

Internationalization and the (American) Transfer Student

In preparing for our 2012 AIEA panel, on “Transfer Students: Many Degrees of Internationalization,” I was reminded of how many facets there are under the “international education” rubric – and most were represented on the conference program. Indeed, a former AIEA President, John Hudzik, has recently written that “internationalization is undergoing a paradigm shift in scale and scope, rather than a fundamental shift in the basic concept.”¹ I hope that this panel increases our appreciation of both scale and scope of a few of these “internationalization” challenges.

In contexts far away from AIEA, I’ve found that many assume international education to mean study abroad, for American students wanting to see the world. Aha, I respond, it’s much much more than that! It can cover setting up American campuses in other countries, and other subtopics such as learning about, and competing with, other countries’ education systems. Receiving and sending faculty visitors are two more. For many American institutions a major consideration is their ability to recruit (and educate) international students. My own career has been focused on improving international exposure for the vast majority of American students who are not able to study abroad but whose lives will be increasingly impacted by the cultures, economies, and politics of other countries.

Our panel presentations focused on educational opportunities in the United States, for international students and for American students. A very significant number of American students are now beginning their education at a (less expensive) community college, planning to complete their undergraduate work at a four-year institution. International students can do the same, and my fellow panelists discussed plans for facilitating that.

The focus of my presentation was the domestic, or “native,” North American student who begins undergraduate work at a community college and transfers to a four year institution to complete the baccalaureate. In this scenario, the specific issue that has worried me arose from research findings in an earlier project, when I learned that students transferring from community colleges might be exempted from internationally-oriented baccalaureate requirements such as foreign language training.² So I have been exploring a little further whether the increasing numbers of transfer students are fully benefiting from efforts to internationalize curriculum at four-year institutions. It seems likely that more research is needed on ways to facilitate better international competence for transfer students.

Methodology

To get a few more glimpses of the realities related to this question, I sent a brief questionnaire to contacts at some 45 four-year institutions (i.e., those receiving transfer students) and twelve community colleges. Some of the contacts I had met at an April 2010 research

¹ John K. Hudzik, “More Action, Not Just Talk, on Internationalization” (electronic *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 27, 2012)

² That U.S. Department of Education-funded research focused on internationalization in teacher education programs. The report, *To Leave No Teacher Behind: Building International Competence into the Undergraduate Training of K-12 Teachers*, is available at, www.internationaledadvice.org.

workshop organized by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) and most of the others are at institutions where I had conducted interviews for earlier research. Indeed, of my previous research contacts, I sent the request only to people at those 27 institutions where I had learned about significant numbers of transfer students nearly ten years ago. Six messages were intercepted by the Mailer Demon; 30 replied, from 16 states plus DC, most with very informative comments. Several supplied links to websites that have further relevant information. A table showing their responses is attached.

As background information sources, in addition to numerous articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Change*, and *Inside Higher Education* in recent years, I might note the active listservs for NACADA's transfer student advisors and for advisors in community colleges. Interestingly NACADA is currently updating its publication on advising transfer students; like the other articles I've seen, the 2004 edition³ has little if any mention of international education issues, and the provisional table of contents for the coming edition gives little reason to expect the kind of change we international educators would hope for, even though in recent years NACADA has been developing more interest in "international" (including a new listserv for study abroad advisors). Electronic newsletters from other organizations working on the transfer issue – the Lumina Foundation, and Columbia's Community College Research Center (CCRC), for example – similarly seem to devote no attention to international education, with possible exceptions of comparisons with other countries' educational systems and productivity. So my few questions are but a small start in a field that may need more attention.

