The State of Transfer at IU: Summary for Admissions Officers

December 12, 2019

Mission: The University Transfer Office (UTO) eases student transition through improved access, accuracy and application of credit toward degree attainment.

What We Know

In general, transfer students are more likely to be female, first generation, minority, and older compared to the overall student body. Indiana University, annually, enrolls approximately 4,000 new transfer students*. In the last four years, we have seen a 20% decline (2014: 4,523 to 2018: 3,618) in transfer student enrollment. This trend is concerning and conversations are underway to respond. Our prospecting, culture of transfer, and procedures for processing of credit, particularly automation of undistributed credits, are areas for enhancement.

Transfer students, attending full-time, are not completing their degree on time. Transfer students entering as juniors and enrolling full-time have completion rates of 27.2% after two years and 67.5% after 4-years (2014 cohort). The IU Bicentennial Plan highlights metrics for student degree completion, including number of degrees, retention, graduation rates, and time to degree. This goal targets a specific transfer enrollment pattern – those students entering IU at junior status and enrolling full-time upon transferring (averaging 12 or more credits across enrolled semesters). While these students should be positioned to graduate after 2 years, degree completion peaks at 4 years. An exception that may be able to inform some best practices is at IU East, where completion peaks a year earlier, after 3 years.

Enrollment yields for transfer warrant campus review. The current university-wide yield of students who enroll after being admitted is 57%. The university-wide second-year retention rate of transfer students is 73.8% (Fall 2017 entering transfer students).

Application, admission, and enrollment of transfer students all decreased across the past 5 years with enrolled applicants showing the greatest decline (see Table 1). Strengthening the articulation relationships with transferring institutions, while simultaneously bolstering retention engagement efforts for new transfer students would support increases in both student enrollment and degree completion.

These declines have not affected credits transferred. A rise in credits brought per student (37.6 in 2014 to 50.7 credits in 2018) suggest students are staying longer at the 2-year campuses, prior to transfer (see Figure 1).

*Transfer Student: 1st year student at IU with 12 credits beyond graduation from high school.
We have seen growth in credit brought by new undergraduate students using AP, other test scores, and expanding access to dual credit courses. On average new students are bringing just over one semester of credits in their first year (2014: 13.4 to 2018: 18.1). This full range of transfer credit-taking behavior (while in high school, between High School graduation and enrollment at IU, and even while enrolled) characterizes what we call the “transfer active students.”

With the looming enrollment crisis and campuses looking to transfer students and transfer activity to fill gaps and pain points, pricing incentives, the Transfer Single Articulation Pathways (TSAP), and Statewide Transfer General Education Core (STGEC) create enhanced opportunities to align 2-year college coursework with 4-year degree objectives for good outcomes. In fall 2018, 119 first year students transferred to IU with a TSAP milestone and 437 transferred with a STGEC milestone. Close attention to the transfer population, their needs, and expectations are necessary to ensure an uptick in student numbers and student success.

Ongoing relationships with external partners, public institutions for reverse transfer, and internal units like USSS and campus leadership suggest bright times ahead through efficiencies gained in coordination. A coordination, which provides information, resources, and connections, may increase the available support for students toward the completion of their degree objective. By helping campuses understand the unique natures of their student population, they are able to tailor their outreach and support efforts.

Campus Responses to Transfer

Campuses can use data to inform and develop programs to support transfer students in areas of:

- Recruitment
- Marketing
- Course Articulation
- Transition Support
- Academic Integration
- Social Integration
- Financial Aid and Scholarships
- The Use of Technology
- Residential Communities and Housing
- Career and Outcomes Support

The Transfer Student Experience: Fall 2019 Survey

In Fall, 2019, UTO, in conjunction with UIRR, administered the first IU Transfer Survey. The survey asked students to rate their experience in the following areas: admission, enrollment, articulation, services, and advising. Survey administration concluded in November 2019 and analysis is currently being conducted. Survey results and recommendations will be distributed to partners in spring 2020.

Notes: Transfer data dashboard depicting student transfer, enrollment, and completion. The transfer profiles, at both the campus and university levels, across four areas:

- Transfer Students, including source, enrollment yield, and characteristics.
- Transfer Activity, including the top courses posted as transferred both before and after enrolling at IU, as well as total transfer activity for all new undergraduates to IU, whether transfer students or first-time undergraduates.
- Transfer Student Retention after 4-years, for all transfer students, and for those entering with junior standing and enrolling full-time.
- Degree Production by transfer students, including transfer source and top degrees.