Making Transfer Credit Evaluations More Student Focused

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A White Paper

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INTRODUCTION

Sova, with support from the College Futures Foundation, began studying credit evaluation practices at five public community colleges and universities in California in early 2024. The study aimed to understand how institutions evaluate credits, identify successes within the credit evaluation process, and pinpoint areas for improvement, with an eye toward policy ideas and practices that can improve credit evaluation processes at scale for both learners and institutions. Researchers analyzed data from focus groups, interviews, and mapping exercises with administrators, staff, and students from the five institutions.

BACKGROUND

More than one-third of college students transfer within their first six years, with almost half of that group transferring more than once.[1] In fall 2023, 13.2 percent of non-first-year undergraduates across the U.S. transferred to a new institution.[2] This growing population of students faces well-documented challenges: Researchers have studied the significant gap between the number who seek transfer and the number who actually transfer, as well as the gap between the number who transfer and those who earn a bachelor's degree.[3] Of students who begin at a community college, only 33% transfer to a four-year institution

[1] Doug Shapiro et al., "Transfer and Mobility: A National View of Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions Fall 2011 Cohort," National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, July 1, 2018, http://hdl.handle.net/10919/95155.

[2] National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Transfer and Progress: Fall 2023 Report, February 28, 2024, https://nscresearchcenter.org/transfer-and-progress/.

[3] Laura Horn and Paul Skomsvold, "Community College Student Outcomes: 1994–2009," National Center for Education Statistics, November 2011, https://nces.ed.gov/use-work/resource-library/data/tables/community-college-student-outcomes-1994-2009?pubid=2012253; Davis Jenkins and John Fink, "What We Know About Transfer," Community College Research Center, retrieved February 20, 2022, https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/what-we-know-about-transfer.pdf.

within six years and only 16% of the cohort complete a bachelor's degree. Bachelor's completion rates, when disaggregated by student subgroup, are even more alarming: low-income (11%), older (6%), Black (9%), and Hispanic (13%) students transfer and complete bachelor's degrees.[4] Higher education scholarship also addresses the ineffectiveness of existing transfer pathways, disparities between the experiences of students of different backgrounds, and more.[5]

Unfortunately, students are often surprised and disappointed to learn *after* they transfer that the receiving institution will not award credit for their previously earned credits or apply them toward program requirements.

Experts point to the transferability of community college credits as a significant barrier to transfer student success, with only about half of students receiving credit for all of their prior coursework.[6] In a 2024 survey of adult Americans, Sova and Public Agenda found that 58 percent of respondents who tried to transfer credits experienced credit loss, with 24 percent indicating that "few" or "none" of their credits were accepted.[7] Moreover, many of the credits that institutions do accept do not move students closer to completing a degree.[8] Without applying these credits to program requirements, students end up with excess credits — a reminder of the time and money lost in the process.

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[4] Tatiana Velasco, John Fink, Mariel Bedoya-Guevara, Davis Jenkins & Tania LaViolet, *Tracking Transfer: Community College and Four-Year Institutional Effectiveness in Broadening Bachelor's Degree Attainment. Community College Research Center,* February 2024, https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/tracking-transfer-community-college-and-four-year-institutional-effectiveness-in-broadening-bachelors-degree-attainment.html

[5] Horn and Skomsvold; David B. Monaghan and Paul Attewell, "The Community College Route to the Bachelor's Degree," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 37, no. 1 (2015): 70–91, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/ 0162373714521865; Jason L. Taylor and Dimpal Jain, "The Multiple Dimensions of Transfer: Examining the Transfer Function in American Higher Education," *Community College Review* 45, no. 4 (2017): 273–293, https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552117725177; Burton R. Clark, "The 'Cooling-Out' Function in Higher Education, *The American Journal of Sociology* 65, no. 6 (1960): 569–576, https://doi.org/10.1086/222787

[6] Patricia Gándara et al., "Building Pathways to Transfer: Community Colleges That Break the Chain of Failure for Students of Color," The Civil Rights Project, February 14, 2012, retrieved February 18, 2022 from https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/college-access/diversity/building-pathways-to-transfer-community-colleges-that-break-the-chain-of-failure-for-students-of-color; Pamela Mery and Eva Schiorring, "A Qualitative Study of Two-to-Four-Year Transfer Practices in California Community Colleges: An Analysis of Seven Case Studies Featuring Colleges with Consistently Higher-Than-Expected Transfer Rates," Center for Student Success of the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges, Fall 2008, retrieved February 12, 2022 from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED521877.pdf

[7] "Beyond Transfer: Insights from a Survey of American Adults," Public Agenda, 2025, retrieved April 21, 2025, https://publicagenda.org/resource/ beyond-transfer/findings/

[8] Michelle Hodara et al., "Exploring Credit Mobility and Major-Specific Pathways: A Policy Analysis and Student Perspective on Community College to University Transfer," *Community College Review* 45, no. 4 (2017): 331–349, https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552117724197.

While not all credit loss is due to transfer credit evaluation, it is necessary to examine undergraduate credit evaluation processes to understand where improvements can be made to prevent excess credits and maximize credit mobility and applicability to program requirements. Scholars have found that students who can transfer nearly all of their community college credits are 2.5 times more likely to earn their bachelor's degree than those who cannot transfer in as many credits.[9]

METHODS

Sova evaluated the transfer credit evaluation processes of five public colleges and universities in California. Forty-seven administrators, staff, and faculty (institutional ASF) and 37 students participated in a combination of interviews, focus groups, and full-day workshops.

Institutional ASF participants came from a variety of departments and played some role in their institution's transfer credit evaluation process. Sova invited each to an in-person focus group held on campus. The group mapped the transfer credit evaluation process as described in the focus group protocol (see Appendix D). It also discussed key players in the process, how they communicate and work together, feedback from students, pain points in the process, criteria and documentation of decisions, and student-administrator interactions. Researchers also invited participants to a 30-minute one-on-one in-person follow-up to reflect on the focus group and process mapping exercise (see Appendices A and E).