The Student Transfer Population

My first question was simply what estimated percentage of the institution's undergraduates are transfers – or, for community colleges, what proportion is on a track preparing for transfer. On the receiving side (the four-year institutions), the estimates are low (5% or less) for the (few) responding private institutions; in fact I was told at one private university that most of their transfers are from other four-year institutions (described by some as "horizontal" transfers). The situation is very different however for public four-year institutions, where I heard of rates up to 60% or more of the undergraduate student body. Most respondents reported between 20% and 50% of their undergraduate student body to be transfer students, and other data indicate that they are mostly "vertical" – i.e., from feeder community colleges – amounting to a very large number of students. The responding institutions range in size from about 2,000 to over 30,000 undergraduates, so for a 20,000 undergraduate student body at a four-year institution, if 30% of students are transfers then 6,000 students would be involved. The rates may be higher in some fields – indeed, for my research on teacher education I heard some estimates of 75% or more.

In the last few years the higher education press has been reporting increased numbers of students starting their undergraduate studies at community colleges and a variety of reasons for doing so, among them finances and proximity to home; first generation students, sometimes "at risk," are more likely to choose this path to the baccalaureate. So it is not surprising that more than 50% of students at the responding community colleges may be planning to transfer to four-

³ Thomas J. Kerr, Margaret C. King, and Thomas J. Grites, editors, *Advising Transfer Students: Issues and Strategies* (NACADA Monograph Series, Number 12, 2004).

year institutions. An estimated 14 million students are enrolled in community colleges, and about 60% (more than 8 million) are in credit-bearing programs.⁴ If half of all the community college enrollees are hoping to transfer, the transfer number would be around 7 million; if half of the credit-bearing course enrollees want to transfer, the number (4 million) is still a very substantial segment of the American postsecondary education landscape. Given such numbers, it is hardly surprising that the higher education community has been increasing its attention to regularizing transfer procedures.

Furthermore, because transfer conditions can be related to completion rate issues,⁵ administrators in both community colleges and four-year institutions are giving this serious attention, developing statewide (and other) policies to facilitate transfer and removing perceived barriers. As one admissions expert noted in 2010, “When we don’t look at the transfer experience, we’re really in trouble.”⁶ A recent report implicitly carried this point a little further, reporting that a third of all undergraduates attend more than one institution before completing a degree⁷-- and this estimate explicitly excludes the student who earns an Associate degree before transferring, so it is a very low estimate of the entire transfer student population. Even though half of the community college student population may not eventually transfer, international educators – SIOs (Senior International Officers) – at both sending and receiving institutions should be part of the effort to improve communication about transfer opportunities, conditions, and procedures.

Program Articulation

“Articulation” in higher education is a phrase that I first heard many years ago, though initially it seemed to be applied to varieties of degrees and certificates within an institution. A report by the Massachusetts Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group cites state-wide efforts to improve community college to four-year institution transfers in Florida beginning in 1971, and in Massachusetts later that decade.⁸ Hawaii has also been in the vanguard of states working on coordination and rationalization of institutional curricula state-wide. Jumping ahead to the early stages of my thinking about this project, I googled “articulation agreements” and got nearly 5 million hits! The Massachusetts report cites 2001 data from the Education Commission of the States on types of articulation policy, among them: legislation (30 states), cooperative agreements between institutions (40 states), transfer data reporting (33 states), incentives and rewards (18 states), and statewide transfer guides (26 states). Clearly, a much narrower approach was needed for this preliminary and small-scale project of mine, so – as indicated earlier – I simply asked these few relevant questions of knowledgeable people at representative institutions.

My second question therefore was whether the respondents’ institutions have articulation agreements that govern, and guide, the transfer process. For this modest project, 16 four-year

⁴ According to “Fast Facts” at www.nche.aacc.org, although other AACC data give somewhat lower estimates.

⁵ A 2006 article in *Change* (William R. Coyle, “Community College Transfers and College Graduation: Whose Choices Matter Most?”, May/June, pp. 56-58) showed a clear relation between baccalaureate completion and number of credits accepted for transfer.

⁶ Alfred Hererra, UCLA, quoted by Eric Hoover, in “How to Build a ‘Transfer-Receptive’ Culture” (electronic *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 27, 2010)

⁷ Mitch Smith, “Invisible Transfer Students” (*Inside Higher Ed*, February 28, 2012).

