VA-NC Alliance Transitions Workshop

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Conducted during the VA-NC Alliance Annual Symposium hosted by the University of Virginia and Piedmont Virginia Community College, the Transitions Workshop generated discussion about barriers and best practices for underrepresented minority STEM students transferring to four-year institutions.

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The first Virginia-North Carolina Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation Transitions Workshop was held on April 10, 2016 during the Ninth Annual VA-NC Alliance Undergraduate Research Symposium co-hosted by the University of Virginia (UVA) and Piedmont Virginia Community College. The VA-NC Alliance is a nine-institution consortium funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and led by UVA. The primary goal of the VA-NC Alliance is to increase the number of underrepresented minority students who earn science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees. According to the NSF, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Native Pacific Islanders are considered underrepresented in STEM fields.

Faculty and administrators with diversity, student affairs, and transfer advising responsibilities at VA-NC Alliance partner institutions participated in the Transitions Workshop (see Appendix A for list of participants). During a time when the nation is struggling with college completion and affordability, the workshop provided an opportunity for participants to learn more about community college transfer processes and issues in Virginia and North Carolina. The workshop commenced with a brief overview of differences between the two states' community college systems before participants shared observations from the two-year and four-year institutions, identified challenges, and discussed actions.

Partners from the VA-NC Alliance's four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in North Carolina noted that they do not receive many transfer applications because most students transfer to the UNC system (e.g., UNC Chapel Hill and NC State). Transitioning to HBCU schools would be less difficult than transferring to larger, four-year institutions because HBCU undergraduates face similar challenges to community college students (e.g., family obligations, part-time work, financial needs, etc.). Partners recommend advising community college students to consider small four-year schools, particularly HBCUs for these reasons. This is a missed opportunity for community college students in the region.

The most significant structural differences between Virginia and North Carolina pertain to course numbering and ensuing credit loss. The North Carolina Community College System uses a consistent course numbering system across schools whereas the Virginia Community College System does not require consistent numbering. This leads to confusion for transfer students in Virginia regarding which classes may count towards prospective majors at different schools because the institutions numbers their courses differently. Individual departments at the four-year institutions decide which credits will and will not count toward major requirements (e.g., a community college genetics class counts as a biology major's second year course at Virginia Commonwealth University however it does not qualify as equivalent at UVA). Therefore, community college course credits may transfer and count toward graduation but not students' major requirements. Community college students must know in advance to which school they aspire to transfer in order to select courses that will count as credit towards their majors. This proves difficult for students who are keeping their options open regarding their prospective four-year institutions. The credit loss for Virginia transfer students has financial

implications and lengthens the time it takes to earn a bachelor's degree; both factors are known to contribute to attrition. Changing Virginia's course numbering would require passage of legislation through the General Assembly.

Pre-transfer Challenges for Community College Students (General)

- credit loss;
- first generation college student status;
- financial;
- loss of financial aid (e.g., students are not always aware of the 150% rule in which financial aid ceases after students complete 150% of credits needed to obtain a degree);
- multiple educational tracks;
- one or more jobs while enrolled;
- childcare needs;
- transportation concerns;
- veteran status;
- part-time student status;
- psychological distress;
- perception issues (e.g., perceive themselves as academically inferior and/or don't feel like they are enrolled at a "real" college);
- not taking courses which will count toward their majors; and
- time management issues.

Post-transfer Challenges for Community College Students (STEM-specific)

- foreign language requirements;
- the number of community college credits which count towards majors at the four-year institutions lower than anticipated;
- length of time for degree completion;
- expectations of high achievement post-transfer;
- isolation and a lack of socialization;
- transfer students often don't take advantage of resources, including orientation; and
- increased volume of work at four-year institutions leads to academic overload.

Current Pre- and Post-transfer Strategies to Support Transfer Students

- contacting students as early as possible during the transfer process;
- holding transfer student-specific orientations;
- offering peer advisor programs at four-year institutions;
- engaging transfer students as a cohort;
- hosting "lingo workshops" define terms frequently used on campuses;

- displaying the contact information for a community college liaison who serves as the first point of contact for transfers;
- posting transfer student templates on admission offices' websites;
- providing accommodations for students who need longer than eight semesters due to family and/or work obligations;
- advising transfers to live on campus when possible;
- recommending transfers pursue student jobs on campus because managers will be more accommodating to their schedules and particular needs; and
- counseling students to seek a delicate balance between becoming involved as a student, but not too involved since the volume of work will be significantly higher at four-year institutions.