Sova recruited student participants through the main campus contact at each institution via email. Potential participants completed an initial online questionnaire to determine eligibility and to confirm that they read the University of California, Los Angeles Institutional Review Board-approved study information sheet. To participate, students needed to be enrolled or recently enrolled, had to have earned credits at other institutions, and had to have initiated the transfer credit evaluation process at their current institutions. This sample includes some alumni who recently earned a degree. As with institutional ASF participants, Sova invited the students to an in-person focus group (see Appendix F). It began with group guidelines and an individual mapping exercise to prompt reflection and allow them to visualize their journeys with transfer credit evaluation (see Appendices A and F). Students created visual representations of the transfer process,

[9] William R. Doyle, "Effect of Increased Academic Momentum on Transfer Rates: An Application of the Generalized Propensity Score, *Economics of Education Review* 30, no. 1 (2011): 191–200, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2010.08.004; Fink et al, "Measuring STEM Momentum;" Monaghan and Attewell, "Community College Route."

including points such as key steps, offices/administrators with whom they interacted, and tasks to complete. This was followed by a group discussion about students' experiences initiating transfer credit evaluations, their motivations for pursuing those evaluations, their expectations going into the process, the challenges they faced, and the impacts on their academic journeys. Sova then invited students to 30-minute individual interviews via Zoom or phone calls, which dove deeper into the focus group, their educational backgrounds, their current status in the transfer credit evaluation process, their support networks, and their recommendations for administrators (see Appendix G).

Questionnaire items for all participants included background information, such as demographics, basic questions about academic journeys for students, basic questions about institutional roles and roles in the transfer credit evaluation process for institutional ASF, and whether they agree to participate in the study (see Appendices B and C).

FINDINGS

Sova's research revealed that the five institutions share a number of policies and practices, both formal and informal, for evaluating transfer credits. There were, however, substantial variations that confuse and frustrate students moving through these different institutional types, impacting their academic journeys and complicating work processes for staff, faculty, and administrators. In the following sections, we evaluate our findings in four areas: (I) methods for evaluating credits and determining equivalencies, (II) technology and automation, (III) outreach and communication, and (IV) guidance and support.

I. Methods for Evaluating Credits and Determining Equivalencies

Typically, faculty determine credit equivalencies. There were examples at each institution of departments doing this well and in a timely manner. However, this was not the norm. Some departments within some institutions never reply to credit evaluation requests from the advisor, registrar, or student. Some departments change leadership often, which leads to new or even revoked credit evaluations. And some evaluate course credits on a student-by-student basis rather than through institution-wide articulation, giving students mixed messages about which of their credits will transfer and resulting in students with identical situations receiving inconsistent credit determinations.

Typically, only students who are "in the know" — through advisor recommendations or by word of mouth — appeal credit evaluation decisions. Even when successful, waiting on the results of an appeals process can impact degree plans and lengthen time to graduation.

Meanwhile, informal credit evaluations, intended to speed enrollment while students wait for their new institution to review their transcripts, result in duplicated efforts. Students said they wish credit evaluations happened before their first term at their new institution.

Inconsistent policies and procedures in place across systems or institutions can be confusing and serve as barriers to awarding and applying valuable student credits. Some examples include:

- departmental changes to major requirements and admissions criteria late in the admissions process, resulting in delays and inaccuracies in recruiting and admitting transfer students.
- the transferability of courses in a sequence, such as calculus, resulting in lost credits and course repetition, and potentially preventing eligibility for transfer to a four-year institution.
- international students not knowing which credits will transfer, or how to transfer them, limiting their ability to assess the feasibility of studying in the United States and plan accordingly.
- some institutions require transfer students to complete their degrees within two years, with some majors mandating institution-specific courses regardless of the credits that transferred from previous institutions. Students in these majors must overload their schedules each term (e.g., at least 1.5 times more units than the average student) to stay on track.

Sova found wide variations in how long it takes the participating institutions to evaluate transfer credits, ranging from 48 hours to 24 weeks or more. Some spend anywhere from 16 to 20 weeks just verifying graduation and sending transcripts to the receiving institution — a protracted process that must occur before credit evaluation can even begin. Requiring students to further certify general education credits, which is not always noted on transcripts, affects the quality and duration of the credit evaluation process. This lack of clarity and consistency negatively impacts the student experience.

Other variations include:

- different processes for requesting transcripts, including the timing of request, delivery methods, costs, and consistency in delivery/receipt.
- whether the lack of official transcripts prohibits a student from receiving an official admissions decision, meeting with an advisor, or enrolling in classes, etc.
- automatic credit evaluations occur at some institutions, while evaluations must be student-initiated at others. Some institutions do not process any evaluations until they receive all official transcripts and/or standardized test scores.

- allowing manual substitutions and prerequisite overrides, which might be done with good intentions but, without good communication, can result in downstream issues such as students duplicating credits or completing courses out of sequence.

II. Technology and Automation

Staff are excited to automate processes related to sharing transcript data. But their institutions face issues with aging technology and a lack of resources for upgrades, despite the substantial revenue generated by transcript processing fees. Meanwhile, students expressed frustration in regards to transcripts: not intuitively understanding the importance of official transcripts to admission, advising and enrollment processes; the logistical and financial challenge of sending and receiving transcripts from various sources; needing to certify information that is not captured in their transcript to the satisfaction of their new institution; finding transcripts inaccurately documented in new institution's systems; and more.

The five institutions vary in their use of automation and technology to evaluate transfer credits, with some still relying on manual processes despite the availability of digital tools. Some institutions built processes to automate transcript requests and receipt, initial transcript review, and updates from review. This automation results in students receiving initial transcript evaluation within 24-48 hours and full reviews resolved within two weeks. Some institutions provide dynamic checklists for students within their information systems, yet students consistently expressed a need for stronger automated tracking to stay updated on their progress through the evaluation process. Other institutions still use manual "hard-copy" forms, increasing inefficiencies. Transcript request processes also remain inconsistent and cumbersome, creating unnecessary barriers. Although some use electronic transcript systems such as eTranscript California and Parchment, the lack of a common data template results in the need for manual intervention to interpret transcripts. Institutions noted that full participation in eTranscript California with standardized formatting could significantly streamline the process.

