition from community college – during the summer prior to transfer students' first semester at Berkeley – as a critical period that has a potentially lasting impact on their academic experience and advancement. Transfer students may face challenge such as:

- Courses taken prior to enrolling at UCB are not articulated/evaluated in time for students to enroll in courses at UCB that will keep them on track.
- If not admitted directly into their major of choice, transfer students may not have a sufficiently specific curricular path in their first semester at Berkeley, possibly leading to delays in graduation and loss of motivation.
- Uneven access across academic programs to timely advising jeopardizes transfer students' progress and sense of belonging as new Berkeley students.

In order to determine if the Berkeley campus is uniquely challenged in these ways within the UC system, the AAE subcommittee sought input from colleagues at UCLA, which shows a two-year graduation rate that is over ten percentage points higher than that of UCB. Professor Adrian Galván, Dean of Undergraduate Education at UCLA, shared the following factors that may result in this difference.

- Transfer students at UCLA are admitted by major – thereby have completed certain major-specific course requirements.

- Coursework is articulated by UCLA for all transfer students prior to orientation. A longer summer makes this possible due to their quarter system.
- The Office of Registrar at UCLA automatically declares Degree Expected Term (DET) as the Spring of 2nd year, making it a default expectation (exceptions exist in certain schools and colleges that require school/ college approval).
- Transfer students at UCLA are restricted from switching into certain popular majors (e.g., Economics, Psychology, Life sciences, Engineering, and Computer Science).
- Exceptions to extend DET for options such as double majors, minors, pre-med courses not relevant to majors are usually not granted at UCLA.
- The quarter system at UCLA may provide more flexibility than the semester system in enabling students to meet degree requirements within two years.

Following this input, we considered if UCLA strategies are applicable to and desirable for UCB. We asked the following questions:

- Are there similar practices for some majors at UCB that are producing similar results?
- Will the requirement of transfer applicants to UCB to declare a specific major improve time-to-degree? An analysis of the current majors for which transfer applicants must declare may shed light.
- How are we doing with articulation of coursework and, if needed, can we do better?

Whether or not these strategies apply, we support that all students should be guaranteed a path to graduation within two years, while acknowledging exceptions under certain circumstances.

Recommended Immediate Actions (implemented within one year)

- Each division should have a plan or strategy for pre-enrollment advising, covering all majors. Elements of a plan or strategy may include sample schedules and webinars.
- Inconsistencies across the colleges in pre-enrollment advising should be resolved.
- Major Maps designed specifically for transfer students should be leveraged for sharing information with transfer applicants, admits and new students.
- An equity analysis should be performed before restrictions to access to majors are codified since a recent analysis has shown that barriers to declaration of specific majors – often the most impacted ones – can result in inequities in annual early-career wages compared to wage outcomes associated with students graduating with second-choice majors [1].

Long-Term Recommendations (1-3 years to implement)

- An end-to-end assessment of the entire articulation process should be made; this includes investigation of:
  - » Sufficient partnerships with CA Community Colleges (CCC) in order to expand articulation agreements.
  - » Criteria for the review of CCC course outlines for articulation, as applied by the faculty, toward the goal of assessing for sufficient academic preparation (vs full course equivalency).
  - » Curricula for majors that have lower division courses that cannot, in general, be articulated.
  - » Processes for the review of non-CCC courses toward degree progress.
  - » Fit gap analysis of FTEs dedicated to the maintenance of ASSIST agreements, transcript evaluation, posting of scores and transfer credit, and maintenance of the degree audit as compared to other UCs.
- Entering as a transfer student with a declared major across all majors should be considered following an equity analysis.
- All admits should have met their major requirements by the time they enroll at UCB – more information is needed to determine the extent to which this is an issue.
- A campus strategy for connecting with advisors at CCCs should be developed.
- Further exploration is needed around the effects of capped majors on the transfer student experience.
- Further discussion is needed around the needs of DSP-eligible transfer students, and whether there is sufficient partnership with CCCs in order to expand articulation agreements.

[1] Z. Bleemer and A. Mehta, "Will studying Economics Make You Rich? A Regression Discontinuity Analysis of the Returns to College Major," American Economic Journal: Applied Economics 14 (2), 1 (2022).

V. SENSE OF BELONGING

Findings

We explored three main areas related to a sense of belonging among transfer students.

The first area is around **fostering transfer disability access and justice**. Transfer students find it difficult to transition from services at their community college to DSP services at UCB. Website refinement to create consistent and cohesive messaging of belonging across campus programs is missing. This issue blends into the challenge of students transferring into UCB in need of DSP services, but not being able to efficiently reach them. DSP works with several Equity & Inclusion programs such as the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), Path to Care, the Student Parent Center and others, but more collaboration is needed to enhance and strengthen the sense of belonging among transfer students in this area. Transfer students also face the challenge of not being able to see themselves in the visual (websites, social media, swag, etc) representation of "success" on campus, in relation to their sense of belonging.

