COVID-19: TRANSFER STUDENTS ARE KEY
REDEFINE CONTINUING; EMBRACE NEW TRANSFERS

Despite the anticipated reopening of most campuses in fall 2020, the return of students is not guaranteed. Polls show uncertainty among parents and college students about their attendance, some worried about distance from home, others about quality of experience, others about affordability, with many worried about "all of the above." For most institutions, overt recruitment of their own continuing students is rarely a concern unless retention problems are serious. In the wake of the pandemic's impact on higher education, the current concept of retention must be reexamined and broadened. For selective schools, allowing students to plan a "study away" semester or year while retaining their opportunity to graduate from their home college or university could bridge this period of uncertainty, and reciprocal options might be negotiated to preserve tuition revenues. For schools with less well-established loyalties to bolster retention of students whose lives have been disrupted and whose college experience seriously affected, maintaining relationships with such students is critical but may not prove sufficient to meet enrollment goals. By thinking of "transfers" holistically – both into and out of the institution – enrollment and student services models can become more comprehensive.

Transfer student planning needs to incorporate all aspects of a framework Huron outlined in a recent white paper: immediate, medium-term, and longer-term opportunities, defined here as "Triage, Stabilize, and Transform."

TRIAGE	STABILIZE	TRANSFORM
Rapid response to urgent pandemic-related needs	*Shift resources to mid-term stabilization*	*Implement change to ensure long-term success*
• Support student engagement in a virtual environment, including discussion of options for upcoming term enrollment decisions • Evaluate transfer credit policies and restrictions for continuing & incoming students (to reduce restrictions for transfer work and increase opportunities for credit) • Review financial aid budget for incoming transfer class	• Communicate institutional plans for the coming term accurately and update regularly. • Consider partnerships for study away options that offer reciprocal enrollment potential in comparable institutions • Examine transcript requests processed as indicators of potential transfer-out behavior	• Determine the right balance of transfer students and sub-populations that strengthen enrollment goals (e.g., URM, low income, under-enrolled majors) • Adopt or optimize CRM to track transfer student experience (transfers in) / and "study away" students planning to return. • Streamline the credit evaluation process for all students bringing credit from other institutions • Involve school-level academic leaders in visible ways to engage transfers' academic interests

Triage: Retain Student Loyalty

While students are interacting with the campus via remote learning options, engaging current students about plans for fall through virtual information sessions, one-on-one meetings with academic advisors, and live streaming of campus "events" as much as possible will send important messages that the campus remains a community in which they are important members. But for some, the option to return may already be off the table. Those students should be given the opportunity to express plans to take classes elsewhere but could still be encouraged to affiliate as continuing students planning to graduate upon their eventual re-enrollment. Formal reciprocal arrangements could also structure financial and re-enrollment expectations.

Institutions that now provide "study away" opportunities for students can explore using these existing relationships with other colleges and universities to provide a structured offering to students whose return is in question. Some campuses are likely to experience more continuing exposure to the novel coronavirus than others. Similar to efforts made by schools to assist sister institutions in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, continuing students could be allowed to enroll elsewhere with structured agreements between participating institutions. Such plans could also address short-term student/family concerns about distance from home as well as continuing "hot spots" for the virus in densely populated areas.

Communicating about such options throughout the summer will be critical. Measuring impacts on attendance and on the effectiveness of options offered will be an important way to remain prepared for potential future disruptions.

Stabilize: Address Transfer Applicant Questions Holistically

Institutions will need fresh approaches in assessing their academic policies and business processes in order to maximize transfer student enrollments. The impact on students, both those just entering college and those whose remote college experiences or family circumstances have given them reason to consider transferring will be looking closely at how well their questions are addressed. Here are some things to consider in making those answers easy to find:

- Showcase high-impact experiences such as research, internships, community service to illustrate how transfer students become actively engaged and can take on leadership roles.
- Provide clear online overviews of transferability of college credits and timely individualized credit evaluations.
- Adapt transfer credit policies to acknowledge pass/fail grading, so that students are not disadvantaged by factors outside of their control. Engage faculty in ways that make clear the importance of timely transfer credit reviews.
- Evaluate effectiveness (and improve, as necessary) student orientation programs designed to meet transfers' needs.
- Highlight or establish scholarship programs designated for transfer students.
- Assess modifications made to transfer admissions process during this period; *continue* those that provide a simpler or more flexible application experience while maintaining institutional quality standards.

Transform: Create the Comprehensive Student Experience

As committed as colleges and universities are to a four-year experience, many students and their families now question its value. The current health crisis has added incentives for institutions to create a student-centric, customized application and enrolled student experience, based on the specific needs and expectations of each student. Such expectations have also put the college or university in a position to articulate more clearly than ever before the value proposition of the education being offered and the ways that institution best delivers that experience. Schools that can track their enrolled experience for all students, including transfers, have the best likelihood of explaining the intended outcomes of the education they offer. Being able to cite outcomes resulting from the educational experience will be enhanced by using a CRM for enrolled students. In the case of transfers, populating the CRM with the student's prior collegiate experiences -- as well as possible work experiences in the case of non-traditional student transfers -- will streamline the connection of such students with appropriate resources and opportunities quickly upon their enrollment. Such information can help faculty personalize advising sessions and support services reach out to incoming transfers with targeted resources.

Transfers understandably worry that they may "miss something" by entering a four-year school midway through their peers' experience. Students considering transferring out of their chosen institution likely have similar worries about the experiences they will miss by leaving. Communicating well with both of these populations will be key to institutional success. The more a school can describe the ways in which students will gain from the planned programs that address their educational, personal and eventual career needs and goals, the better the value proposition is understood by parents and students, resulting in a strong sense of institutional loyalty. Affordability issues will underlie and potentially challenge these efforts, particularly as we face widespread economic concerns. Clear communication and early outreach, even when all financial concerns cannot be resolved, will be important in maintaining the relationships for all students.

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