

# TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS

An Analysis of First to Second Year Retention and Academic Performance

Fall 2007 New Transfer Student Cohort



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## Introduction

Are transfer students as academically successful as native UCR students (i.e., those who enter the university as freshmen)? We use the first-year retention rate and first-year grades, either in specific courses or the cumulative first-year grade point average (GPA), as two measures of student success. In comparing transfer students to native students we utilize two comparisons: the first compares all transfer students with entering freshmen, on the premise that, while the two populations are different in age, college experience, and a variety of other characteristics, they are both facing their first-year at a four-year research university. The second compares junior transfer students with native students who possess junior-level status, on the premise that, while the native students know UCR and have experienced UC-level academic challenges, both groups are at similar stages in their college careers.



## Results

### Transfer Students in Comparison to First-Year Freshmen

Table 1 gives the retention and first-year cumulative GPA information for all transfer students and all freshmen entering the university in fall, 2007. Retention rates are very similar for these two populations. While the means suggest that transfer students are slightly more likely to be retained than native freshmen in the College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (CNAS), and that the reverse is true in the Bourns College of Engineering (BCOE), none of the comparisons are statistically significantly different.<sup>1</sup> Looking at the GPA comparisons, while transfer students attain cumulative grade point averages that are universally higher than those of freshmen across the three colleges, and for the institution as a whole, once again the differences are not statistically significantly different. Thus, on these two measures of success, transfer students seem to be performing equal to, but not significantly better than, freshmen. Note, however, that in comparing graduation rates, we see that transfer students graduate (in four years) at a higher rate than do freshmen (in six years), suggesting that attrition is lower in subsequent years for the transfer population.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the college-level retention rate measures the percentage returning to the college (as opposed to the institution) after the first year.

## Transfer Students in Comparison to Junior-Level Students

Table 2 gives similar information for a comparison of transfer students with native juniors. Here we do see significant differences in one-year retention rates, with native juniors having the edge over transfer students in BCOE and the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, and for the institution as a whole. However, the latter is the only comparison for which there exists a statistically significant difference. Interestingly, in CNAS junior transfers are more likely to be retained than native juniors, and the difference is statistically significantly different. In comparing the cumulative grade point average for the 2007-08 academic year only, we see that grades are uniformly higher for junior transfer students, and statistically significantly higher in CNAS and for the institution as a whole.

GPA comparisons are fraught with problems in that transfer and native students, whether freshmen or juniors, may be enrolled in very different courses. To get a better sense of how transfer students compare to native students in course grades, in Table 3 we compare grades of junior transfer and native students in select courses where transfer and native juniors are together in the largest numbers. Here, we see that transfer students have a slight edge over native students, except in Business 101, but the edge is only statistically significantly greater in Math 9A, where the difference is rather dramatic. Note that this comparison

may be somewhat problematic, however, in that native students in the sciences and engineering who have not passed through the first calculus course are clearly very weak students, whereas this is perhaps less true of transfer students, who may have concentrated on breadth requirements in community college or who have come to the sciences very late in their careers.

## Conclusion

In summary, these comparisons suggest that transfer students generally perform at least as well academically as do native UCR students, and in a select few cases they perform better.



**Table 1: Fall 2007 New Entering Freshmen and Transfers Retention Rates and Academic Performance**

Fall 2007	Total		BCOE		CNAS		CHASS	
	New Freshmen	New Transfer						
First-Year Retention	84.1% (0.006)	83.6% (0.013)	76.2% (0.021)	72.4% (0.084)	79.0% (0.011)	83.1% (0.035)	82.8% (0.008)	82.5% (0.014)
Average First-Year UCR Cum GPA (Fall-Winter-Spring)	2.50 (0.014)	2.68 (0.030)	2.37 (0.042)	2.77 (0.167)	2.41 (0.023)	2.77 (0.078)	2.57 (0.018)	2.67 (0.033)

"Standard Errors are in parentheses"

Fall 2004 New Transfer Cohort 4-yr Grad Rate = 78.3%

Fall 2002 New Freshman Cohort 6-yr Grad Rate = 64.3%

**Table 2: Fall 2007 Entering Transfers with Junior Status and Native Juniors Retention Rates and Academic Performance**

Fall 2007	Total		BCOE		CNAS		CHASS	
	New Transfer Juniors	Native Juniors						
One Year Retention (Fall to Fall)	86.5% (0.014)	89.1% (0.006)	77.8% (0.101)	85.6% (0.026)	86.4% (0.037)	78.2% (0.016)	85.6% (0.016)	87.6% (0.008)
Average Junior Year UCR Cum GPA (Fall-Winter-Spring)	2.75 (0.036)	2.69 (0.017)	2.80 (0.223)	2.69 (0.060)	2.81 (0.090)	2.66 (0.031)	2.74 (0.040)	2.70 (0.022)

"Standard Errors are in parentheses"

**Table 3: Fall 2007 Entering Transfers with Junior Status and Native Juniors Academic Performance in Select Courses**

Fall 2007	ANTH001	BUS101	CHEM112A	MATH009A	CS008	All Select Courses
New Entering Transfers with Junior Status	2.88 (0.252) [20]	2.52 (0.085) [93]	2.57 (0.196) [32]	2.78 (0.267) [16]	2.78 (0.127) [24]	2.62 (0.067) [185]
Native Juniors	2.68 (0.185) [39]	2.81 (0.069) [125]	2.42 (0.109) [84]	1.81 (0.322) [19]	2.70 (0.138) [46]	2.61 (0.056) [313]

"Standard Errors are in parentheses"

"Number of Observations are in brackets"

## APPENDIX A

### Transfer Student Profile, Fall 2008 and 2009

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Over 70% of the fall 2008 transfer student cohort originally resided in Southern California: 31% from Riverside County, 25% from LA County, and 18% from San Bernardino County. The two categories of income that the majority of our fall 2008 transfer student cohort identified themselves as in was either the 0/Blank category (40%) or the over \$100,000 category (16%) . Finally, the ethnic profile of the fall 2008 transfer student cohort does vary from the fall 2008 freshman cohort: 29% Caucasian, 25% Asian, and 23% Chicano/Mexican American (whereas, the top three ethnic profiles for our incoming freshman cohort was 38% Asian, 26% Chicano/Mexican American, and 15% Caucasian).

The fall 2009 enrolled transfer student cohort was comprised of 861/866 students and is broken down by college as follows: 82% in CHASS, 14% in CNAS, and 4% in BCOE. The top three majors in each college for transfer students are as follows: CHASS-Business Administration/Business Preparation, Psychology, Sociology; CNAS-Biological Sciences, Biochemistry, and Neuroscience; and BCOE-Chemical Engineering, Bioengineering, and Computer Science and Electrical Engineering are tied with four students each.