

Exploring the Success and Challenges of Diploma to Degree Transfers

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Outline of the Study

This study focused on 8 questions probing student profile, academic performance, graduation rates, motivations, transfer/non-transfer student differences, barriers faced, needed supports and potential improvements in the transfer process. “To assess the outcomes of diploma to degree transfer students, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data were collected.” (p. 8) The sample of respondents from 8 programs permitted the comparison of transfer and non-transfer students based on information from interviews and college academic data bases.

Findings

Quantitative Findings:

Besides being slightly older, in terms of other demographics, transfer students look much like non-transfer students. In terms of academic success, this study found that transfer students tended to obtain higher GPAs than non-transfer students and were less likely to drop out of the degree program. (p. 25) Among non-transfer students, males were less likely to complete their scheduled courses on time and consequently more likely to drop out when compared to their female counterparts (p. 25).

Qualitative Findings:

Reasons for pursuing a college degree related to the students’ labour market focus and the anticipation of boosting career options (p. 26) although specific motivations varied by program (pp. 17-19). Many of the “students who transferred in [to the degree program] from a diploma ... felt that their diploma level study provide them with practical, hands-on experience, and that their program gave them a unique perspective not shared by non-transfer students”. (p. 4)

“Many [transfer students] expressed feeling underprepared for the degree program”. (p. 4) The time to degree completion and the greater baccalaureate workload were seen by students to be challenges. (p. 19) Although the majority of the students had a good experience with the process of transferring from the diploma to the degree, their primary issue was the perceived inadequacy of communication. A number indicated that more information about the degree program before and during the transfer process would help students form realistic expectations and perhaps reduce some of the pressure that students felt in managing the more demanding baccalaureate workload. (p. 20)

Most transfer students did not take advantage of orientation programs although the study reported that attendance brought a peer networking value to those that attended. “Coordinators and instructors” were the main source of support and found their “high level of approachability” and availability to be valuable. (pp. 21-22)

Bridge programs were seen as a strong feature of the transfer pathways that included them. Developing a peer network, getting to know faculty, and preparing for academic challenges were all seen as particularly important outcomes of the bridge experience. (p. 22)

Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study presents a number of recommendations for the enhancement of the transfer process. These are summarised as:

1. Provide information on transfer pathways to students as early as feasible in, and throughout their diploma studies. This may take the form of periodic seminars and workshops on degree requirements (and particularly related to baccalaureate program workload) in order to form realistic expectations;
2. Better prepare transferring students for the greater/different demands of baccalaureate study through strategies such as time management workshops, bridging programs, the development of student support networks, tutoring services and/or mentoring programs;
3. Adopt strategies to integrate transfer and non-transfer students; and
4. Further research the differences between transfer and direct entry students in order to better understand the unique needs of each and facilitate their integration. (pp. 27-28)