

# 5

*This chapter reviews a four-year university's role in developing and implementing a transfer-receptive culture. In particular, it focuses on the first element of a transfer-receptive culture by highlighting a series of visits by the chancellor of the University of California, Los Angeles, to community colleges within California.*

## Building a Transfer-Receptive Culture at Four-Year Institutions

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California is a bellwether state in many respects, including higher education. Its unique three-tier system of higher education has long been credited with providing multiple options for students to access postsecondary education (Johnson, 2010). The University of California (UC) holds the top tier with 10 campuses; the second tier is comprised of the 23 campuses of the California State University (CSU) system; and the 112 campuses of the California Community Colleges located throughout the state (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2011a) constitute the third tier. Currently, the California Community Colleges represent the largest system of higher education in the nation, serving 2.6 million students (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2013). In accordance with the 1960 California Master Plan of Higher Education, all segments of the system are expected to coordinate and collaborate with each other in order to ensure the academic success of all students (University of California Office of the President, 2009).

An example of this coordination is the ability for students to transfer from a community college to a UC or CSU campus to obtain their bachelor's degree, and ultimately a graduate degree. But the transfer function often does not work well for students who attempt to transfer from a community college to a top-tier UC institution, in particular to a UC campus that is highly selective such as the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA; University of California Office of the President, 2012). This difficulty in transferring particularly affects the main constituents of California community colleges—low-income, underrepresented, first-generation, and/or immigrant students who most often identify with communities of color (Woodlief, Thomas, & Orozco, 2003). The transfer function often fails these students who aspire to persist successfully throughout the educational

pipeline to ensure better social and economic futures for themselves and their families.

Attempts have been made to address the shortcomings of institutions in serving transfer students by creating and identifying components of a transfer-sending culture at the community college level and a transfer-receptive culture at the four-year level. A transfer-sending culture exists when a community college normalizes the transfer function so that all students who seek to transfer are able to do so (Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004). A transfer-receptive culture is defined as follows:

Institutional commitment by a four-year college or university to provide the support needed for students to transfer successfully—that is, to navigate the community college, take the appropriate coursework, apply, enroll, and successfully earn a baccalaureate degree in a timely manner. (Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2011, p. 257)

A transfer-receptive culture is a dramatically different way of viewing the transfer function as the receiving institution shares responsibility with sending community colleges for the success of transfer students. By linking these two cultures together, a holistic view of transfer becomes possible that honors the critical intersections of identities held by students.

### **Elements of a Transfer-Receptive Culture**

Instrumental to creating and understanding a transfer-receptive culture is the realization that efforts toward the inclusion of transfer students begin prior to when the student arrives (Jain et al., 2011). What this means is that there are pretransfer and posttransfer initiatives that must take effect in order to ensure a successful and welcoming academic environment. A transfer-receptive culture consists of five elements, listed in the section that follows, which are operationalized through the theoretical framework of critical race theory. These elements ensure that transfer students have a sense of legitimacy as members of the university community (Jain et al., 2011).

The first two elements of a transfer-receptive culture are the following *pretransfer* efforts:

1. Establish the transfer of students, especially nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, as a high institutional priority that ensures stable accessibility, retention, and graduation; and
2. Provide outreach and resources that focus on the specific needs of transfer students while complimenting the community college mission of transfer. (Jain et al., 2011, p. 258)

The last three elements of a transfer-receptive culture, which are *post-transfer*, include the following:

3. Offer financial and academic support through distinct opportunities for nontraditional-reentry transfer students where they are stimulated to achieve at high academic levels;
4. Acknowledge the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family; and
5. Create an appropriate and organic framework from which to assess, evaluate, and enhance transfer-receptive programs and initiatives that can lead to further scholarship on transfer students. (Jain et al., 2011, p. 258)

The remainder of the chapter will focus on the first pretransfer element, which establishes transfer for nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students as a high institutional priority. To demonstrate the details of this element, we focus on the work of the Center for Community College Partnerships (CCCCP) at UCLA. Specifically, we illustrate the role that the CCCC, the UCLA chancellor and top administrators, in coordination with local community college campuses, play in developing this element.