⁸ Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group, Final Report (June 2008) at <http://www.mass.edu/library/ctagIII.asp>.

institutions, out of the total of 20 respondents, reported having articulation agreements. The average number per (reporting) institution is nearly 90; the largest number reported, for a single four year institution, is 500. All ten of the community colleges have articulation agreements, and for those that provided numbers the average per institution is about 45.

In addition to the incidents cited above, “articulation agreements” may come in even more varieties. Sometimes the agreements are governed by a state-mandated template. Many actual agreements are institution-to-institution, sometimes they are between the departments of two institutions, and I even heard of agreements between individual faculty members. The responses to my follow-up question about a template for the agreements gave a variety of information, most often not exactly answering the question. Few reported working from a template, and those that did indicated that its applicability was limited, essentially agreeing with the respondent who described articulation agreements generally as “largely ceremonial.” The websites to which I was referred more usually offer instructions for the potential transfer student, rather than the actual agreements. The potential transferee (and parents) may find lists of courses that are transferable and/or meet the general education requirements of the receiving institution. Indeed, one of the community colleges I heard from categorizes its agreements under four headings: “course-by-course,” “general education requirements course by course,” “general education block agreement,” and “major specific agreement.” The international educators’ inquiries could be whether the agreements, website instructions, and commonly-agreed-to course requirements specify international content, and, if so, what the internationally-oriented requirements may be.

Or is international exposure inadvertently de-emphasized for the transfer student? A California report from 2009 compares transfer requirements for the California State University (CSU) system and the University of California (UC) system on several dimensions, one of them being foreign language; the good news, of course, is that foreign language is mentioned. However, the more specific information is mixed: the UC system has a foreign language admission requirement, and the CSU system, which receives more transfer students, does not – or did not when the report was prepared.⁹ The higher education press has reported many developments related to transfer issues in California since then, and (as in many states) the conditions continue to be in flux. Are SIOs following this?

While institutions respond to pressure to facilitate student transfer, international elements may be getting a bit more attention in the transfer process than they did 10 years ago. That the NACADA activity mentioned above, as well as the number of transfer-oriented websites and web pages,¹⁰ and the more detailed information on them, have been steadily increasing in recent years was confirmed by commentary from the respondents to my questions. All indications are that the requirements of the receiving (four-year) institution are expected to govern the process, and that exceptions, or waivers, require special committee review. Thus the existence of internationally-oriented requirements at the four-year institutions should be key. Many websites provide fairly precise information about the general education requirements that the student must meet –

⁹ Colleen Moore, Nancy Shulock, and Cristy Jensen, *Crafting A Student-Centered Transfer Process in California: Lessons from Other States*, Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy, California State University Sacramento, 2009; page 6.

¹⁰ New Jersey’s www.njtransfer.org is an example of this; Florida’s www.FACTS.org is another.

requirements agreed upon by the community college and the four-year institution. In some instances, when community colleges do not offer courses that can meet the requirements, waivers are requested in the admission process and usually students are expected to fill whatever the gaps may be after the transfer. One hopes that the requirements are not watered down by the four-year institution to make transfer more feasible for nearby community college students; this may be another point on which SIO attention is needed.

Most of the articulation agreements that I've learned about – and sometimes even state laws – specify that a completed Associate degree will be accepted as meeting admission requirements (although other factors, such as grade point average, may actually determine the final admission decision). The four year institution is likely to accept the community college's general education requirements as fully meeting its own general education requirements. Yet... what if the Associate degree's general education requirements include no international components?

Another complication is that many students decide to transfer before completing their Associate degree, so this is where the course-by-course equivalency information becomes important – probably requiring hours of study and discussion among “cooperating” faculty and staff at each institution. Are international education specialists at participating institutions included in these discussions and decisions? One might assume not, although they might have contributed indirectly at a prior stage by helping the relevant faculty strengthen their international perspectives with travel and other professional development grants.

