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## College Transfers: Myths and Realities

by Sutee Sujitparapitaya

Higher education policy and practice surrounding issues in undergraduate education have been dominated by studies that track traditional students who enroll in college right after graduation from high school. In recent years, an emphasis on transfer students is becoming more important to both the California State University system (CSU) as a whole, and to San José State University (SJSU). In fall 2008 alone, the CSU enrolled more than 35,000 California Community College transfer students, and two out of three graduating seniors in 2007-08 were transfers. At SJSU, about 42 percent of our new undergraduates and nearly two out of three of graduating seniors were transfers.

To recognize the importance of transfer students, this issue of *OIRblog* is dedicated to providing a number of facts, related studies, theories, and comments concerning transfer student success. We define **transfer students** as those *students who first matriculated at a different post-secondary institution(s) and then enrolled at San José State in some subsequent semester*. Since a few scholarly studies referenced in this article tend to use a limited student population within a given institution that may or may not be sufficient for a comprehensive evaluation, it is important to be wary of generalizing the results.

### I. Importance of Enrollment Management and Transfer Policy

The traditional 'linear-matriculation' image of college students who arrive right after high school and stay until graduation still influences higher education policy formulation and educational practice, despite the reality that the majority of 18- to 24-year-olds, as well as older students, do not experience their college education in a linear fashion [Borden, 2004; McCormick, 1997]. Recognizing this important issue, the CSU Board of Trustees adopted an enrollment management policy, effective fall 2001, to reaffirm that upper division California Community College (CCC) transfers who have successfully completed a course of study in an approved transfer agreement program would receive priority for admission over all other applicants to the CSU. All CSU eligible freshmen who are California residents are next in line to be accommodated in at least one CSU campus.

In recent years, a number of efforts have been undertaken to further facilitate the transfer process, including improved alignment of coursework in the

higher education segments and the development of online tools to help transfer counselors provide the best available information to students.

To provide an opportunity for CCC students to realize their academic goals more quickly and efficiently, the Trustees adopted the **Lower Division Transfer Patterns (LDTP)** project. This project provides community college students with clear road maps that show specific courses they need to take for a given CSU baccalaureate degree major, although impact criteria or requirements still apply. This streamlined transfer policy took effect in fall 2006 to help students graduate with fewer units beyond the minimum required for the degree, and in doing so, create more space for incoming students. More information about the LDTP is available online at [www.calstate.edu/acadaff/ldtp.shtml](http://www.calstate.edu/acadaff/ldtp.shtml); and <http://artic.sjsu.edu/static/misc/ldtp.html>.

The **Dual Admission Program (DAP)** is another CSU effort that allows students to enroll at a CSU and a community college at the same time. The goals of DAP are to provide students with a seamless and guaranteed transition from a community college to a CSU campus, help students focus on transfer early in their academic careers, increase the number of CCC transfer students who enter the CSU appropriately prepared for upper division course work, and move students to completion of the bachelor's degree in the most timely and efficient manner. For more information about the DAP, visit [www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/docs/MOU\\_CSU\\_CCC\\_805\\_Final.pdf](http://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/docs/MOU_CSU_CCC_805_Final.pdf).

Furthermore, three separate certification processes are used to streamline the transfer process, with nearly all academic departments having participated in the development of articulation agreements. First, with the **CCC Certification Plan for Transfer to the CSU**, the CSU recognizes General Education (GE) courses taught in California community colleges, as well as those of a few other institutions, as meeting SJSU's particular GE objectives. Second, another certification process applies to students transferring from other CSU campuses. Students who have completed all or a fraction of their lower division GE requirements at another CSU will be recognized as certified for lower division requirements at San José State. If CSU transfers have completed their upper division GE requirements at their respective campuses, the courses are evaluated upon transfer and appropriately applied to the SJSU GE Program to meet

SJSU's upper division GE requirement. Finally, the **Inter-segmental GE Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) plan** is for a GE program that community college transfers can use to fulfill lower division GE requirements in either the CSU or UC system without the need to take additional lower division GE courses after transferring to a four-year college. For more information about these three certification processes, visit the CSU Mentor web site at [www.csumentor.edu/planning/transfer](http://www.csumentor.edu/planning/transfer).

Turner (1992) suggested the words "It takes two to transfer" which emphasize the need for relational networks to ensure the success of transfer students. In February of this year, the leaders of the three segments of California public higher education (UC, CSU and CCC) agreed to take more aggressive efforts. They announced their intention to establish a joint task force to develop plans that would facilitate the transfer of more community college students to the state's four-year universities. Thus, the improvement in college transfer will help reduce the costs of obtaining a four-year degree for greater numbers of students, increase access to four-year institutions for underrepresented and educationally disadvantaged groups, and recognize the fact that many students prefer to begin their college education at an institution close to home.

San José State welcomes transfer students from many types of post-secondary institutions: two-year and four-year public and private institutions from California, out of state, and universities from around the world. To strive to make the transfer process as clear and uncomplicated as possible, students can access information about degree specific transfer agreement, GE Breadth agreements, necessary lower division courses in preparation for degree, and other useful information through the SJSU articulation website at <http://artic.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/artic/tpg/templates.html>.

It is also important to recognize that different rules apply to transfer students depending on when and where the transfer(s) took place.

In both fall and spring semesters, SJSU offers our transfer students a one-day formal orientation program, called Transfer Information Program (TIP). This program was designed to help transfer students understand the institution's expectations, as well as where they can obtain assistance as they make their transition. It also provides the information about the key university services, SJSU Studies requirements (formerly Advanced GE), preparation for the Writing Skills Test (or WST), and introduction to their college and major department where they meet with their major advisors. For more information about SJSU Transfer Information Program, visit [www.sjsu.edu/aars/tip](http://www.sjsu.edu/aars/tip).