### **UCLA and the Center for Community College Partnerships**

As a large public research university, UCLA is distinguished by its academic excellence and commitment to a diverse academic community. The commitment to scholarship, research, and public service are core values that start at the top (UCLA, n.d.). UCLA has a long-standing commitment to recruiting, admitting, and enrolling transfer students. In fact, for the last 20 years nearly 40% of all new undergraduate students entering the university are transfer students (UCLA Office of Analysis and Information Management, 2013).

Partnerships between UCLA and California community colleges have provided many opportunities to engage in various efforts designed to prepare students for the competitive environment of the UCLA campus. In 2001, the Center for Community College Partnerships (CCCCP) was established at UCLA in the College of Letters and Sciences. In its commitment to social justice and diversity, CCCC empowers students to become self-advocates and leaders in their communities by equipping them with the skills and knowledge of available transfer pathways (Herrera, 2012). Overall, CCCC's mission is to work to increase transfer rates and the success of underserved community college populations (Herrera, 2012).

On August 1, 2007, Chancellor Gene Block began his tenure at UCLA. During his first few weeks at the institution, in a meeting to learn about the campus academic development programs, he voiced his interest in several areas, including the diversity of the student population and transfer students. To capitalize on the chancellor's interest in transfer students and student diversity, the assistant vice provost for academic partnerships/

director of the Center for Community College Partnerships developed a comprehensive transfer strategy for UCLA. This plan included hosting a meeting at UCLA for community college chancellors and presidents, and more notably, coordinating visits by the chancellor to community colleges. The philosophy behind this effort was to ensure that community colleges and their students heard this message: UCLA was very interested in transfer students, especially those who did not envision themselves at this elite public university.

### **Building a Transfer-Receptive Culture: Community Colleges Visits by the UCLA Chancellor**

As originally conceived, the idea was for the chancellor to have brief meetings with the presidents at the community colleges to discuss UCLA's interests. After careful thought and discussion, CCCP administrators decided it was imperative that the visits be expanded beyond one to two hours. Rather, the visits should last several hours and incorporate a variety of opportunities to engage not only with the community college president but also with multiple stakeholders. The structure of the visits (which varied slightly for each community college) included several meetings throughout the day with the president of the community college, the administrative leadership team, deans, directors, academic senate president, student leaders, and faculty. These meetings were intended to introduce the chancellor to the community college community so that the chancellor could discuss UCLA's genuine interest in diversity by continuing to strengthen its transfer population. In addition, the visit included a tour of each community college campus and visits to classrooms where students had an opportunity to ask questions. At some colleges, in addition to the president, the district chancellor, members of the board of trustees, and/or locally elected officials attended part of the day.

Another important decision was to include on the visiting team others who could support the chancellor and demonstrate UCLA's commitment to transfer students. These staff voices provided an opportunity for students to hear from others at the University who were dedicated to serving under-represented transfer students. The UCLA team was led by the assistant vice provost for academic partnerships/director of the Center for Community College Partnerships and included the assistant vice chancellor for governmental relations; director of admissions; director of financial aid; coordinator of transfer recruitment services; and where possible, current UCLA students who had transferred from the community college being visited. The UCLA team attended the chancellor's presentation to students, faculty, and staff, which was followed by a question-and-answer session allowing the team to provide answers and additional information related to admissions, financial aid and scholarships, support for undocumented students, housing, and academics. The presentation was followed by a reception

where students and others could meet and greet the team and ask questions directly to any of the members.