“International” Course Requirements

In my earlier interviews, for the teacher education research project nearly ten years ago, I asked a series of 20 questions about elements of the student experience that might contribute to “internationalization.” Among them, the two most salient about the curriculum were the existence of (1) a foreign language requirement and (2) a required general education course on a non-U.S. topic. These were the clear candidates for inclusion in my current inquiry.

As the attached table shows, fifteen of the 20 four-year institution respondents reported some kind of foreign language requirement. The proportion is somewhat lower than what I learned in the earlier research,¹¹ and a little higher than the 2003 data reported by the American Council on Education,¹² but the differences may not be significant because the numbers are so small for this project. However, as in my earlier interviews, I was reminded that there are many kinds of foreign language requirements and that there are almost as many ways of getting around them. At some institutions, the requirement is for admission purposes, to be met preferably at the secondary level, while others expect a minimum number of postsecondary semesters in the same language. Some four-year institutions require the foreign language study for the B.A., but not for the B. S., and there are often similar distinctions for the Associate of Arts (A.A.) or Associate of Science (A.S.) degrees conferred by community colleges. And of course some majors may require more than the minimum number of semesters in foreign language. In all instances when a foreign

¹¹ *To Leave No Teacher Behind...*, p. 25.

¹² Laura Siaya and Fred M. Hayward, *Mapping Internationalization on U. S. Campuses* (American Council on Education, Washington, DC, 2003), page 103.

language requirement was reported for a four-year institution, the requirement applied as well to transfer students. [Did any mention measuring foreign language competence to meet transfer requirements? No, although one respondent did refer to “courses that demonstrate competency.”]

On the other hand, less than half of the community colleges reported having a foreign language requirement (of any kind), and only one seems to require it for all students (and, at that, it is only for students on the liberal arts track). Checking the websites of a few community colleges (not necessarily the actual respondents to my questions), it was clear that some do not have the resources to offer a coherent set of foreign language courses. What is a student at such a college to do when the nearest, or most appropriate, four-year institution has a language requirement? Perhaps the requisite courses can be taken elsewhere, but one can imagine that motivation would have to be very strong to do so. A participant at a 2010 AIEA session for community colleges commented that if the nearby four-year institution lowered its language requirements, foreign language course enrollments would fall at the community college. This may be yet another realm where SIOs (and others) at four-year institutions could stimulate development of stronger foreign language instruction (more, or some, offerings and/or a greater variety of languages) at nearby community colleges.

Several respondents replied that although they do not have a foreign language requirement, instruction is offered; one reported a “languages and cultures” requirement that can be met in a variety of alternative ways, including six credit hours of courses with a “Global Awareness...or Cultural Diversity in the U.S....designation,” or completion of two sequential semesters in a current computer language. Some of the respondents, at both two-year and four-year institutions, who reported no foreign language requirement did note, however, that the general education humanities requirement – usually several courses – could include foreign language, if the student wished. What, or who, could encourage the student to so wish? An advisor?

Moving on to the question about a general education requirement of at least one course on an area outside the United States, the situations revealed by the responses are also a little muddled. A few respondents did not understand that the question referred to the substance of the course, rather than the location of its presentation! Many four year institutions have a requirement of at least one “Diversity and Global Studies” course – is that clearly “non-U.S.”? Or does it simply indicate some comparative elements in an essentially U.S. course about diversity? Occasionally an accompanying narrative gave an answer. Thirteen of the responding four-year institutions do seem to require at least one non-U.S. course, such as world history or religions of the world, for some or all programs, as do seven of the ten community colleges. One four-year institution appears to require several! Again, the proportion is roughly similar to the findings of my earlier research on teacher education¹³ and not very different from the American Council on Education data from 2003.¹⁴ The good news is that, as for foreign language study, all of these requirements are said to exist for the transfer students as well.

Or do they? As noted earlier, if a student receives an A.A. from a community college that does not have a foreign language and/or non-U.S. general education requirement, and state law

¹³ *To Leave No Teacher Behind...*, pp 20-22.