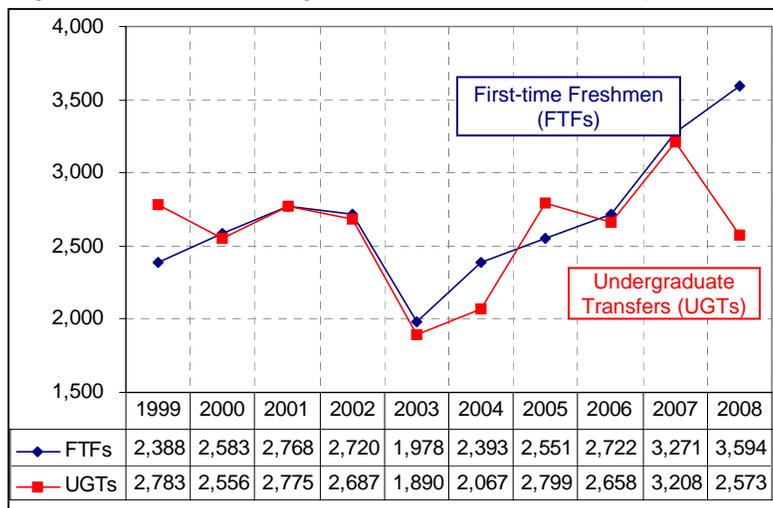
## II. What is known about our transfers?

### a. New Undergraduate Transfers

The goal of CSU enrollment management policies is to preserve CSU's mission to provide access to all first-time freshman and upper division transfers who meet CSU's admission eligibility requirements within the constraints of campus capacity and budget resources. For many people, it's not simply a question of *whether* their children will go to college, but *where*; and for good reason – bachelor's degree holders earn twice as much per year as those with only a high school diploma or GED (CPAC, June 2007).

For San José State, about 83 percent of our undergraduate transfers come from California Community Colleges. Slightly fewer than seven percent of all transfers come from other CSU campuses. The remaining transfers come from the University of California (two percent), California's private institutions, other U.S. States, and foreign countries (eight percent).

Figure 1: SJSU New Undergraduate Enrollment (Headcount)



Note: FTFs=First-time Freshmen; UGTs=New Undergraduate Transfers

Table 1: Comparison of SJSU New Undergraduates

Group Entering in	Total New Undergrad Headcount *	% of Total	
		First-time Freshmen	Undergrad Transfers **
Fall 2008	6,167	58.3%	41.7%
Fall 2007	6,479	50.5%	49.5%
Fall 2006	5,380	50.6%	49.4%
Fall 2005	5,350	47.7%	52.3%
Fall 2004	4,460	53.7%	46.3%
Fall 2003	3,868	51.1%	48.9%
Fall 2002	5,407	50.3%	49.7%
Fall 2001	5,543	49.9%	50.1%
Fall 2000	5,139	50.3%	49.7%
Fall 1999	5,171	46.2%	53.8%

\* Included 1<sup>st</sup> freshmen and new undergraduate transfers only.

\*\* In fall 2008, about 95% of those transfers entered as a junior.

Source: SJSU Official Census, Office of Institutional Research

- During the last 10 years, San José State's new student enrollment had grown more than 20 percent. Figure 1 shows that the growth took place due to a strong increase in first-time freshmen (50.5 percent), despite a decline of 7.5 percent in undergraduate transfers. Also, the ratio between first-time freshmen and new transfers had been nearly the same until the recent year. The percent of new transfers was dropped to 41.7 percent in fall 2008.
- Due to state-wide impacted programs and limited growth in both 2002-03 and 2003-04, new undergraduate enrollment underwent a decline starting fall 2001. However, 2004 showed a rebound (nearly 15 percent) due to 21 percent increase in first-time freshmen and 9.4 percent in new transfers (Table 1).
- In consideration of a state-wide enrollment reduction of five percent in 2004-05, San José State developed an enrollment management plan, aligned with the CSU enrollment policies, to place lower division transfers in the "low admission priority" category. As a result, the number of new lower division transfers dropped more than 16 percent in fall 2004. Upper division transfers, on the other hand, increased nearly 12 percent. However, the primary emphasis was placed on first-time freshmen. Additional information regarding the restrictions placed on selected incoming students, is available at [www.calstate.edu/acadaff/codedmemos/AA-2004-04.pdf](http://www.calstate.edu/acadaff/codedmemos/AA-2004-04.pdf).
- Starting in fall 2006, undergraduate enrollment has grown significantly. The number of applications received from fully qualified applicants started to exceed the number of available spaces that the campus can accommodate given the instructional resources and physical capacity of the campus. On November 20, 2008, SJSU agreed to adopt the CSU system-wide impaction and was authorized to use supplementary admission criteria to screen non-local undergraduate applicants for the fall 2009 and

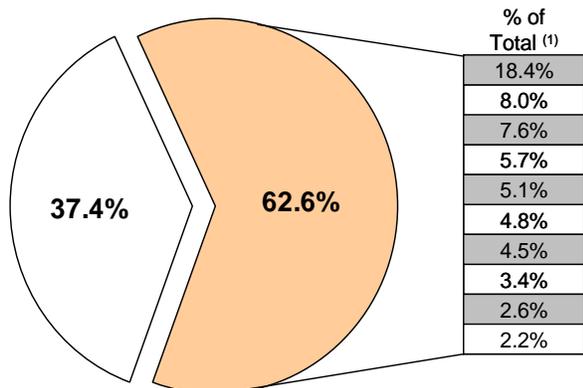
spring 2010 admission cycles. Total of 923 transfer students from Santa Clara County who applied during the initial filing period (between November 20 and November 30) were admitted. Transfer applications from outside Santa Clara County (n=2,564) were expected to be admitted if their overall transfer GPA was 3.6 or higher. Therefore, for the first time in its history, SJSU must turn away qualified students from outside the county, citing the state budget crisis.

