

TO:	Dr. Carmen Wilson, Chair, Faculty Senate
FROM:	Rebecca L. LeDocq, Chair, Committee on Academic Policies and Standards
RE:	Report on special charge to CAPS concerning transfer students
DATE:	November 16, 2006 Approved 7-0-1

### **Pursuant to the Faculty Senate charge issued to CAPS on August 25, 2006 to**

“Consider and report on the following special charge:

- Complete a report on transfer students including for example, but not limited to, the number of credits transfer students transfer to La Crosse, the types of courses transfer students generally take, retention rates, time to graduation, etc.”,

After discussion at several CAPS meetings, and after consultation with Kathy Kiefer, Associate Director of UW-L Enrollment Services/Admissions, Diane Schumacher, UW-L Registrar, and Teri Thill, Director of Institutional Research, the CAPS report is as follows:

### ***Background***

In 2004-2005, CAPS took up the issue of the likelihood of success of transfer students in response to the “increased reliance on transfer students to fill seats in 2004 (and possibly 2005).” Based on the results of their inquiry, CAPS made the following recommendation.

***CAPS recommends (8/1/0) requiring completion of 18 credits or more for transfer to UW-L.***

This recommendation was approved at the March 9, 2006 meeting of the Faculty Senate with the following amendment:

***...to include “and students with fewer than 18 credits will be considered if their high school record qualifies as priority 1.”***

This policy will become effective as of Fall 2007.

CAPS continued its consideration of transfer students in 2005-2006. In the committee’s final report for that year, the following concern and subsequent recommendation were made:

- ***The significant elevation in transfer students is likely to have negative consequences for overall University success measures. Based on the data compiled by the 2004-05 CAPS committee and presented in their end-of-year report, transfer students have noticeably lower rates of success than new freshmen. It is likely that significant additional support resources will need to be allocated to help these students succeed.***

***In light of this concern, CAPS recommends that “a Task Force be established to determine how best to improve the academic success of transfer and Priority 3 students”.***

The continued concerns relating to the success of transfer students initiated the special charge given to CAPS for 2006-2007.

### ***Investigation into success of transfer students***

In response to the charge from faculty Senate, CAPS considered data attempting to measure the success rates of transfer students based on

- GPA at time of transfer
- Native vs. transfer graduation rates
- Retention to the end of the first year

Of those retained,

- Average Spring semester GPA;
- Number on Dean’s List; and
- Academic standing

Based on this data, discussions among committee members, and conversations with Teri Thill, Director of Institutional Research, CAPS notes the following:

1. **Determining an appropriate comparison group for transfer students is problematic.** Institutions are not currently required to keep the same types of information on transfer students as they do for native students. Thus we cannot compare our transfer students with those from peer institutions. It is also difficult to determine the appropriate comparison group within UW-L. In some instances it may be appropriate to compare transfer students to *native students who enter UW-L at the same time*. In other cases it seems more reasonable to compare them to *native students who have the same class standing*. The latter is the peer group used by CAPS for the current analysis.
2. **The overall number of transfer students is too small to allow for any useful information from further divisions by college, program, etc.** Transfer students make up a relatively small percentage of our student body. Even when considering all transfer students entering the university in a particular Fall term, the numbers have been between 300 and 400 for the past several years. This is in comparison to an incoming freshman class of between 1500 and 1600. The small size of the sample must be kept in mind when trying to draw conclusions or make recommendations based on the data.
3. **There is a \*strong\* negative correlation between the size of the transfer cohort and the median transfer GPA.** Over the past several years, it has often been suggested that when the number of transfer students admitted is increased in order to meet enrollment targets, the overall academic preparedness of the cohort is reduced. The data appears to bear this out (see Figure 1). In fact, for Fall cohorts, there is a  $-0.91$  correlation ( $p = .002$ ) between the size of the transfer cohort and median incoming GPA; for Spring cohorts, the correlation is  $-0.79$  ( $p < .001$ ). In other words, the larger the cohort, the lower the median GPA.