¹⁴ Siaya and Hayward, *Mapping...*, page 104.

says that the A.A. meets the admission requirements of four-year institutions which nonetheless do have these requirements for “native” students, the state law seemingly trumps the individual institution requirements and the A.A. recipient can transfer with no more general education courses required; responses to my questions indicated that this really can happen. Furthermore, seven four-year institutions, and three of the community colleges, do not require a non-U.S. general education course – a situation somewhat harder to understand than the numbers for non-existence of a foreign language requirement. And of the four-year institutions, two had neither a foreign language requirement nor a non-U.S. general education requirement.

A third question asked about general education requirements in my earlier research was whether the institution had one or more required courses with “international” or comparative modules. This question might have gotten a few more positive responses in this little survey, but a review of some selected course lists revealed that even this option is lacking at some community colleges. Again, the transfer student may be disadvantaged in getting sufficiently prepared for work in the much larger world.

Returning to my initial question about whether research is needed on ways to facilitate better international exposure for transfer students, the answer seems to be yes – but perhaps the question is related primarily to the four-year institutions’ requirements for incoming students. Still no foreign language requirement? And no general education requirement for at least one non-U.S. course? Again, one hopes that SIOs and their colleagues – at both two-year and four-year institutions – can put development of these course requirements on their agendas, and hopefully, these kinds of wrinkles can be worked out, thereby strengthening the students’ world-wise education.

Advising

My final question for this little survey was whether advising staff at the institutions – four-year and community colleges – receive training about the importance, relevance, and feasibility of including internationally oriented courses in students’ curricula. Are students’ academic advisors trained to be fully aware of students’ needs as they enter our increasingly globalized economy? A few replied affirmatively but made clear that the training was related only to study abroad options. Another wrote, “It seems unnecessary to me because who in their right mind could disagree?” Realistically, I have counted both of these as negatives: my earlier research interviews with advisors indicated that working out ways to expose students to other languages and cultures is unlikely to be high priority, particularly for majors with many requirements and few electives, such as education and business.

It was also clear in my earlier research that advisors, and even admissions officers, could use help in planning integration of internationally-oriented choices with general education requirements. For this survey, one respondent commented that the advisors’ training must center on degree requirements; another noted that although advisors may well have up-to-date information about international options, whether and how they pass it on to students is hard to measure; several, as noted above, thought (hoped?) that advisors would have international competence in mind without specific training. So it is not surprising that the data in the attached

table show that little more than a quarter of the respondents at four-year institutions reported training on international options for advisors – and at the responding community colleges it is only 10% (i.e., only one of the ten reporting institutions).

On January 25 of this year *Inside Higher Ed* reported on its latest survey of chief academic officers. Among its many questions were several that seem quite relevant to this inquiry. One was a rating of institutions' effectiveness in providing student resources and services; only 36% considered their institutions to be very effective. Academic support services did not rate much better, still at less than 40%. Similarly, only 37% rated their institutions very effective in offering support services, such as advising, to undergraduates. [SIO involvement to strengthen advising could surely help here!] Looking ahead, nearly 60% of the chief academic officers feel that assuring that their programs prepare students to become engaged citizens is very important. And fortunately less than a quarter of them found that major damage to student academic support services has been done by recent budget cuts,¹⁵ so the resources should be available for improved advising. The IHE findings would seem to corroborate information in a 2010 Minnesota report on a student survey which found that 40% of transferring students had not sought advice, seemingly from either the sending or receiving institution.¹⁶ Indeed, a June 2011 presentation by George Mason's dean of admissions, Andrew Flagel, emphasized the diversity of transfer students, and the challenges of advising students who surely cannot be assumed to be poor, low-achieving, and unlikely to graduate.¹⁷ Strengthening the resources needed to reach this large cohort of students with relevant and timely advice should interest the international education community.