Institutions widely recognize the need to expand digital tracking and electronic forms to enhance service for students and staff, yet the role artificial intelligence can play remains largely unexplored. Staff and students acknowledge its potential, particularly in reading transcripts and automating data entry, but have not yet connected AI to immediate process improvements. There is a strong need for education on AI's capabilities, as those engaged in AI discussions may not currently overlap with transfer teams.

III. Outreach and Communication

External communication: Staff and students at all five institutions said they value relationships with close partner institutions, something that is evident from on-campus visits by representatives and other interactions. Staff appreciate staying up-to-date with important transfer information across institutions and students appreciate having direct access to staff who can answer their many questions.

Internal communication: Staff and students also value effective internal communication within their institutions. For example, both groups said staff regularly participate in cross-departmental brainstorming to address unique student cases. Despite acknowledging the highly decentralized nature of most higher education institutions, staff and students viewed this engagement as a strength.

Communication with students: Some institutions use workflow technology and automated articulation processes to streamline transcript management and provide timely responses to students. Others have restructured admissions, credit evaluation, and advising by focusing on specific student groups.

Despite these efforts, student participants noted that haphazard and inconsistent practices across the institutions contribute to a lack of transparency and coordination. For example, students want clear steps and timelines, the ability to track their progress through the process, and to be able to inquire about rationales for why a particular credit was not accepted. Many said they were not even notified when evaluations were completed and/or received no explanation for why credits were denied. Conversely, excessive and uncoordinated institutional messages can overwhelm students and reduce the effectiveness of outreach efforts — usually staff aren't even aware of when and what other departments are communicating to students. Staff and students may also use and interpret terminology differently (words such as articulation, transferability and applicability are commonly used by transfer experts, but they are confusing and opaque to most others), creating confusion and delays. Additionally, transfer data does not always integrate well into receiving institutions' systems, missing opportunities for proactive outreach and advising.

Without better communication and support, some students disengage and do not re-enroll anywhere.

IV. Guidance and Support

Transfer students expressed the need for more transfer-specific and transfer-friendly resources and support. Despite their prior experiences in higher education, these students must still adapt to new systems, procedures, and expectations at their new institutions. Some institutions attempt to ease this transition by offering dedicated resources such as peer mentoring programs, veterans' resource centers, and transfer centers to improve preparedness and address knowledge gaps. Student participants emphasized their great appreciation for campus transfer centers in particular and their wish that these centers be made known to more students earlier on. Students who work in campus offices or have family connections had an easier time navigating these processes, but recognized that most students lack this advantage. Students also consistently asked for intentional and relevant communication, and for institutions to recognize that many transfer students are juniors but cannot register until summer when many class seats are already filled. Siloed departmental approaches and high staff turnover complicate their transition, leading to gaps in institutional knowledge and support.

The level of guidance and support offered to transfer students varies among institutions, including whether advising appointments are mandatory for students and when initial access to advisors becomes available to transfer students. Some students reported meeting with an assigned advisor multiple times a term, while others said they never met with an advisor. Additionally, many of the resources supporting transfer students require them to navigate multiple technology platforms, which can be challenging. These variations can result in transfer students not having access to the courses needed in their first semester.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, Sova recommends a series of actions for institutions to: (I) streamline internal processes, (II) build greater consistency, and (III) provide robust support to transfer students.

I. Streamline Internal Processes

A. Deepen cross-departmental relationships and streamline processes across them.
Given the wide variations in how long credit evaluations take and who performs them, transcript evaluators/credit advisors should work with department leaders and faculty to:

- build a consistent process for credit evaluation within and across departments, develop advisor/evaluator relationships with departments/faculty, and define a college-wide expectation of credit evaluation practices that are equitable for all students.

- create a streamlined process for transcript credit evaluation that provides students the results prior to the student registration period, removes the dependency on student petitions, waivers, and substitutions, and applies articulated courses equitably across all students.
- ensure necessary petition processes are transparent, accessible, and consistently applied, as approved petitions can impact degree plans and time to graduation.

B. Make better use of available technology. Transitioning from paper forms to an all-electronic format, including dropdown menus, will let students monitor application, admission, and credit evaluation processes from start to enrollment. Additionally, it is important to provide transfer students with tailored advising and resources early, and identify areas for support, such as checklists, electronic forms, and progress tracking systems. Implementing statewide data sharing and a transcript data template allows institutions to automate requests for transcripts and automatically upload, evaluate the student's academic data, and capture other relevant student data. Institutions also can automate the initial credit articulation review, allowing courses with existing equivalencies to be directly uploaded into student records while flagging others for departmental review.

C. Leverage the potential of artificial intelligence (AI). Participants were interested in the potential for artificial intelligence to provide significant benefits to the credit evaluation process. Advances in AI are in use around the country, helping institutions to automatically extract course and degree information from transcripts, evaluate credits documented on transcripts, and suggest additional course equivalencies based upon faculty rules.

D. Better understand transfer guarantees. Staff and administrators should familiarize themselves with programs such as the University of California's (UC) Transfer Admission Guarantee and Transfer Admission Planner, and the California State University's (CSU) Transfer Success Pathway and Transfer Planner to learn how they can benefit students and their selection and application process.

II. Build Greater Consistency

A. Scale a consistent transcript data template that is shared through standardized and digitized processes. Create statewide expectations that all transcripts include the following in addition to course completion data: confirmation of credentials earned, certification of IGETC/Cal-GETC or identification of general education areas satisfied for partial completion, and/or confirmation of Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) completion. Then create consistent, statewide expectations for electronic transcript

submission and adapt institutional applications to provide student approval for electronic transcript data sharing. These practices should address: timing of transcript submission, type of transcript, costs, etc. Finally, build student approvals for transcript sharing into college or university applications through opt-out boxes.