During the last decade, student enrollment at community colleges had grown at much faster rates than at four-year institutions. According to Wellman [2002], the four primary reasons are a) growth in the number of high school graduates; b) demographic changes that are increasing the proportion of low income and minority students; c) more stringent admissions requirements in many four-year institutions; and d) rising college tuitions.

For the last five years, SJSU has enrolled, on average, three out of every 10 California Community College students who apply (with an average of "applied to enrolled" rate of 32.7 percent).

- The top 10 feeder schools, all community colleges, contributed over 62 percent of all new transfers. Figure 2 indicates that the top five feeder schools for our transfers are community colleges that had contributed nearly 50 percent of total new transfers this fall.
- On average, San José State enrolled four of every 10 transfers from these top 10 feeder schools in fall 2008. More descriptive statistical information about our top feeder schools is available online at [www.oir.sjsu.edu/Students/applications](http://www.oir.sjsu.edu/Students/applications).

Figure 2: New Transfers from Top 10 Feeder Schools



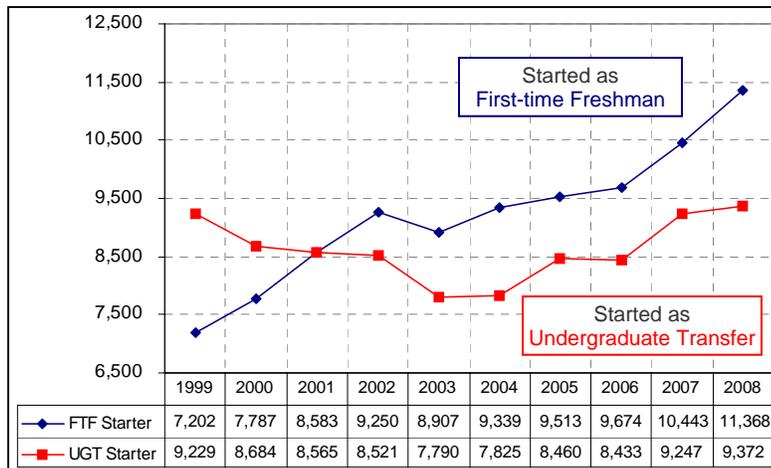
(1) Percent of total new undergraduate transfers

Table 2: Enrollment & Yield Rate for Top 10 Feeder Schools

Institution	Enrolled (Headcount)	Applied to Enrolled (Enrollment Rate)
De Anza Community College	476	38.6%
West Valley College	207	44.9%
Evergreen Valley College	196	53.6%
Cabrillo College	147	43.6%
Mission College	132	47.1%
San Jose City College	125	45.8%
Foothill College	117	34.7%
Ohlone College	89	36.2%
Diablo Valley College	68	21.5%
Gavilan College	58	39.5%

Source: SJSU Official Census, Office of Institutional Research

Figure 3: SJSU Undergraduate FTEs by Admission Basis



Note: Freshman Starters (Native) = students who started their academic career as a freshman and had not earned any college credits since graduating from high school; Transfer Starters = students who enter San José State for the first time as a transfer student.

Source: SJSU Official Census, Office of Institutional Research

Table 3: FTEs Comparison of Total Undergrads

Group Entering in	Total (1) Undergrad FTEs	Started as	
		First-time Freshmen	Undergrad Transfers
Fall 2008	20,740	54.8%	45.2%
Fall 2007	19,690	53.0%	47.0%
Fall 2006	18,107	53.4%	46.6%
Fall 2005	17,973	52.9%	47.1%
Fall 2004	17,165	54.4%	45.6%
Fall 2003	16,697	53.3%	46.7%
Fall 2002	17,772	52.1%	47.9%
Fall 2001	17,148	50.1%	49.9%
Fall 2000	16,471	47.3%	52.7%
Fall 1999	16,431	43.8%	56.2%

(1) Excluded Transitory and 2<sup>nd</sup>/Post- Baccalaureate Starters

### b. Today's Enrollment of Transfer Students

- Because fall enrollment provides guidance to the Trustee's budget development, the FTEs generated by transfer students each year have been a significant force in San José State's new General Fund appropriations. Figure 3 shows that FTE enrollment of undergraduate transfer starters began to increase in fall 2003. Since then, enrollment of transfer students has grown more than 20 percent.
- Due to various programs mentioned in the previous section, enrollment growth of transfer students started in fall 2003. To sustain this trajectory the community colleges have increased recruitment of students directly from high school and have positioned themselves as a cost effective alternative to four-year institutions. Today's transfer starters contributed about 45 percent of total undergraduate FTEs, illustrated in Table 3.
- The snapshot of fall 2008 enrollment (see Table 4) suggests that more transfer starters are in the upper division category, tend to enroll part-time, and work full-time. Because of undergraduate studies prior to transferred mostly at community colleges, transfer starters tend to be non-traditional students (25 years old or over).

- A decline in minority enrollment for transfer starters is offset by an increase in their freshman counterparts. Nationwide, one-fourth of all transfer students were minorities [Palmer, 2000]. In fall 2008 alone, seven out of every 10 SJSU undergraduates were non-Caucasian. According to Nora and Rendon [1990], minority students have significantly lower retention rates and higher transfer losses. The continued under-representation of minority transfers has several contributing factors – parents' education, income, encouragement, initial goal and institutional commitments, social integration, and academic integration.