Term	# of Transfers	Median GPA	Mean GPA	Standard Deviation
Fall 1994	433	2.84	2.88	0.48
Fall 1995	513	2.77	2.78	0.56
Fall 1996	512	2.79	2.83	0.55
Fall 1997	543	2.80	2.81	0.54
Fall 1998	518	2.80	2.83	0.54
Fall 1999	435	2.87	2.90	0.48
Fall 2000	455	2.96	2.95	0.55
Fall 2001	382	3.03	3.04	0.47
Fall 2002	273	3.17	3.15	0.50
Fall 2003	329	3.19	3.15	0.47
Fall 2004	335	3.18	3.12	0.52
Fall 2005	425	3.08	3.08	0.51
Fall 2006	376	3.16	3.14	0.44

Term	# of Transfers	Median GPA	Mean GPA	Standard Deviation
Spring 1995	359	2.75	2.80	0.57
Spring 1996	306	2.67	2.72	0.58
Spring 1997	297	2.78	2.82	0.60
Spring 1998	308	2.77	2.82	0.56
Spring 1999	314	2.86	2.84	0.58
Spring 2000	299	2.85	2.91	0.59
Spring 2001	326	2.82	2.88	0.55
Spring 2002	289	3.09	3.12	0.52
Spring 2003	263	3.07	3.10	0.42
Spring 2004	226	3.20	3.15	0.51
Spring 2005	258	2.98	3.02	0.55
Spring 2006	307	2.90	2.91	0.55

Figure 1: GPAs of Incoming Transfer Students by Term

4. Compared to native students with the same class standing, **the percentage of transfer students whose academic status is designated as “Good Standing” after the completion of their first two semesters at UW-L is consistently lower** (see Figure 2). In other words, a larger percentage of transfers are on probation or ineligible. On the other end of the spectrum, **the percentage of students on the Dean’s list is significantly lower for transfer students** (see Figure 3).

3-years Combined		Total Cohort	Total Retained	Good Standing	
First Freshmen	Continuing	65	52	50	96.2%
	Transfers	61	48	42	87.5%
Second Freshmen	Continuing	1006	924	852	92.2%
	Transfers	238	213	186	87.3%
First Sophomore	Continuing	2831	2660	2574	96.8%
	Transfers	257	232	217	93.5%
Second Sophomore	Continuing	1848	1691	1625	96.1%
	Transfers	157	135	118	87.4%
First Junior	Continuing	2630	2490	2432	97.7%
	Transfers	238	222	206	92.8%
Second Junior	Continuing	2016	1903	1849	97.2%
	Transfers	47	41	39	95.1%
First Senior	Continuing	2508	2410	2375	98.5%
	Transfers	14	14	14	100.0%
Second Senior	Continuing	4143	2655	2607	98.2%
	Transfers	14	13	12	92.3%

**Figure 2:** Native vs. Transfer student academic standing after the completion of two semesters at UW-L for combined cohorts beginning Fall 2003, 2004 and 2005.

3-years Combined		Total Cohort	Weighted Average Spring GPA	Total Dean's List	% on Dean's List
First Freshmen	Continuing	65	2.97	7	13.5%
	Transfers	61	2.71	5	10.4%
Second Freshmen	Continuing	1006	2.75	136	14.7%
	Transfers	238	2.61	21	9.9%
First Sophomore	Continuing	2831	3.12	884	33.2%
	Transfers	257	2.94	57	24.6%
Second Sophomore	Continuing	1848	3.05	507	30.0%
	Transfers	157	2.81	25	18.5%
First Junior	Continuing	2630	3.21	1019	40.9%
	Transfers	238	2.97	52	23.4%
Second Junior	Continuing	2016	3.16	710	37.3%
	Transfers	47	3.07	11	26.8%
First Senior	Continuing	2508	3.30	1034	42.9%
	Transfers	14	3.03	**	28.6%
Second Senior	Continuing	4143	3.37	1000	37.7%
	Transfers	14	3.25	9	69.2%

**Figure 3:** Native vs. Transfer student average GPA after the completion of two semesters at UW-L for combined cohorts beginning Fall 2003, 2004 and 2005.

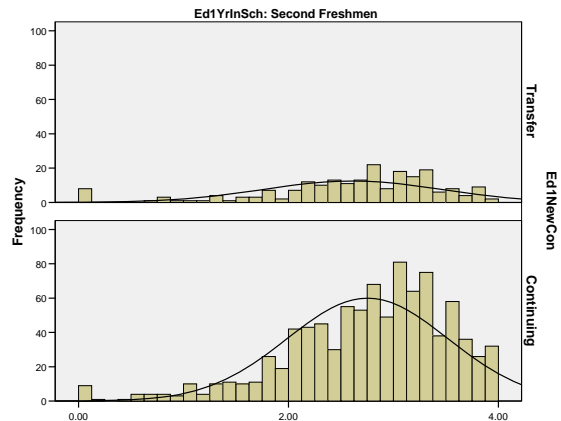
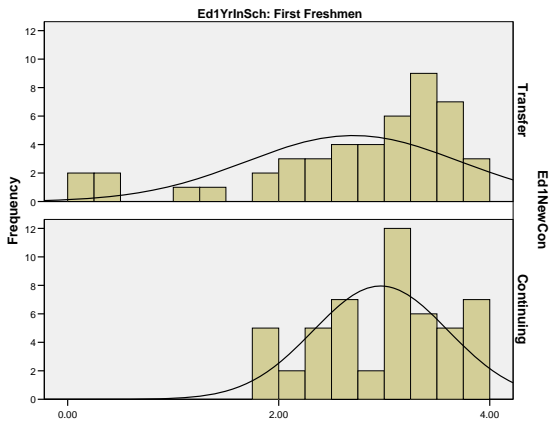
\*\* cells with values fewer than 5 students are not reported in order to maintain the privacy of students