B. Create a single source of transfer information for students statewide. Right now, students in California face a confusing array of transfer web sites and programs (e.g., ASSIST, CaliforniaColleges.edu, California College Guidance Initiative, I Can Go to College, UC Transfer Admission Planner, CSU Transfer Planner, and more). A California-wide transfer platform would centralize essential resources, enabling students to develop informed transfer plans.

C. Identify and support potential students who are not yet enrolled. California's higher education systems should develop a strategy for reaching students who aren't enrolling anywhere and assist them in finding the right college.

III. Support Transfer Students

A. Give students the results of their transfer credit evaluations *before* they register. This will reduce the need for waivers and substitutions and will apply articulated courses to students equitably. When waivers and substitutions are necessary, institutions should use processes that are transparent, accessible, and consistently applied, since it can impact students' degree plans and their time to graduation. When credit is not accepted or applied, provide a written rationale as to the reasons and instructions on how to submit an appeal. Consider holding spots for transfer students in major-specific courses that must be taken at the institution.

Overall recommendations include (see Appendix A):

- ensuring major admission requirements are transparent and easy to access within transfer admissions materials.
- granting access to transfer advising and peer mentoring from the time of application, to help students understand the admissions and enrollment process.
- connecting newly admitted students to campus support programs/centers to encourage yield.
- ensuring credit evaluation is complete before registration.
- providing clear information on appeals process and monitor appeals to inform areas where additional curricular alignment/new articulations are needed.
- holding spots for transfers for major courses that are frequently at capacity.
- making available/requiring major-specific advising in the first term of enrollment to ensure accurate course planning.

B. Solicit feedback from students on ways to improve the process. Student focus groups are a good way for institutions to understand and document how their transfer credit evaluation processes impact students' academic journeys. Secret shopper-style activities, where students navigate the process and document the results, can help institutions assess how well their websites guide prospective transfers. Additionally, students can serve as key resources for staff as they create plans for sharing information about credit evaluations, transcript processing, and institutional transfer guarantees.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the successes and challenges in the transfer credit evaluation process across five California public colleges and universities. While the institutions share a commitment to supporting transfer students, inconsistencies in policies, procedures, and communication create unnecessary obstacles that impact students' academic progress and degree completion. Variations in credit evaluation timelines, the use of technology, and institutional resources contribute to confusion and frustration, further emphasizing the need for more transparent and standardized processes.

To improve the transfer experience, institutions can develop more efficient credit evaluation systems, enhance student support services, and prioritize clear, proactive communication. Leveraging automation and artificial intelligence, streamlining transcript evaluation processes, and fostering cross-departmental collaboration can significantly reduce barriers for students. Additionally, a coordinated statewide effort to develop standardized transfer policies, improve articulation agreements, and create a centralized transfer platform would strengthen pathways between community colleges and four-year universities. By adopting these strategies, institutions can increase credit mobility, reduce time-to-degree, and ultimately improve outcomes for transfer students, ensuring that higher education remains an accessible and effective pathway to degree attainment.

Appendix A:
Visualizing the Student Transfer Process

This visualization of the student transfer process highlights the best of what Sova learned during our research. Consider it an aspirational view of the transfer process that can encourage institutions and leaders to consider the gold standard for credit mobility. In addition, this visualization provides a realistic look at promising practices and student barriers observed during our campus visits.