Table 4: SJSU Undergraduate Enrollment (1) – Fall 2008

	Started as First-time Freshmen	Started as UG Transfers
Gender	Female = 50.6%	Female = 52.4%
Enrollment Type	Full-time = 89.4%	Full-time = 69.7%
Class Level	Lower Div (2) = 63.3%	Upper Div (2) = 96.4%
Ethnicity (3)		
American Indian	0.5%	0.6%
Black	6.9%	3.9%
Asian	27.1%	22.7%
Filipino	11.3%	6.2%
Pacific Islander	1.1%	1.0%
Hispanic	18.9%	17.9%
White	24.5%	30.2%
Foreign Nat'l	2.0%	5.1%
Other	7.8%	12.5%
Age		
19 under	46.0%	0.9%
20-24	49.5%	55.7%
25-29	3.7%	26.2%
30-34	0.4%	7.6%
35-59	0.4%	9.2%
60 over	0.0%	0.4%

(1) Excluded transitory students; (2) Lower division = freshmen and sophomores; Upper division = juniors and senior; (3) Excluded foreign national and unknown category

Source: SJSU Official Census, Office of Institutional Research

### c. Baccalaureate Degrees Awarded

A notable goal for a majority of undergraduate programs has been to increase the number and percentage of students who persist in their studies through degree completion. With enrollments booming and state budgets tight, public institutions have been looking for ways to enroll more students without spending additional state funds. One cost-saving measure under consideration is to stimulate the progress of those students who take longer than the customary four years to complete their bachelor's degrees in order to open up space for more eligible students.

The extensive literature available relating to college student retention describes several important factors that facilitate student success. Chief among these factors are: having completed rigorous college preparatory courses in high school; attending classes full-time; living on campus; and minimizing off-campus work commitments [AASCU/NASULGC, 2002]. The vast majority of SJSU students do not conform to this portrait. Many current undergraduates have notable deficits in their high school academic records (60 percent of incoming freshmen needs at least one remediation); 21 percent attend classes on a part-time basis; no more than 13 percent live on campus; and four-fifths of undergraduate students work an average of 30 hours per week off-campus.

- Although the number of new students transferring to San José State recently declined in fall 2008, the number of transfer starters who received their undergraduate degree had increased by 11 percent during academic year 2006-07 and 2007-08, shown in Figure 5.
- When we focus on the percentage of total degrees conferred in Table 5, each year over 64 percent of baccalaureate degrees awarded have been to transfer students. That number was as high as 79.3 percent in 1999-2000.
- Looking at cumulative earned units at graduation, graduating students who started as transfers consistently had accumulated more units (averaging about five units) than those who started as first-time freshmen. Since nearly 2,900 transfer starters graduated in the most recent year, that translates to approximately 14,500 units or 967 FTEs that were accumulated without fulfilling their graduation requirements.

Figure 5: SJSU Undergraduate Degrees Awarded

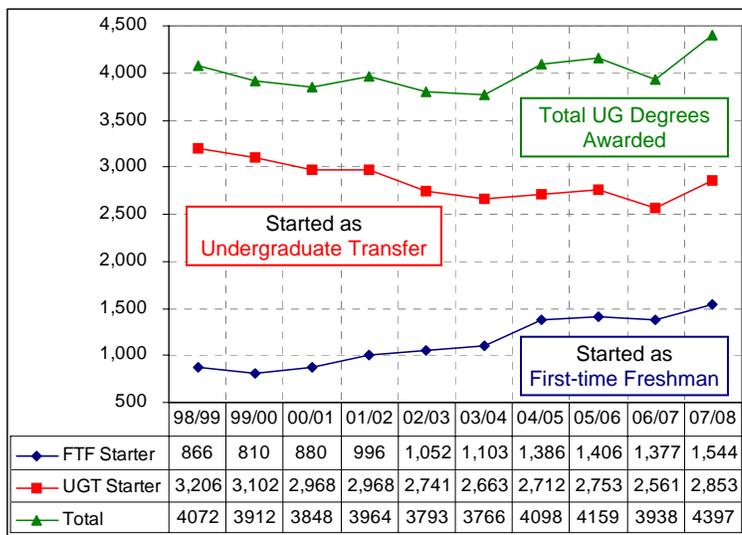


Table 5: % of Total Degrees Awarded & Earned Units <sup>(1)</sup>

Group Graduated during College Year	Started as First-time Freshmen		Started as Undergrad Transfers	
	% of total Undergrad Degrees Awarded	Average Earned Units	% of total Undergrad Degrees Awarded	Average Earned Units
2007/08	35.1%	143.8	64.9%	152.5
2006/07	35.0%	143.6	65.0%	151.2
2005/06	33.8%	141.7	66.2%	149.4
2004/05	33.8%	142.3	66.2%	146.0
2003/04	29.3%	140.2	70.7%	144.9
2002/03	27.7%	140.7	72.3%	144.7
2001/02	25.1%	139.9	74.9%	144.1
2000/01	22.9%	140.3	77.1%	144.6
1999/00	20.7%	142.2	79.3%	145.6
1998/99	21.3%	144.0	78.7%	145.4

(1) Excluded 2<sup>nd</sup> Baccalaureate Degree Recipients  
 Source: SJSU Official Census, Office of Institutional Research