The second area of exploration is around **fostering a stronger sense of belonging**. Stigmatization is still a major barrier in creating a sense of belonging for transfer students. Several factors, including age, parental and/or veteran status, and commuter student status are examples of identities that transfer students believe are not included in the definition of "student success" at UC Berkeley.

The third area of exploration is around the transfer student's shorter timelines towards graduation and how that creates **barriers to transfer students' access to career enrichment resources** within colleges and departments. Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) do not tend to honor and accept student leadership

experience and success at a transfer student's community college, creating a barrier to maximal participation and/or participation in general. Recently, transfer students were subjected to stigmatic harm in the form of satirical social media content which depicted transfer students as "not as intelligent or hardworking" as first year students on campus.

Recommended Immediate Actions (implemented within one year)

- Refinement of departmental/programmatic communication methods to include visual and verbal communication of validation, acceptance and belonging for transfer students who are also DSP eligible. Refinement can come in the form of refined expectations during yield activities and at the start of each semester, as well as pragmatically within the upcoming academic year.
- Collaborative, DSP-led, diversity roundtable discussions, workshops and community enrichment programming.
- Create more transfer student-specific programming that honors and validates the scope of identity and availability and that factors into the content and scheduling of programming. Time, location, and impact of participation are essential to removing barriers of access to resources otherwise available to first-year/ traditional students.
- Clear and intentional outreach during yield and other welcome events that make connecting with campus resources simpler and more accessible at the onset of campus transition.
- A more intentional and direct line of communication to newly admitted transfer students upon admission, from our Chancellor. An example to help influence the logistics for this action can be found in the [UC Davis Welcome Message](#) to newly admitted students, which is publicized each admission term.

Long-Term Recommendations (1-3 years to implement)

- Increase awareness/offerings to transfer students who are student parents such as offering priority registration and specialized funding.
- Additional outreach to transfer students from the Title IX Office, the Haas School of Business' PreCore program for transfer students, the Transfer Transition Program (TTP) offered during summer sessions, and the Disabled Student Program's partnership with various equity-based programs.
- Offer a separate move-in day to our residence halls for our newly transfer students.
- Expand Transfer Student Center resources within and beyond the Transfer Student Center to collaborate with other departments that offer transfer student services, further adding to the maximization of the sense of belonging for transfer students in the long term setting. An example of this could be an alignment of the spring transfer student admission decision date that would allow for newly admitted transfer students to participate in Cal Day, as well as the expansion of collaborative training sessions with the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, which would focus on enhancing the sense of belonging for newly admitted transfer students each academic year.

- Revise RSO leader/signatory training to hold more inclusive practices of allowing prior RSO experience at other institutions, as a value added qualification, as well as holding de-stigmatization workshops around social media activity involving transfer students.
- Support students who are commuters (i.e. not living in campus housing and/or outside of a two mile radius from main campus) with commuter inclusive services including, but not limited to: lockers, food and hygiene hub areas on campus, commuter lounge facilities, as well as expanded services during weeknights and evenings.

VI. RESOURCE NEEDS AND CONCLUSION

Resource Needs Summary

In addition to the recommendations listed, this Task Force has identified the following as areas of investment in order to fully carry out recommendations

- Campus investment in technologies to support the automation of many admissions and onboarding processes. This provides time for staff to engage in outreach, student interaction, experiences, and/or high level incidents.
- Further investment in FTEs and resources in key campus programs like the Transfer Student Center that support a sense of belonging for transfer students. Additional investment in programs that provide transfer student services to work in collaboration to enhance services that expand belonging for more transfers at UCB.
- More thorough examination of the needs of commuter transfer students and investment in resources and expanded services in response to the identified needs.

The task force will develop a list of specific resources needed during their work in year two.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Joint Senate-Administration Task Force on the Transfer Student Experience has undertaken a thorough examination of key areas impacting transfer students at UCB, focusing on admissions, advising, and sense of belonging. As we wrap-up Year One of this collaborative effort, the Task Force has identified immediate and long-term recommendations aimed at enhancing the overall transfer student journey. By addressing disparities in admissions processes and outreach, improving pre-enrollment advising, and fostering a stronger

sense of belonging, particularly for marginalized identities, UCB can better support the diverse needs of its transfer student population. From the committee's perspectives, iterative evaluation should be conducted to develop and add to these recommendations over time.

Looking toward Year Two (2024-2025), further discussion and evaluation will be needed to determine the specific needs of transfer students as it relates to the collaborative bandwidth of campus partners applicable to those needs, once they are identified. Through continued collaboration and investment in resources, UCB can ensure that transfer students have the opportunities and support necessary to thrive academically and personally during their time on campus.