The visit to West Los Angeles College was one of the first that Chancellor Block made in 2008, marking the first time any UCLA chancellor had visited the campus since its opening in 1969 (UC, Los Angeles, 2008). Former West Los Angeles College President Mark W. Rocha escorted Block and his team around his campus for the half-day visit, which coincided with the college's 40th anniversary. Both the chancellor and the president made affirming comments regarding the visit:

“We’re here to recruit you,” Block told an assembly of students during the half-day of activities that included a campus tour, visits to classrooms, and receptions. “Transfer students are a big part of our community. Hopefully I’ll see some of you walking around our campus in a few years.” (UCLA, 2008, para. 3)

Former President Rocha echoed these comments: “This is about the partnership between UCLA and West Los Angeles College moving forward. . . . It’s been an absolute mission accomplished” (UCLA, 2008, para. 5).

This visit by the chancellor reinforced the University’s commitment to a transfer-receptive culture by purposefully targeting a campus with a high number of underrepresented students, a key component of the first element of the culture. During the year of the chancellor’s visit, West Los Angeles College had an enrollment of over 21,000 students that included 35% identifying as African American, 25% as Latina/o, 13% as White non-Hispanic, and 6% as Asian American (California Community College Chancellor’s Office, 2008). Additionally, it is important to note that historically there had not been a robust transfer pathway between the two institutions, with only 24 students transferring from West Los Angeles College to UCLA during the 2008 to 2009 school year (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2011b). For the chancellor to visit this campus and announce recruiting students for UCLA represented a crucial step forward in linking two institutional cultures that have similar goals—to increase the degree attainment of students who have been traditionally pushed out by higher education.

Over the chancellor’s first five years, Block has visited 10 community colleges as part of the Center for Community College Partnerships strategy for building a transfer-receptive culture. This is an unprecedented number of visits to community colleges by a chancellor of a top-tier research university in California. The visits have been to both Southern California colleges—Los Angeles City College, Los Angeles Valley College, Pasadena City College, Santa Monica College, and West Los Angeles College; and Northern California colleges—City College of San Francisco, Evergreen Valley College, Foothill College, Laney College, and Merritt College.

Chancellor Block’s willingness to participate in these visits demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that UCLA remains a viable and accessible

option for California community college students, particularly those students who are underrepresented, first-generation, low-income and/or nontraditional.

## Recommendations

In some cases, a commitment to transfer is already an important value and high priority held by a four-year chancellor or president, but in others it is something that needs to be nourished and developed. The visits by Chancellor Block have been effective because of a strong institutional commitment to transfer. A successful visit to a community college by any four-year college or university chancellor or president requires key support, analysis, and cooperation among different entities on both campuses. The following recommendations are intended to assist four-year administrators in coordinating a campus visit to a two-year institution in order to encourage and welcome student transfer.

**Collect Institutional Data.** Request data from the institution's institutional research office on transfer students from each feeder community college. This will assist administrators in determining what colleges would be best to visit if there is more than one community college in the direct service area. If there is only one feeder community college, focus on that college. Data elements to request can include number of applicants, admitted students, enrollees, majors, grade point averages of transfer students at admission, performance data after one year, retention, and graduation rates. The objective of data analysis should be to examine the data in a way that provides information about the institution's transfer applicant and admission pool. It is also imperative to include race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status so that the four-year institution has a holistic view of its transfer population.

**Survey the Institutional Transfer Climate.** It is important to know who the transfer allies are on the four-year campus—faculty or staff who were once transfer students or those who are supportive of transfer students. These can include student service professionals, faculty, administrators, and staff. Identifying these individuals will provide a starting point for discussion on the importance of transfer students and could also lead to the creation of a transfer task force that includes student voices.

**Arrange a Meeting With the Chancellor or President.** Prior to this meeting, administrators should make sure to analyze data that highlight the contributions transfer students make to the campus. At this meeting, administrators should present to the chancellor or president a rationale for the importance of visiting a local community college based on data analysis and dialogue with campus allies. Once the chancellor or president is supportive, the next step is to carefully select which community college campus to visit.