Because my earlier research, on internationalizing teacher education, indicated that most of the advising of first- and second-year students is done by advising staff, rather than faculty, the question for this project was appropriately directed to the advising staff at most respondent institutions. The earlier research revealed several findings that could also be relevant for this project:¹⁸

- that strengthening advising systems was the most recommended strategy to improve students' international exposure,
- that 70% of the respondents said that advisors are not sufficiently trained with respect to the international options for students, and
- that some 85 % of the interviewees felt that improved advising could make a difference in the campus internationalization process.

So (again) here is an important element in the student experience for SIOs – at community colleges and at four-year institutions – to work on. Well-trained advisors, cognizant of the increasing importance of international competence for the future workforce, can – and should – steer students to internationally-oriented courses within the more general prescribed framework

¹⁵ Kenneth Green, with Scott Jaschik and Doug Lederman, *The 2011-12 Inside Higher Ed Survey of College & University Chief Academic Officers* (www.insidehighered.com), January 25, 2012), pages 17-20.

¹⁶ Minnesota State College Student Association, Minnesota State University Student Association, *Student Transfer Survey Report*, May 2010, page 11.

¹⁷ Eric Hoover, "The Complexity of Counseling Transfer Students" (electronic *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 1, 2011).

¹⁸ To Leave No Teacher Behind..., pp 15-18.

even if the relevant transfer policy does not so specify or if the receiving four-year institution does not require foreign language training or even non-U.S. courses. Indeed, one (current) respondent wrote that while his institution has not been training advisors about the importance of such coursework (“although we should”), they have been working to have more courses qualify to meet a cultural diversity requirement. Perhaps more demand for foreign language and non-U.S. courses could lead to further strengthening for these parts of the curriculum.

As noted earlier, research has shown that transfer conditions can be related to degree completion. Let me stretch this line a little further. At a panel (was it at AIEA, or NAFSA, or perhaps the Inter-Agency Language Roundtable?) a few years ago I heard about research on a small cohort of at-risk undergraduates who had been encouraged to participate in study abroad programs. Their degree completion rates were better than average! A larger scale project, the Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Research Initiative (GLOSSARI), completed in 2010, produced similar findings.¹⁹ Is it possible that improved advising about international options and exposure for community college and transfer students could also contribute to improved completion rates?

One of my concerns about the international education community has been its sometime obliviousness to issues of great concern in the larger postsecondary community. With funding sources increasingly difficult to find, making such connections would seem ever more important, and both these large-scale issues need attention. Returning to John Hudzik’s recent piece in the *Chronicle*, “internationalization” must be integrated into campus curriculum, including the transfer conditions that affect so many students, and not simply treated as another “add on” – at both two-year and four-year institutions. Completion rates (however defined) are a big issue and a large number of transfer students may be missing out on international exposure; perhaps international educators, and well-trained advisors, can contribute to improvement in both.

Recommendations

1. Attention to the training of advising (and admissions) staff in both the importance of international exposure of all sorts (i.e., home-campus curriculum as well as study abroad) and ways to work international content into current programs, in both community colleges and four-year institutions.
2. More research, with much larger and more representative samples, on the role(s) (or absence) of international components in the procedures for transfer between community colleges and four-year institutions, with a view to formulating cost-effective recommendations.
3. Development of more foreign language training and other internationally-oriented courses in general education programs at community colleges – encouraged by outside grant programs, such as Title VI, and/or by the outreach programs of four-year institutions.

¹⁹ www.GLOSSARI.uga.edu.

The Transfer Student and Curriculum Internationalization

	Four-Year Institutions	Community Colleges
	<i>N=20*</i>	<i>N=10**</i>
Percentage of students who transfer (est.)		
At private institutions	1% - 5%	
At public institutions	4% - 63%	33% - 60%
Institutions reporting articulation agreements	16	10
Average per (reporting) institution	88	45
Foreign language requirement		
For all students	6	1
For selected programs	9	4
Applicable to transfer students	15	4
Requirement for at least one non-U.S. course		
For all students	10	4
For selected programs	3	3
Applicable to transfer students	13	7
Advisor training about international competence:		
Yes	5	1
No	13	9

* From 9 states, plus DC

** From 9 states

Total states represented: 16, plus DC