### III. Preparing Transfer Students to Succeed

Table 6a: Three-year Graduation Rates: CSU Comparison

	Fall CCC Transfer Cohorts					
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
<b>CSU System-wide</b>	<b>48.8%</b>	<b>49.6%</b>	<b>49.5%</b>	<b>50.3%</b>	<b>52.4%</b>	<b>53.8%</b>
Long Beach *	45.4%	47.8%	44.9%	47.5%	46.9%	52.2%
San Diego *	49.0%	53.2%	52.5%	58.5%	61.2%	64.3%
Northridge	50.8%	50.3%	50.3%	53.8%	56.1%	59.3%
Fullerton *	54.4%	56.0%	55.8%	55.1%	54.7%	55.7%
San José	39.6%	41.1%	39.7%	39.3%	42.9%	44.7%
Sacramento	48.4%	46.9%	47.6%	47.6%	52.4%	52.9%
Fresno	64.2%	49.0%	52.4%	48.3%	47.5%	48.3%
San Francisco	45.6%	48.9%	49.5%	50.3%	52.9%	57.5%

\* Impacted Campus

Source: CSU CSRDE ([www.asd.calstate.edu/csrde](http://www.asd.calstate.edu/csrde))

Enabling students to complete their undergraduate degrees is of fundamental importance, not only to the students and their parents, but also to the institutions. Graduation rates are often viewed as a measure of institutional performance or accountability because high degree completion rates generally signify that both the institution and its students have been successful. Even the federal government has recognized the importance of degree completion through the Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act, which requires baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities to make public their degree completion rates.

Since 1995, CSU has participated in the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) and publicly reported campus specific retention and graduation rates for both incoming freshmen and transfers ([www.asd.calstate.edu/csrde](http://www.asd.calstate.edu/csrde)).

Table 6a shows the comparison of three year graduation rates for eight largest CSU campuses and the system-wide data. The data suggest that three years later, only half of the new CCC transfers earned a bachelor's degree from one of CSU campuses.

It is important to recognize that three-year graduation rates at SJSU had been the lowest since 1999, although a slight increase has taken place during the last two years. It has consistently fallen approximately 10 percent below the system-wide average.

Some may argue that impacted campuses such as Long Beach, San Diego, and Fullerton were able to restrict enrollment and select students who are better prepared for college. These students, therefore, had a better chance of degree completion than their counterparts from non-impacted campuses, including SJSU. However, San Francisco State (as a non-impacted campus) has consistently met or exceeded the CSU system average as well as some impacted campuses.

The chances of earning a college degree vary not only among campuses, but also among students. The HERI study using CIRP data (2002) indicated that two-third of variation among institutions in graduation rates is attributable to differences in entering classes rather than to differences in the effectiveness of their undergraduate retention programs. Therefore, it is important to be wary of generalizing these rates when the academic preparation and other characteristics of incoming classes are not taken into account. The same explanation applies to the differences in graduation rates among racial groups. Table 6b shows graduation rates broken down by gender and ethnicity for the fall 2004 new transfer cohort only.

- Among the eight largest campuses, SJSU's rates were the lowest for both male and female students (nearly 10 percent below the system-wide average).
- SJSU's rates for Asian and Black students were also the lowest. In fact, graduation rates for Black transfers were 20 percent lower than the system-wide average (13.6 percent for Asians).

Table 6b: Three-year Graduation Rates by Gender and Ethnicity

	CCC Transfer Cohorts – Fall 2004 Only						
	Overall	Female	Male	Black	Hispanic	Asian	White
<b>CSU System-wide</b>	<b>53.8%</b>	<b>56.9%</b>	<b>49.6%</b>	<b>42.2%</b>	<b>50.6%</b>	<b>51.3%</b>	<b>57.8%</b>
Long Beach *	52.2%	56.6%	46.3%	46.2%	53.3%	45.1%	56.7%
San Diego *	64.3%	66.5%	61.2%	44.9%	60.8%	60.1%	69.0%
Northridge	59.3%	63.0%	53.9%	46.7%	57.5%	56.2%	59.3%
Fullerton *	55.7%	59.5%	50.5%	45.2%	52.1%	52.2%	61.7%
San José	44.7%	47.2%	41.6%	22.0%	43.7%	37.7%	54.4%
Sacramento	52.9%	56.6%	47.8%	44.2%	50.8%	51.7%	53.2%
Fresno	48.3%	51.7%	48.3%	37.3%	42.2%	44.3%	53.8%
San Francisco	57.5%	59.3%	55.1%	49.2%	49.3%	52.9%	60.6%

Note: Excluded Foreign National and American due to the fluctuation of very small entering cohort

Source: CSU CSRDE ([www.asd.calstate.edu/csrde](http://www.asd.calstate.edu/csrde))

#### IV. Do Our Transfers and Natives Have Equal Success?

Community colleges have the potential to be a powerful starting point for baccalaureate study. In 2004 alone, community colleges accounted for 45 percent of all high school graduates enrolled in higher education. About half of that number had the goal of attaining a bachelor's degree. Research has consistently illustrated that community college students, when they transfer, perform as well as students who initially enroll in four-year institutions [Dicroce, 2005]. With this evidence, and the changes in the streamlined CSU transfer policies, it is important to examine whether or not transfer starters have equal access to academic success regarding degree completion in comparison to freshmen starters.

To begin our evaluation, we argue that the direct comparison of these two groups is inappropriate and leads to an incorrect conclusion. One reason is that CCC transfers are survivors of a lower division college curriculum and have had the benefits of a post-secondary education experience prior to enrolling at SJSU. They have had an opportunity to develop useful collateral skills, including the ability to navigate the administrative structures of post-secondary institutions, as well as experience with organizing their time to manage the demands of work, school, and family [Nora, Attinasi, and Matonak, 1990; Nora and Rendon, 1990]. These advantages essentially translate into earlier graduation for transfers in comparison to first-time students.