**Identify the Community College(s) to Visit.** The data that were analyzed will help campus officials determine which community college(s) to visit. Once colleges are selected, administrators should explore any previous

or current relationships between the institutions. Next, a representative of the four-year institution should schedule a visit with each community college president to discuss the importance of the visit. After a mutual agreement from both leaders, the next step is to work with a team from both institutions to develop an agenda that represents shared goals and strategies for a successful visit.

## Conclusion

Building a transfer-receptive culture is a multifaceted effort that requires the coordination of several units on campus. Strong support from top administrators is critical, as is support from across the campus. Focusing on the first element of a transfer-receptive culture requires coordination and collaboration within the four-year institution and with the community college partner. Data analysis will help drive the conversation about why the visits are important, and the successful visit will demonstrate how to improve the relationships between institutions.

The visits that were made to community colleges by UCLA Chancellor Block over the last five years were coordinated by the staff in the UCLA Center for Community College Partnerships. The success of these visits can be attributed to the strong relationships developed between transfer allies at both the university and two-year campuses. Over the years, comments from presidents, administrators, faculty, and students have been positive. These visits have been followed by meetings between the transfer staff at sending and receiving institutions. In particular, the Center for Community College Partnerships has been successful in collaborating on several grants and is presently working on additional funding opportunities with partnering community colleges. These visits have been further reinforced by the center's peer mentors, who visit the community college weekly and have been able to offer presentations in classes and conduct workshops about UCLA. The increased visibility of the CCCP program and UCLA partnerships continues to grow and develop, and there have been numerous requests from other community colleges for a chancellor's visit. Currently, there are a series of visits being planned in the upcoming academic years to continue to strengthen and emphasize diversity at UCLA.

A key component of the success experienced is having an office dedicated to the transfer function that can coordinate these efforts. Such an office, similar to CCCP, demonstrates to the campus community that a transfer-receptive culture is a priority. If no such office exists, we would recommend that a successful visit should include key personnel dedicated to transfer students—personnel who can coordinate and collaborate with other offices to develop strategies that impact transfer student success. Another strong recommendation is to have a commitment from the administration at both institutions. Such commitment is critical to ensuring the success of any visit and future partnerships that are developed.

Overall, a transfer-receptive culture centers on students and their lived experiences. An example of the impact the UCLA chancellor's visit had on one student is demonstrated through Latrice, an African American first-generation community college student. She stated:

I can't believe the Chancellor of UCLA actually came to our college. Having him and the other UCLA people here made me realize that UCLA does care and that it is a place I could transfer to. They made it real for me, made me feel wanted and I'm excited to transfer as soon as I can (West Los Angeles College student, personal communication, October 30, 2008).

Latrice's comment is indicative of successful collective efforts to diversify the university and to ensure that UCLA continues to strengthen its transfer-receptive culture.

Strengthening a four-year university's commitment to transfer can be a monumental undertaking that requires support and collaboration across the campus. While trying to develop this culture, it is important to remember that all five elements of building a transfer-receptive culture should be present and harmonious (Jain et al., 2011). The five elements of a transfer-receptive culture are built on the foundation of critical race theory, which allows institutions and educators to center race and racism when considering the experiences of nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and/or underrepresented students who make the transition from the community college to the university. The first two elements—establishing the transfer of students as a high institutional priority and providing outreach and resources to meet the specific needs of transfer students—are focused on students prior to their admission. These elements are evident in the example of visits by the UCLA chancellor and his team to 10 community colleges in five years. The third and fourth elements—offering transfer-specific scholarships and academic support, and centering the lived experiences of students to honor family and community—are critical when students gain admission and enroll at the university. The last element—providing a framework to assess, evaluate, and enhance the transfer-receptive programs provided at the institution—is critical to the success of any initiative. This ensures that the efforts made to develop this culture are reviewed and changed as necessary.

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