Credit Mobility
Student-Centered Process Mapping

The Student Journey	Recruitment Student Exploration	Application Transfer Admission	Admitted	Transfer Credit Evaluation	Advising	Registration & Enrollment	Progress Towards Graduation
The GOAL — Student-Centered Process	Explore & research transfer options, ask questions. Outreach to students, open houses and info sessions. Provide clear instructions for admission process and credit evaluation. Provide resources for determining transfer credit equivaliencies. Use CSU Transfer Planner and UC TAP to plan pathway. Consider guaranteed options - I CAN (ADT), TAG, & CSU TSP.	Submit CCC, UC, and/or CSU application. Automated transcript and student information data sharing. Verify that application is received and complete. Verify that all prior institutions are identified and submit transcripts from non-automated senders. Provide clear next steps with deadlines and timeline of decision process. Check portal and email regularly and complete all items in the checklist early. Engage with applicants to build interest and connection to institution.	Early notification of admission to students in guaranteed program. Batch rolling admission processing to admit or wait list students. Provide clear notification of admission and next steps regarding credit evaluation. Initial credit evaluation of transcript data automatically received through application trigger or submitted. Monitor portal and email regularly. Submit intent to register. Complete steps for credit evaluation, monitor progress, and advocate for courses. For students submitting intent to register, automate the request for final transcript data.	Publicize a clear process for credit evaluations and advocacy options. Submit intent and required forms. Verify all non-automated transcripts are submitted. Automate the upload and evaluation of student academic data. As transcript data is received, process the transcripts and upload course credits awarded. Through automation, identify non-articulated courses and submit them to dept. for review. Monitor evaluation progress and submit inquiries/appeals to advocate for course credit. Communicate regularly with students through checklists and emails regarding credit evaluation decisions.	Follow checklist for establishing and preparing advising appointments. Advising timeline and process clearly communicated to students. Advisor reviews completed credit evaluations prior to first appointment. Understand credit evaluation outcome and take steps to advocate for reconsiderations. Collaborate with student to assure course repetition is avoided. If something doesn't feel right in a credit eval, say something. Address student appeals or requests prior to the end of registration.	Attend orientation - prepared with questions and copies of transcripts/evaluations. Register for class as soon as registration opens. Provide transfer specific orientations and registration periods. Advocate for acceptance of prerequisite courses, avoid repetition. Provide transfer students the opportunity to enroll with their junior peers prior to incoming freshmen. Monitor credit evaluation process and appeals; adjust course selection appropriately. Follow-up with the assigned major-advisor to track progress.	Regular check in with advisor and tracking steps in portal. If transferring, create a transfer plan and submit necessary paperwork. Explore transfer destinations, visit campus transfer centers. Apply for graduation and register intent to transfer at sending institution. CCCs certify general education as part of the automated transcript data. Certify graduation in a timely way so that transfer records indicate degree earned. Automate the sending of transcripts for students transferring to another IHE.
Timeline	3-12 months prior to application.	**Application for fall enrollment:** CCC: Open Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG): Sept 1-30 CSU/UC: Oct 1 - Nov 30	**Transfer Admission Decisions:** CCC: 7-10 days from app TAG: December 15 CSU/UC: Jan 1 - March 1	**Statement of Intent to Register (SIR):** CCC: N/A TAG: February 1 CSU/UC: April 1 Credit Evaluation Period: 2-5 business days from receipt of transcript data.	**Advising Appointment Availability:** CCC: Within 2 weeks of application. TAG: Within 1 month of SIR received. CSU/UC: Within 1 month of SIR received.	**Transfer Student Registration:** CCC: Aligned with college registration period. TAG and CSU/UC: Aligned with junior registration period and completion of advising appointment.	**Certification of Gen Ed and Degree Completion for generation of final transcript and upload of automated data:** One month after the last day of class.
IN REALITY — Promising Practices	Institutions or departments with clear articulation processes, established relationships between AO and faculty, and expectations have more equitable outcomes for students.	Students found the automated checklists in some portals to be very helpful and supported them to stay on track. Campuses offering peer mentors, transfer centers, veteran centers, etc. help create a sense of belonging for transfer students.	One institution has found success in creating mini-teams of admission, evaluation, and advising staff to serve a cohort of students organized by schools.	Institutions participating in eTranscript CA report more efficient transcript processing and have automated evaluations for big feeders resulting in 24-48 hour evaluation results. The use of workflow management software to process and track articulation and credit evaluation work has proven to create more equitable and timely responses.	Transfer students benefitted when served by advisors specializing on the student's major Advisors could best serve students at institutions where credit evaluations were completed prior to advising and/or orientation sessions.	Institutions who offer transfer specific orientations, at times best for transfer students, and prioritize their enrollment into must have classes send a clearer message that transfer students matter.	Institutions with transfer centers that focus on preparing students to transfer and/or focus on engaging students at their transfer destination promote success and combat the imposter syndrome.
Barriers to Students	The breadth of resources across multiple sites and inconsistent use of resources by institutions prevent students from being well informed.	Common applications and automated transcript sharing currently do not provide common data transmission files and complete student profiles resulting in gaps in student data and inability to fully automate at the receiving institution.	Some system level practices and policies prevent institutions from serving transfer students in a more timely way. Example: timing of release of application data. Students are often faced with making final college decisions without knowing the result of their credit evaluations.	Institutions can take up to 24 weeks to complete credit evaluations. Campuses across the board struggle with inconsistent relationships and credit evaluation processes with academic departments and the inequities that creates for students.	Students are faced with completing multiple manual forms, submitting appeals, requisiting waivers and overrides to compensate for lengthy and inequitable evaluation processes or to even have an evaluation completed.	Transfer students struggle to enroll in their upper-division or major required courses when their registration period is after the direct-entry students and with the new first-year students.	Institutions can take 16-20 weeks to complete degree confirmation, final transcript, and Gen Ed certification.

Key: Student Responsibility | Institutional Action | General Information

Appendix B:
Initial Online Questionnaire for Administrators

Introduction

By filling out this survey, you agree to have read the Study Information Sheet included in the email attachment you received, to have read your rights as a research subject, and to consent to participate in this research study if selected.

Survey Items

1. First Name (free text)
2. Last Name (free text)
3. Email Address (free text)
4. Name of Your Current Institution (free text)
5. Current Job Title & Office/Department (free text)
6. Years of participation in transfer credit evaluation at your institution (free text)
7. Brief description of your current and/or previous role(s) in transfer credit evaluation at your current institution (free text)
8. Race & Ethnicity (free text)
9. Gender (free text)
10. Pronouns (free text)
11. Are you willing to participate in this research study? (Yes/No)
12. Do you have any questions or comments for the research team? (free text)

Conclusion of survey

Thank you for your time! A member of the research team will reach out to you shortly about your eligibility for this research study. Take care.

Appendix C:
Initial Online Questionnaire for Students

Introduction

By filling out this survey, you agree to have read the Study Information Sheet included in the email you received, to have read your rights as a research subject, and to consent to participate in this research study if selected.

Survey Items

1. First Name (free text)
2. Last Name (free text)
3. Email Address (free text)
4. Name of Your Current Institution (free text)
5. Age (free text)
6. Race & Ethnicity (free text)
7. Gender (free text)
8. Pronouns (free text)
9. First Enrollment Term at Current Institution (free text)
10. Most Recent Enrollment Term at Current Institution (free text)
11. Do you consider yourself to be a first-generation college student? (Yes/No)
12. Current intended major (free text)
13. Have you earned credits at one or more institutions other than at your current institution? (Yes/No)
14. If yes, please list all institutions at which you have earned credits (free text)
15. Have you engaged with the transfer credit evaluation process at your current institution to any degree (e.g., initiated, in progress, completed, did not complete, etc.)? (Yes/No)
16. Are you willing to participate in this research study? (Yes/No)
17. Do you have any questions or comments for the research team? (free text)

Conclusion of survey

Thank you for your time! A member of the research team will reach out to you shortly about your eligibility for this research study. Take care.

Appendix D:
Administrative Process Mapping & Focus Group Protocol

Participant Prep Work:

1. A few general questions:
    a. What role do you play in the transcript evaluation process?
    b. What works well? Where might there be opportunities?
2. Bring:
    a. Copies of any forms, brochures, etc. used
    b. Policies related to transcript evaluation
3. What data do you collect around credit evaluation?
4. Are there any interesting student cases that might inform or enhance the discussion?
5. What feedback (positive, negative, neutral) have you heard from students about transfer credit evaluation at your institution, if any?

Opening Discussions:

1. Why was your institution interested?
2. Who are the key players?
    a. Consider who receives course information, communicates with students, and works with faculty.
    b. Each participant explains their role.
    c. Who is missing?
3. How do the various departments/people communicate with one another during the process?
4. What percent (or other measure) of decision making is owned by the faculty? What pieces do they cede control over? How does institutional culture influence that?