Figure 7: Direct Comparison of Graduation Rates between First-time Freshmen and CCC Transfers – Fall 2000 Cohort

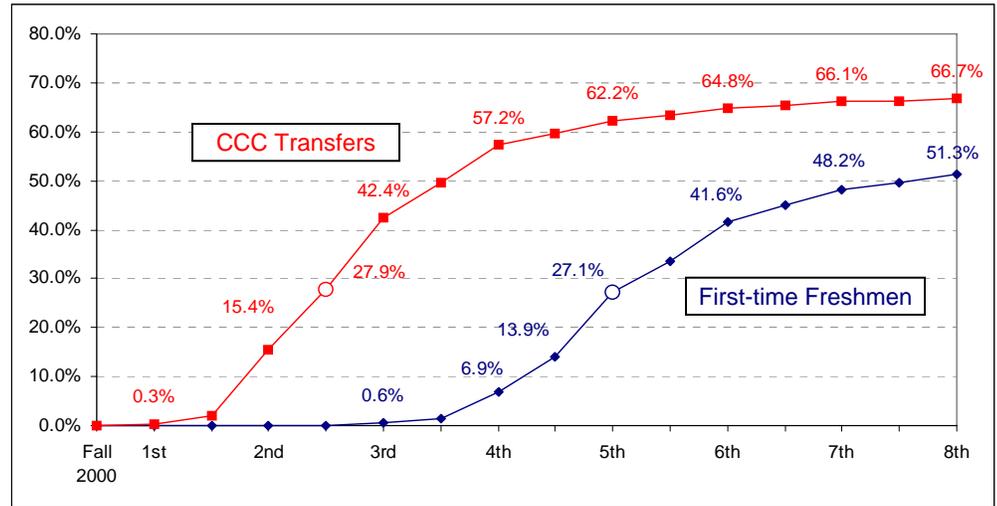


Figure 7 indicates that about 27.9 percent of CCC transfers graduate within two and a half years after entering SJSU, while it takes about five years for first-time freshmen to do so (27.1 percent). Thus, the graduation rates of these two groups are not equivalent.

To make meaningful comparisons, the equalization of first-time freshmen to CCC transfers is needed. This was done by capturing a cohort of first-time freshmen who have survived two years, known as “Comparative First-time freshmen - CFTF.” The cohort of CCC transfers, on the other hand, was also refined to include only upper division transfers who maintained a 2.0 GPA in at least 60 transferable semester units. This transfer cohort is known as “Selective Upper Division Transfers – SUDT.”

- When compared to the 2002 comparative first-time freshmen (CFTF), Figure 7a suggests that CCC Transfers were found to graduate faster during the first three years, but then decline.

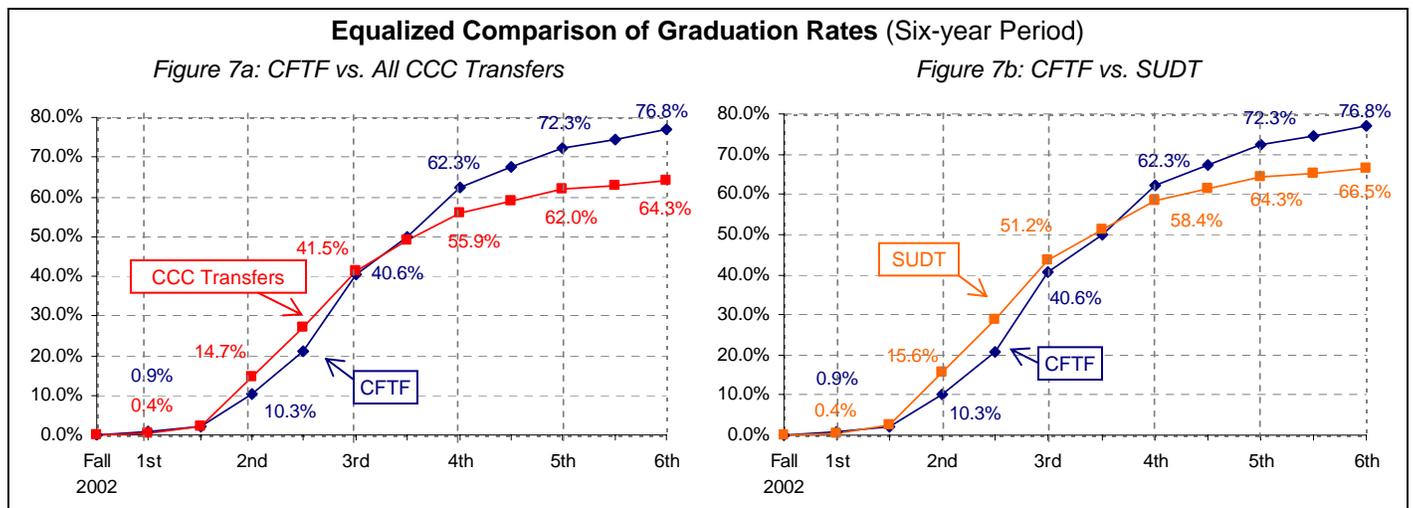


Table 8: Detailed Breakdown of CFTF, SUDT and all CCC Transfers

	Comparative First-time Freshmen (CFTF)	Selective Upper Division Transfers (SUDT)	All CCC Transfers
<b>Total Cohort</b>	<b>1,723</b>	<b>1,596</b>	<b>2,275</b>
Average Entering GPA	2.71 <sup>(1)</sup>	2.97 <sup>(2)</sup>	2.96 <sup>(2)</sup>
Graduated within			
• 3 years	40.6%	51.2%	41.5%
• 4 years	62.3%	58.4%	55.9%
• 5 years	72.3%	64.3%	62.0%
• 6 years	76.8%	66.5%	64.3%
Left during 6-year period			
Average semesters toward graduation	3.39 Years <sup>(3)</sup>	3.06 Years	3.09 Years
Average cumulative earned units at graduation	142.5 Units	143.8 Units	143.1 Units
Average GPA at graduation	2.91	3.05	3.05

