

Northern Arizona University

Reverse Transfer Students
Challenges and Value

Topic Paper #3

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A reverse college student is often a student who has already started at a 4-year university and has since enrolled in a community college. A Student Affairs office can play a vital role in the support of a reverse transfer student. There are two main classifications of a reverse transfer student. One is referred to as a completer, a student with a 4-year degree. The other is a non-completer who chose to either go back to a community college and continue classes in that environment or start as a new enrollee in a community college. The reasons are varied including difficulties with learning styles, expenses, or the desire for a different environment with smaller classes which encourages rapport with professors and faculty. Another classification of reverse transfer is dual enrollment so a student can finish a degree faster by taking classes at two different schools because of scheduling preferences (Winter et al. 2001).

The concept of reverse transfer has been around since the 1960s. In one of the older papers regarding reverse transfer students, nearly 50 years ago, Brimm (1976) found that smaller class sizes and the ease of building rapport with the instructors were vital in helping those students succeed at the community college level. This concept of increasing more personal interaction between faculty and students is important and has been shown to work with all types of students. When looking at having students take 'success skills classes' for community college students, there was more perceived success among the students in the classes that had an interactive teacher with a more personal approach. Having this style of teaching made the

students more comfortable and able to talk through their fears and hopes for the future. The need to develop and encourage new college students to attend these classes to have a rehearsal space to build their college identity is more important than the type of activities that encourage skill development (Hatch et al, 2018).

Reverse transfer students need support from their Student Affairs department to increase their chances of success. A more personalized and interactive class experience and the recognition that smaller class sizes are important to student persistence. Some students attributed their decision to transfer to negative relationships with faculty, lack of social support, having to take care of family members, being closer to family, or because they had financial hardship. While at first glance this can appear to be a step back, to leave a 4-year institution to go to a community college, the reasoning is personal and can be due to being unable to find employment in their location of choice with their current degree, because of general life satisfaction with a desire to use education as a way to increase the quality of life or a change in circumstance regarding family obligations. Students in the Reverse Transfer process valued the possibility of the security of having a degree just in case they were unable to complete a bachelor's degree (Atkinson & Ashford. 2020).

A Student Affairs office considers the value of the reverse transfer student population as a valuable reason to support their educational goals. Around 20% of students in a community college are this type of reverse transfer student (Winter, et al, 2001). In addition to not just the obvious financial benefit of a college enrollee, the benefit to a college from reverse credit transfer is more of their students receive associate degrees, which leads to the institution's overall degree completion numbers and rates (Taylor, 2016).

Historically though the concept of a reverse transfer for students isn't new, the research is limited and more should be encouraged so that the community of reverse transfer students can be better understood and supported. Because the reverse transfer students make up 20% of a community college's student body they are valuable to a college beyond tuition because they can boost a college's success rate and, in turn, make that college more valuable to its community. Most student affairs offices can benefit their college, its students, and its community by continuing to fully understand the needs and support these students by developing ways for them to feel part of the larger community despite the additional demands of life outside of pursuing their educational goals.

References

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