Process Mapping

	Recruiting Exploring Phase	Apply to Transfer	Admitted	Transfer Credit Evaluation	Advising	Registration Enrollment
Process						
Time to Process						
Student Responsibilities						
Student Contact						
Opportunities						
Admin/Staff Contact						
Official Forms Internal Communication.						

Mapping Questions for Process:

1. For each, identify who is responsible (position/office).
2. Identify all steps in the process of transcript evaluation and processing of credits.
3. Identify order and dependencies of all steps. Are there any specific dependencies that stop the flow?
4. How are course credits for transfer work identified? Is it institution-initiated or student-initiated?
5. Is this what you expected it would look like based on your perspective?
6. What if a course doesn't have a current equivalency? (process)
7. Do you send and receive electronic transcripts? Do you use California's eTran?

Mapping Questions for Time It Takes at Each Step

1. How much time does it take for each major process area?
2. Identify areas where things get bogged down.
3. Identify areas that are efficient, productive.

Mapping Questions for Establishing Credit Equivalencies

1. What data and information are used to evaluate the credit? Who/which office ultimately has the authority to make the decision?
2. When deciding on equivalency, do you seek to understand if faculty are using data on student success (rather than assumptions about student preparedness) to inform decision-making?
3. Do you have any kind of rubric or standards around credit evaluation that are designed to ensure decisions are objective?
4. What happens if a student challenges a course?
5. When a course is initially evaluated or a student appeals a decision, do decisions apply only to the individual student or all future students?
6. Where are decisions documented? How are decisions communicated to students?
7. Does any part of the process differ based on the course that requires evaluation (e.g., upper- vs. lower-level courses, core courses vs. major courses, military or non-academic vs. academic credits)?

Mapping Questions for Student Responsibilities

1. What are the student's responsibilities in the credit equivalency process?
2. Where is there direct interaction between students and faculty/staff?

Mapping Questions for Contact with Students

1. How do students know credit evaluation is an option? How is it communicated and when?
2. How about dual enrollment students who come to you directly?
3. How do you communicate with students during the process? At the end of the process?
4. Where are decisions documented? How are the decisions communicated to the student? Do they receive clear rationale for any credits not applied to degree completion?
5. How do you reach out to students with potential credits that have not been submitted for evaluation (e.g., if an advisor becomes aware of a student with credit not evaluated)?

Mapping Questions for Opportunities

1. What are challenges for you?
2. What are opportunities for improvement (e.g., use of technology to bring improvements, AI)?
3. What works really well?
4. Do you believe this process is fair and produces equitable student outcomes?
5. Are there ways in which this process could be more accessible to students (e.g., increased student awareness, submission of credits, etc.)?
6. What credit mobility policies/rules are in place? Do you perceive any barriers stemming from accreditation? (Are they effective or barriers?)

Follow-up Discussions

1. What data do you review as part of your operations plan? How does that data impact what you do?
    a. Number of students entering your institutions with prior credits?
    b. Number of students evaluated for credits?
    c. Number of students awarded credits?
    d. Assessment of impact of Cal-GETC and ADT? (Is it working?)
    e. Percent of credits awarded based on amount submitted - and breakdown of awarded credits for degree-applicable credits vs elective credits?
    f. Demographic breakdown by race, age, income, program, sending institutions?
2. Reflective Questions:
    a. What was difficult to answer and why?
    b. What was not captured?
    c. What impact did this exercise have on you/your department?
    d. Are there realistic opportunities for improvement?

Appendix E:
Administrative/Staff 1:1 Interview Protocol

Questions

1. Based on our group discussions, is there anything that you want to follow-up on with me?
2. What is a key takeaway for you?
3. What is a question you still have for the team?
4. What is an opportunity you would like to see your team embrace?
5. Is there anything else you wish to share?

Appendix F:
Student Mapping Exercise & Focus Group Protocol

Welcome & Introductions

1. Name
2. Pronouns
3. Number of years at institution
4. Previous institution type(s)
5. Current major/field of study

Ground Rules/Expectations

- Confidentiality
- Recording
    - To capture the conversation, not to identify anyone
- Conversation flow/making room for everyone
    - Okay not to respond every time or to abstain from specific topics you're not comfortable with
    - Might call on someone we haven't heard from in a while
- No right or wrong answers
- Be respectful even if you disagree–we want to hear a wide range of thoughts and experiences
- Give opportunity for students to add additional group expectations