1. **The average GPA of transfer students is about .2 points lower than native students with the same class standing.** It should be pointed out that the difference in *average* GPA does not tell the whole story since the distribution of GPAs for transfer students tends to be much “flatter” than that of native students. In other words, while the average GPA of the two groups is typically within .2, they have much different standard deviation (see Figures 4 and 5).

Cohort Starting			Fall 03,04,05 Combined
First Freshmen	Continuing	Valid N	51
		Median	3.07
		Mean	2.97
		S.D.	0.64
	Transfer	Valid N	47
		Median	3.00
		Mean	2.71
		S.D.	1.01
Second Freshmen	Continuing	Valid N	922
		Median	2.87
		Mean	2.75
		S.D.	0.77
	Transfer	Valid N	212
		Median	2.75
		Mean	2.61
		S.D.	0.85
First Sophomore	Continuing	Valid N	2652
		Median	3.25
		Mean	3.12
		S.D.	0.69
	Transfer	Valid N	231
		Median	3.00
		Mean	2.94
		S.D.	0.70
Second Sophomore	Continuing	Valid N	1688
		Median	3.19
		Mean	3.05
		S.D.	0.75
	Transfer	Valid N	135
		Median	2.96
		Mean	2.81
		S.D.	0.83

Cohort Starting			Fall 03,04,05 Combined
First Junior	Continuing	Valid N	2486
		Median	3.35
		Mean	3.21
		S.D.	0.66
	Transfer	Valid N	221
		Median	3.08
		Mean	2.97
		S.D.	0.71
Second Junior	Continuing	Valid N	1896
		Median	3.31
		Mean	3.16
		S.D.	0.69
	Transfer	Valid N	41
		Median	3.20
		Mean	3.07
		S.D.	0.69
First Senior	Continuing	Valid N	2350
		Median	3.43
		Mean	3.29
		S.D.	0.61
	Transfer	Valid N	14
		Median	3.07
		Mean	3.03
		S.D.	0.72
Second Senior	Continuing	Valid N	2236
		Median	3.50
		Mean	3.37
		S.D.	0.66
	Transfer	Valid N	13
		Median	3.58
		Mean	3.25
		S.D.	0.84

**Figure 4:** Transfer vs Native mean and median GPA with standard deviation after the completion of two semesters at UW-L for combined cohorts beginning Fall 03, 04 and 05.



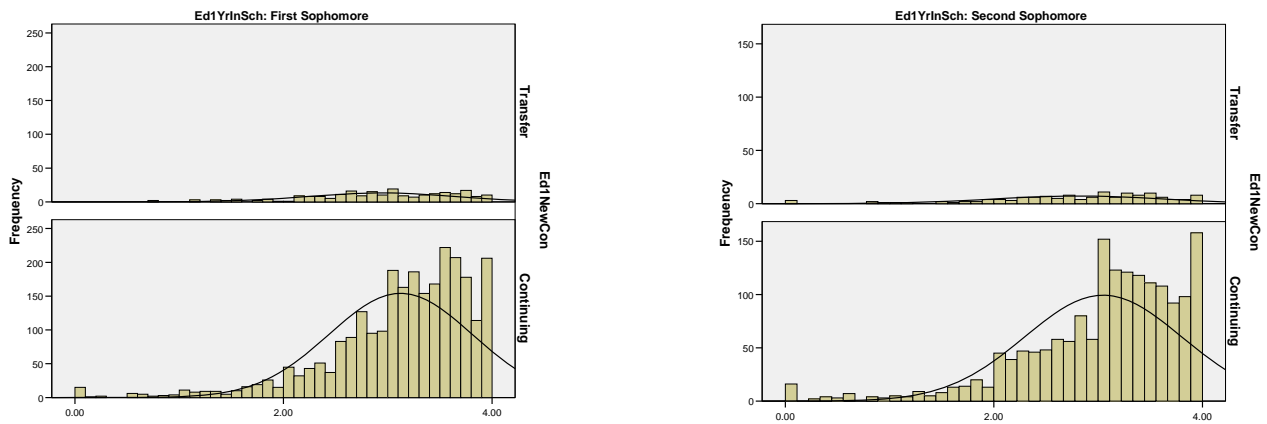


Figure 5: Combined GPA Distributions for Native vs Transfer Cohorts starting in Fall 03, 04 and 05.