(1) Average cumulative GPA at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> year; (2) Average entering transfer GPA; (3) Excluded first two years (2000-01)

Source: SJSU Official Census, Office of Institutional Research; National Student Clearinghouse Database

- On refining the cohort of CCC transfers to include only upper division transfers, Figure 7b shows that the graduation rates of transfers improved only slightly. During the first four years, selective upper division transfer (SUDT) graduated at a higher rate than overall CCC transfers, but this advantage starts diminishing at the beginning of their fifth year.
- Table 8 illustrates the enrollment outcomes of all three equalized cohort types and suggests that comparative first-time freshmen (CFTF) who returned after two years have a much lower cumulative GPA than selective upper division (SUDT) and other California Community College transfers.
- After three years, the graduation rate of CFTF was also lower than that of their counterparts. A reverse trend started to take place after four years in favor of CFTF – with a lower drop-out rate, shorter enrollment period and fewer cumulative earned units at graduation.

## V. Perspectives on Student Engagement

Contemporary transfer students differ from native students in many ways. According to Johnson and Miller [2000], the fundamental difference is that transfer students come to campus at a different stage in their academic career, and subsequently, with different expectations. They typically are less in need of an *in loco parentis* approach to student life and more in need of a coaching and facilitating of the educational process. They tend to be more attuned to vocational or professional outcomes, and treat the college experience as a stepping stone to the world of work, rather than primarily of self-growth [Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux and Myrsiades, 2001]. Some transfer students are moving (or running) away from one environment (for example, those who leave one four-year institution due to incompatibility or a bad fit) in search of something different, while others are running to something (such as completing a four-year degree or transferring from a community college). The result for the transfer student is often the same: arrival on campus at what is loosely determined “an unusual” time without the developed transitional programming (such as new student orientation).

In future studies, it seems appropriate to further refine the CCC transfer cohort by selecting only those with a high school graduation date of 2000. This group of CCC transfers, known here as the “*Elite CCC Transfers*”, was presumed to have spent exactly two years in a community college before transferring to San José State. At this point, high school graduation data is currently unavailable. Also, gender and ethnic-specific differences in persistence rates should be included. However, in most cases, one should exercise with caution when comparing rates across ethnic groups. This is due to the fact that rates for minority ethnic groups are likely to be unstable, across time on a given campus, as they are based on small sample sizes.

Table 9: Sample of Negative Engagement Responses by Transfer Seniors

Seniors Engagement in	Transfer Seniors (n=772)		Native Seniors (n= 351)		CSU Seniors from CSU Consortium (n=8,916)	
	Avg. Response <sup>a</sup>	% Very Often & Often	Avg. Response <sup>a</sup>	% Very Often & Often	Avg. Response <sup>a</sup>	% Very Often & Often
Working with other students on projects during class	2.68	53%	2.81*	62%	2.66	53%
Working with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	2.80	60%	3.00*	71%	2.82	61%
Tutoring other students	1.88	21%	1.96	25%	1.84	20%
Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor	2.14	30%	2.16	30%	2.31*	37%
Working with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)	1.64	16%	1.84	22%	1.75*	19%
Discussing ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class	2.73	57%	2.72	58%	2.86	64%
Having serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	2.81	61%	2.98*	70%	2.76	58%

(a) 1= never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often

	Avg. Response <sup>b</sup>	% Quite a bit & Very Much	Avg. Response <sup>b</sup>	% Quite a bit & Very Much	Avg. Response <sup>b</sup>	% Quite a bit & Very Much
Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically	2.72	61%	2.65	55%	2.86*	67%
Providing the support you need to thrive socially	2.12	29%	2.19	31%	2.14*	32%
Attending campus events and activities	2.36	43%	2.48	47%	2.52	51%

(b) 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much

In a study of 60 four-year institutions in the southeast, Swing [2000] found that transfer students receive only modest institutional support, even though they continue to demonstrate heightened adjustment difficulties. Many institutions, while thinking of students, only think in terms of new freshmen, continuing students, and graduate students, and fail to fully recognize that transfer students compose a significant percentage of their campus community. In addition, transfers are a unique group of students with their own needs, challenges, and contributions.

These issues are a challenge for San José State as well. The 2007 administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) found that transfer seniors were generally less engaged across the board in learning activities. Although senior transfers appeared to perform academically on par with native seniors, in that they reported comparable grades and similar degree of academic challenge, they were less involved in the other four (of five) benchmarks of positive student engagement: active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment. Table 9 shows the notable negative engagement responses by transfer seniors, in comparison to the native seniors.

To address these negative engagement characteristics, a change in culture would be required that would foster the concept that transition issues should be supported by a broad range of professionals in both academic programs and student services. It also would mean supporting and rewarding faculty for providing increased opportunities for students to communicate with them on educational issues [Helm and Cohen, 2001]. And finally, it would mean that we (receiving four-year institutions) would pay more attention – more positive attention – to transfer students [Kuh, 2002].