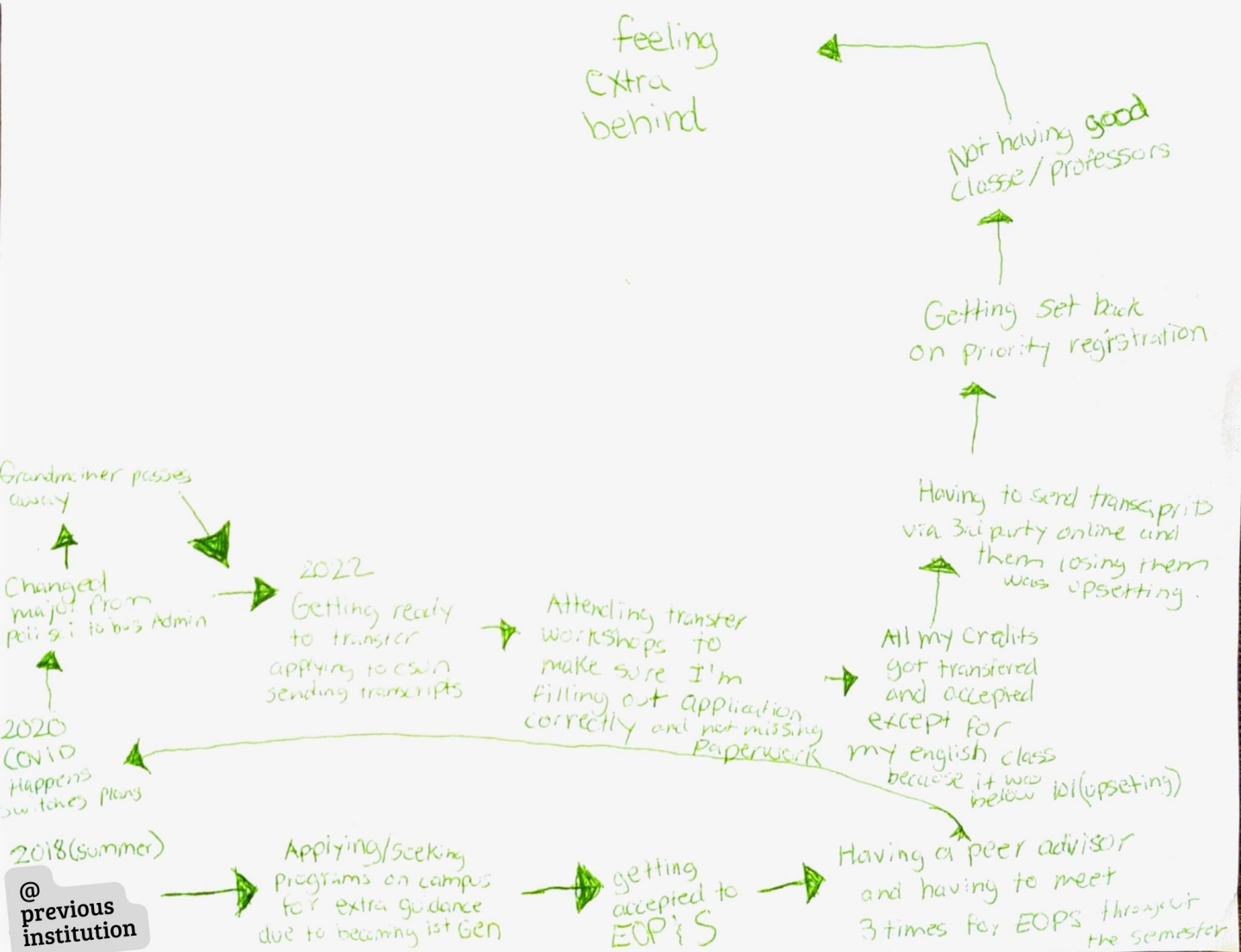
Individual Mapping Activity

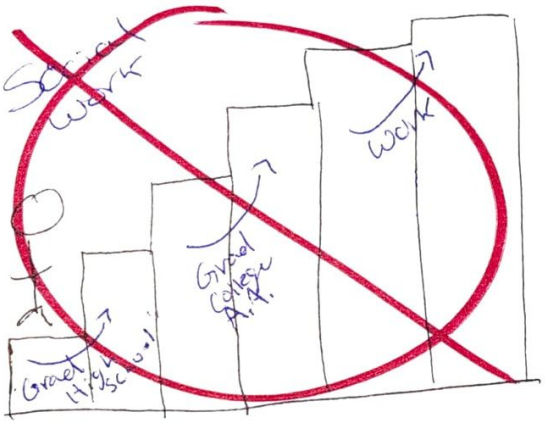
- Before we open up for a group discussion about the transfer credit evaluation process, I'm curious how you would visualize your individual journey with the process. Could you draw a map, timeline, or some other visual representation of your journey with the process? You can be as simple or creative as you'd like.
    - Prompts include: key steps and phases of the process as you experienced them, offices/administrators/students you interacted with, tasks you had to complete, highlights, communications or notifications you received, turning points, major questions you had, etc.
    - Guiding questions:
        - What are some of the memorable moments related to your experience with the process?
        - What else was going on in your life while you were seeking credit transfer?

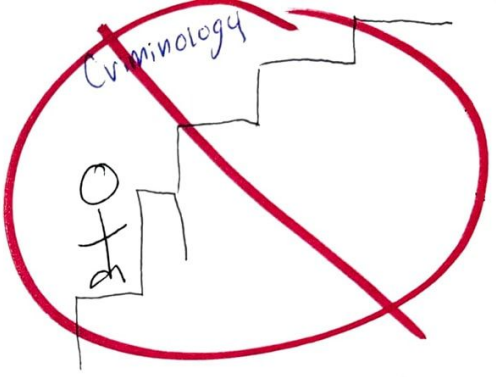
- How did what was going on with the process affect your academics?
- How did you feel at the various stages of the process?
- If you're still in the middle of the process, what steps do you think lie ahead for you?