Recommended Pre- and Post-transfer Strategies to Increase Support of Transfer Students
- Draft an action plan to include advocacy to associations, institutions, and legislatures.
- Advocate to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia for universal course numbering and standardized courses.
- Start standardizing at departmental rather than institutional level by engaging faculty from four-year institutions and community colleges in conversations.
- Offer completion grants to supplement when students' financial aid packages run out.
- Communicate the transfer process and course credits and equivalents more clearly.
- Recommend to the National Science Foundation that its programs foster collaboration between B2Bs and nearby LSAMPs.
- Partner with other grants which are focused on community college and transfer student support (e.g., B2B programs).
- Develop more support centers and transfer students programs.
- Establish honor societies for transfer students.
- Establish specific Guaranteed Admission Agreements for individual schools within institutions.
- Offer dual advising to transfer students.
- Designate a liaison for each college within large institutions to help students navigate entry requirements specific to that program.
- Inform faculty in advance that there are transfer students in their classrooms so they are aware of the specific needs of these students.
- Establish summer bridge programs for transfer students or integrate them into existing activities.
- Communicate the differences between institutions' levels of rigor before students transfer.
- Consider assessment tools to measure the impact of advising and support programs for transfer students.

Appendix A: Transition Workshop Participants

Bennett College:
Cristina Moreira, *Project Director for the VA-NC Alliance and Associate Professor, Biology*
Elizabeth City State University:
Hirendranath Banerjee, *Professor, Natural Sciences*
Gwen Cooper, *Administrative Support Associate*
Shirrin Siddiqui, *Associate Professor, Natural Sciences*
George Mason University:
Alok Berry, *Project Director for the VA-NC Alliance and Associate Professor, Electrical and Computer Engineering*
Johnson C. Smith University:
Sunil Gupta, *Project Director for the VA-NC Alliance and Assistant Professor, Natural Sciences*
Mattie Marshall, *Program Coordinator for the VA-NC Alliance*
Piedmont Virginia Community College:
Patricia Franklin, *Associate Professor Emerita, Biology*
Kathy Hudson, *Project Director for the VA-NC Alliance and Dean of Health & Life Sciences*
David Lerman, *Coordinator of Student Success Admissions & Advising Center*
Kemper Steele, *Coordinator of Advising & Transfer Admissions & Advising Center*
Joanna Vondrasek *Program Coordinator for the VA-NC Alliance and Associate Professor, Biology*
Saint Augustine's University:
Mark Melton, *Project Director for the VA-NC Alliance and Dean, School of Sciences, Mathematics, and Public Health*
Sheila Spence, *Administrative Assistant, Division of Natural Sciences & Mathematics*
University of Virginia:
Marcus Martin, *Vice President & Chief Officer for Diversity and Equity and Principal Investigator for the VA-NC Alliance*
Kristin Morgan, *Director, University & Community Relations and Development and Program Director for the VA-NC Alliance*
Jessica McCauley, *Program Coordinator for the VA-NC Alliance*
Frank Papovich, *Professor and Assistant Dean (Transfer Students)*
Laurie Casteen, *Associate Dean of Students (Transfer Student Support)*
Carolyn Vallas, *Assistant Dean for Diversity & Director of the Center for Diversity in Engineering and Co-principal Investigator for the VA-NC Alliance*
Virginia Commonwealth University:
Rosalyn Hargraves, *Project Director for the VA-NC Alliance and Associate Professor, Schools of Education and Engineering*
Virginia Tech:
Monica Hunter, *Program Coordinator for the VA-NC Alliance and Assistant Director, Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program*
Jody Marshall, *Project Director for the VA-NC Alliance*
And Director, Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program
Bobbie Potter, *Recruiter, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences*
John Gray Williams, *Recruitment/Career Development, College of Natural Resources and Environment*