6. There appears to be a significant difference in the native vs. transfer 6 year graduation rates for 1996-2000 cohorts (see Figure 6). In this data, transfer cohorts are compared to continuing students of the same class standing. In each of the cohorts beginning 1996-2000, the 6 year graduation rate for transfer students is approximately 9% lower than that for native students with the same class standing.



Cohort Starting		Cohort Total	4 Year Graduate	5 Year Graduate	6 Year Graduate	More than 6 Year Graduate	Non-Graduate
Fall 1996	Native	1724	370	470	129	95	660
		Cume %	21.5%	48.7%	56.2%	61.7%	38.3%
	Transfer	494	57	128	51	37	221
		Cume %	11.5%	37.4%	47.8%	55.3%	44.7%
Fall 1997	Native	1696	365	490	129	84	628
		Cume %	21.5%	50.4%	58.0%	63.0%	37.0%
	Transfer	527	71	119	71	36	230
		Cume %	13.5%	36.1%	49.5%	56.4%	43.6%
Fall 1998	Native	1736	423	490	137	62	624
		Cume %	24.4%	52.6%	60.5%	64.1%	35.9%
	Transfer	498	84	115	47	43	209
		Cume %	16.9%	40.0%	49.4%	58.0%	42.0%
Fall 1999	Native	1630	380	534	117	34	565
		Cume %	23.3%	56.1%	63.3%	65.3%	34.7%
	Transfer	421	67	120	48	22	164
		Cume %	15.9%	44.4%	55.8%	61.0%	39.0%
Fall 2000	Native	1606	408	476	126		596
		Cume %	25.4%	55.0%	62.9%	62.9%	37.1%
	Transfer	444	84	108	59	10	183
		Cume %	18.9%	43.2%	56.5%	58.8%	41.2%

Figure 6: Expected graduation rates\* for Native vs. Transfer students for cohorts starting 1996-2000.

\* Expected graduation rates for transfer students are computed based on the time we would expect them to take to graduate within 4-, 5- or 6-years based on their class standing at the time of transfer. For instance, a student who transfers into UW-L with a class standing equivalent to a first semester sophomore would be a 4-year graduate if they receive their degree from UW-L within three years (six academic terms) of their first term in attendance at UW-L."

## Summary

While CAPS acknowledges that in comparison to native students, *on average*, transfer students tend to:

- have a lower GPA,
- have a smaller percentage with academic status in “Good Standing,”
- have a smaller percentage on the Dean’s list,
- have a lower graduation rate,

the Committee does not see this as a serious problem as things currently stand. While overall the academic performance of transfer students may not be at the level of the native student, many transfer students are quite successful. A large percentage of transfer students with lower incoming GPAs are actually returning adult students. Their incoming GPAs are often from courses they took several years earlier and so may not be indicative of future educational performance. Even for those transfers of traditional age, there just does not seem to be any substantive way to change the current situation.

The discussions of possible changes included targeting specific transfer populations, such as those with an Associate’s Degree, in order to reduce the pressure on introductory and General Education courses. However, there simply are not enough of these students currently to have any way of determining whether they are more successful than students who transfer without a two year degree. The small numbers make it impossible to compare or draw any conclusions about specific types of transfer students.

Despite the comments above, in light of the possible implementation of the *Growth and Access Plan*, some concerns do bear stating.

- 1) The data clearly shows that ***the larger the transfer cohort, the lower the average GPA***. It is likely that there will be an increase in the numbers of transfer students if the *Growth and Access Plan* is implemented.
- 2) ***The policy that will be in effect beginning Fall 2007 requiring 18 credits or more for transfer to UW-L*** (unless a student’s high school record would qualify them as priority 1 status), ***will likely have a negative impact on the number of spring transfers***. These spring transfers have increasingly been used to meet enrollment targets, often resulting in lower GPA requirements for admission of transfer students. This need for spring transfers is not likely to change since UW-L is required by UW-System to maintain 92% of the Fall revenue in the Spring. When the number of continuing students is below the projection, there is no other way to make up for this shortfall.

Should a large increase in the number of transfer students occur due to *Growth and Access* or for any other reason, resources will be needed to improve the chances for success of these students. On the front end, UW-L will likely need to change its recruitment efforts in order to encourage the enrollment of transfers with better academic backgrounds. Once enrolled, these transfer students will need additional support in order to be successful. Some areas in which this support would be needed are orientation/adjustment to UW-L, advising and tutoring.