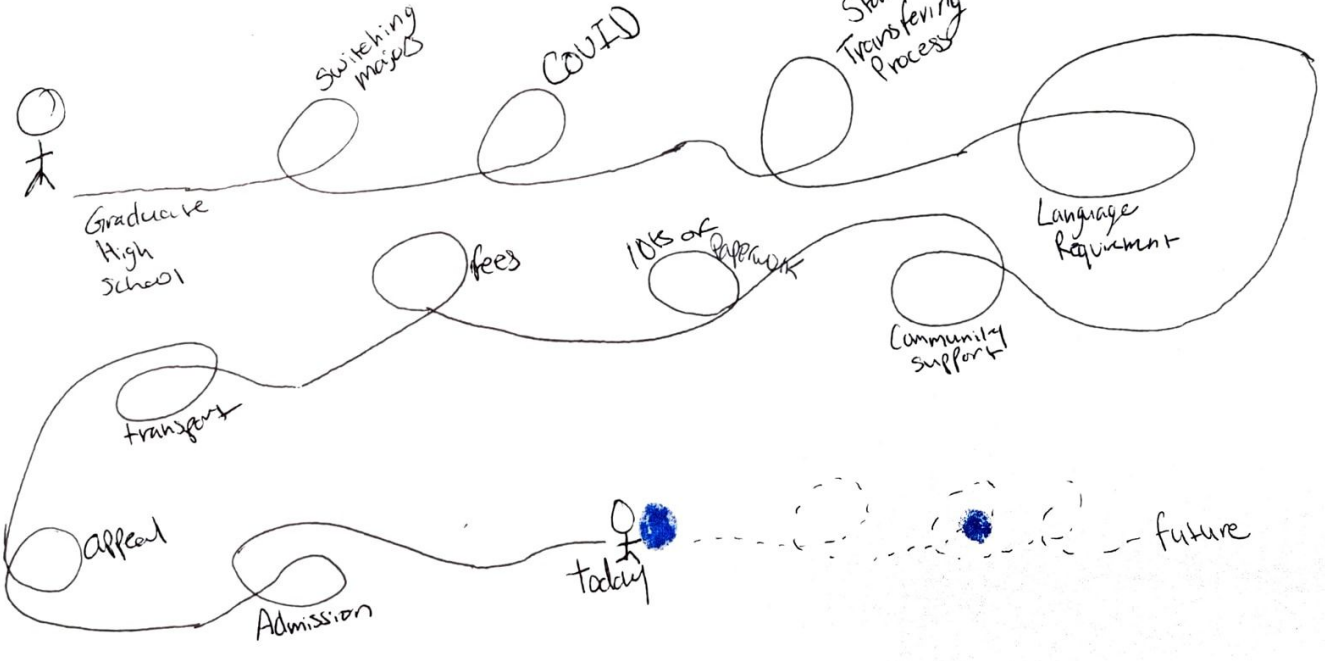
Questions

1. What are three words or phrases that come to mind when you think about your experience with the transfer credit evaluation process?
2. What made you interested in participating in this focus group today about the transfer credit evaluation process?
3. Think back to when you first learned about the transfer credit evaluation process here. How/where did you hear about it?
4. What were your biggest questions at the beginning? Were you worried about anything? Did you know who/where to reach out to with your questions? Did you know anyone who had gone through the process?
5. Why did you decide to pursue transfer credit evaluation? Why did you want/need it?
6. Was your experience what you expected it would be like?
7. What did you find challenging about the process?
8. How important would you say this process is/was to your academic journey? Why?
9. Were there are any sacrifices you had to make in terms of time, money, effort, etc. throughout the process? How did you feel about them, and how much did they impact you?
10. This is the transfer credit evaluation process according to administrators' process mapping/websites/etc. Do you believe this accurately reflects the process as you experienced it? How so or why not?
11. What do you think worked well in terms of the process?
12. What could have worked better? Are there any changes you would suggest?
13. What do you wish administrators/the institution would learn from your experience with this process?
14. Of all the things we discussed today, what was the most important to you?


feeling extra behind
Not having good classe / professors
Getting set back on priority registration
Having to send transcripts via 3rd party online and them losing them was upsetting.
All my credits got transfered and accepted except for my english class because it was below 101(upseting)
Having a peer advisor and having to meet 3 times for EOPS throughout the semester
getting accepted to EOP's
Applying/seeking programs on campus for extra guidance due to becoming 1st Gen
2018(summer)
@ previous institution
2020 COVID Happens switches plans
Changed major from psi si to bus Admin
Grandmother passes away
2022 Getting ready to transfer applying to csun sending transcripts
Attending transfer workshops to make sure I'm filling out application correctly and not missing paperwork


Social Work
Work
Graduate College A.A.
Graduate High School


Criminology


Graduate High school
switching majors
COVID
Start Transfering Process
Language Requirment
Community support
lots of paperwork
fees
transfer
appeal
Admission
today
future

4yrs

high school

① AP (ENV. SCIENCE)

previous institution 1

1.5yrs

? CLASSES

DIFFERENT CREDIT SYSTEM

③ CLASSES

previous institution 2

0.5yrs

1.5yrs

UC

④ CLASSES FALL (18.0)

⑤ CLASSES SPRING (21.0)

⑤ CLASSES WINTER (20.0)

③ CLASSES ~~SPRING~~ SUMMER (16.0)

17 PETITIONS!!

Appendix G:
Student 1:1 Interview Protocol

Background at Current Institution & Previous Institution(s)

1. How important was it for you and/or your family to go to college? What surprised you about college?
   [if "not important"] Was your family supportive of you going to college? Why or why not?
   [alt] What were some of the expectations you had about college before you started? Where did those expectations come from?
   [alt] What was one thing that pleasantly surprised you about college? What was one thing that surprised you in a negative way?
2. Why did you decide to enroll at/transfer to [Institution]? Why did you decide to enroll at [Institution] when you did?
   [alt] What else was going on in your life at the time?
   [alt] Did anyone help you with this decision or serve as an influence?
3. What were your academic goals when you first came to [Institution]? What's stayed the same, and what's changed?

Introduction to the Transfer Credit Evaluation Process

1. What were your expectations at the beginning of the process? How long did you think it would take? Did you think it would go smoothly? Did you anticipate any hurdles?
2. Follow-up on things specifically mentioned during the focus group or in their map.

Navigation of the Process

1. What is your current/most updated status, in relation to the process?
   [alt] Are you still waiting for anything, in relation to the process? If so, what?
   [if 'unsure'] What are you unsure about at this point in the process? Do you know who to check in with for more information or next steps?
2. What offices and administrators did you interact with throughout this process? How did you feel about your interactions with them?
   [alt] Did you feel supported?
3. Had you interacted with them or others before this process?
   [alt] Are there any other processes or policies that have caused you some difficulty since enrolling here?

4. What did you find most challenging about the process? Were there particular things about your specific situation that might have made it more challenging than for others?
   [alt] Is there a specific difficult situation/scenario that comes to mind when you think about this process?
   [if 'nothing'] Are there any challenges you've heard other students mention in relation to this process, or challenges mentioned by others in the focus group that struck you for any reasons?
   [alt] What do you think other students might find challenging about the process?
5. How did you deal with and navigate those challenges? Were there any resources that you found helpful?
   [alt] Did you consult with or confide in any others about your experiences?
6. Follow-up on things specifically mentioned during the focus group or in their map.

Reflection

1. What do you wish administrators/the institution would know about your experience with this process?
   [alt] What would you suggest they change about the process to make it better for students to navigate?
   [alt] What do you think administrators should change about the process, to make the process less difficult for students?
2. If you could give other students advice about this process, what would you tell them?
3. Follow-up on things specifically mentioned during the focus group or in their map.
4. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not touched on yet?