Many changes in transfer policy and enrollment management, at the CSU system level and with California higher education in general, have taken place to allow for an easier student transfer for the purpose of degree completion. This development has dual implications. The first is opportunity: Institutions must work harder to accommodate those transfer students already on campus. The second is challenge: Institutions that fail to accommodate their transfer students will find that other institutions are more than willing to “raid” the enrollment of dissatisfied transfer students. Like other CSU campuses, San José State is facing savvy and sophisticated college students who see higher education enrollment as a commodity, and who may well look (enroll) elsewhere if the institution does not deliver a perceived level of acceptable “product.”

## VI. Conclusion

Historically resistant to the concept that transfer students are part of the market place, today's institutions of higher education must become responsive to their constituents. It is inaccurate to assume that SJSU students are those who arrive in their first year of college and that transfer students are add-ons. We must recognize that transfer students are also "our" students. All students equally deserve the same care, attention, and expectations for success.

Research suggests that transfer students' experiences are diverse with respect to their arrival on campus, integration into it, preparation for life as an SJSU student, and expectations or desires for their life as a student here. They subsequently are also faced with having to make decisions more quickly, particularly since they must declare a major and begin coursework in the major almost immediately upon arrival [Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux and Myrsiades, 2001; Johnson and Miller, 2000; Nora, Attinasi, and Matonak, 1990; Nora and Rendon, 1990]. Therefore, it is difficult to make sweeping generalizations about their experiences. We should recognize that some of their needs may be distinct from those of other new students, and that academic support programs and services designed for them will be more effective when they are designed to meet their unique needs and characteristics.

This issue of *OIRblog* was prepared to provide useful information to stimulate further questions and dialogue on issues related to transfer student success. For the last 10 years, nearly half of our undergraduate enrollment has been transfer students. They have generated significant enrollment FTEs, and contributed a large portion of our annual enrollment income. In the end, more baccalaureate degrees have been awarded to them, with that number starting to rise in recent years. However, a few concerns we need to be aware of are total earned units at graduation and overall graduation rate. With nearly 3,000 transfers graduating each year, that translates to approximately 1,000 FTEs that were consumed without fulfilling any graduation requirement. Also looking at the most recent four cohorts (1996-1999), our three-year graduation rate has been much lower than the CSU system-wide average and the lowest among larger CSU campuses. Since SJSU's mission statement states that the university is committed "*to enrich the lives of its students, to transmit knowledge to its students along with the necessary skills for applying it in the service of our society, and to expand the base of knowledge through research and scholarship,*" an early and effectual relationship, combined with an institutional commitment and academic support, is necessary to enhance transfers' overall experience and success as San José State students.

This study is not an attempt to promote the idea that graduation rate is the only measure of student success. We know that there are many different reasons why students enroll in college and do not earn a degree. Some of those reasons have to do with the students themselves, their financial resources, family circumstances, and motivation. Research indicates that successful undergraduates need the kinds of strong preparation in their K-12 education that far too many students, particularly low income and minority students, fail to receive [Berger and Braxton, 1998; Ishitani and DesJardins, 2002-2003; McGrath and Braunstein, 1997; Yorke and Thomas, 2003]. The decisions of state and federal lawmakers also make a difference; the policies they adopt, and the resources they choose to allocate, have impact. All of these things matter, and yet none of them are under our control.

However, universities play a role as well. Four-year universities, including San José State, are exceptionally complicated enterprises requiring a high degree of skill, expertise, and good judgment to operate well. Decision-makers make choices every day that greatly affect the lives of their students. Among competing priorities, thoughtful consideration could be given to marshalling resources and focusing energies to maximize student learning so that it results in success for as many undergraduate students as possible. For many students, these decisions and policies make all the difference in the world.

Note: For more information about the retention and graduation at the college and program level, please contact the Office of Institutional Research or visit [www.oir.sjsu.edu/Assessment/ProgRev](http://www.oir.sjsu.edu/Assessment/ProgRev).

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## Appendix

In consideration of our new transfers, it is important to recognize that academic experience at four-year universities will be both stimulating and challenging. Students will be stepping into a new environment, and much of their success in adjusting will depend on their own initiative. Research suggests that transfer students should be aware of the following factors when entering four-year universities:

- **Expecting rigorous coursework:** Most of incoming transfers' coursework will be at the upper division level, which may be more demanding than they are used to. Subjects will be presented in more depth and with a tighter focus than in the broad-based survey or foundation courses they took in preparation for transferring. While some of their classes may be larger than they are used to, big lectures are typically paired with small group discussions. Many campuses also offer seminar-style courses each term that enable them to have more one-on-one interaction with instructors.
- **Giving courses priority over work:** Many community college students are used to fitting part-time classes around a full-time job. At the four-year university, the expectations are different. With financial assistance provided through financial aid, transfer students may be able to keep their work hours more manageable. The best way for transfer students to deal with all of the changes that they will encounter is for them to allow more time for their studies at the university level.
- **Seeking out career contacts early:** Successful student/faculty relationships require efforts beyond merely attending weekly lectures. It is important for students to visit faculty during office hours and ask about internships or research prospects in their field. Faculty often are the key to unadvertised opportunities that can give students vital career experience, particularly if they plan to attend graduate school. Career Centers also can help transfers research career or graduate school options.
- **Getting involved:** Our campus offers clubs and organizations where students can quickly get to know their fellow students. Unlike many other campuses, our campus does not have transfer centers or specialized support services to foster a smooth transition.
- **Concentrating on preparing for the major:** Most important in making the transition to four-year universities is the academic preparation at the community college level. The more comprehensive and challenging the community college programs, the better prepared students will be for university work, and the better their chances for academic success. Concentration on classes required as preparation for upper division work in their intended major, and completing their major preparation coursework and general education requirements while at community college, can help students become more competitive applicants and help them graduate sooner after transferring.

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