Clark College

Business Students’ Smooth Transfer to Four-year Universities

Sabbatical Report

Spring Quarter 2015

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We need a sound basis for making assessment and curriculum decisions. To this end, I interviewed 28 of our counterparts at ten, four-year schools to make sure our students have the best preparation for success.

The benefits to my sabbatical are (1) I can contribute to our assessment and curriculum decisions with more knowledge, (2) I have information that I can share with my students around making a successful transfer to their four-year school, and (3) I can pass along a proven method to other faculty for their own sabbaticals to find out what will be required of their students when they move on to the next step in their education or career.

To start, I performed a pilot study to guide me in applying for my sabbatical. I visited the nearest four-year school, WSU-Vancouver (WSUV) and interviewed four people:

* [Claire Kamm Latham](http://directory.vancouver.wsu.edu/people/claire-latham), Associate Professor of Accounting
* Debra Sanders, Faculty Director- Master of Accounting Program
* [Ben Kulp](http://directory.vancouver.wsu.edu/people/ben-kulp), Academic Coordinator
* [Ron Pimentel](http://directory.vancouver.wsu.edu/people/ronald-pimentel), Clinical Assistant Professor of Marketing, Faculty Director–Professional Sales

Since I teach transfer-level accounting, I went to WSUV with a detailed list of our accounting course outcomes. I was prepared to talk about our curriculum in detail to make sure our students are well prepared for transfer. It turned out that our students transfer with a good academic foundation. The salient issue is making the adjustment to a four-year school. I then developed two pages of questions titled, “Preparing Clark College Students for Successful Transfer” (attached) to bring back information that will help us in making assessment and curriculum decisions. It became more refined with successive interviews. I used it for starting and guiding the interviews. To keep the information flowing, I assumed a conversational style in the interviews.

As a result of the connections with WSUV from my pilot study, Clark Business students and WSUV Business students held two get-togethers. The purpose was to facilitate the transfer of Clark students by making them more familiar with a four-year school. We agreed to make this an annual event. Clark College alums attending WSUV also talked to my classes about what to expect when they transfer and made it clear that transferring to a four-year school is doable and that they can succeed.

Over the year prior to the sabbatical, I did some research (attached), and I talked to a number of people (attached) to gather ideas on how to successfully gather the information that would be helpful to Clark Business students. The topics included what concerns to bring up, whom to approach at the four-year colleges, and how to approach them.

During Spring Quarter, 2015, I interviewed 24 faculty, administrators, and advisors at ten four-year colleges:

Washington State University at Vancouver

* Sara Ackerson, Academic Coordinator for the School of Business
* Wendy Olson, PhD, English Professor

Central Washington University

* Debbie Boddy, Manager – Advising Center
* Carlo D. Smith, PhD, Chair, Department of Finance and Supply Chain Management; Chair Department of Economics
* Marv Bouillon, PhD, Chair, Department of Accounting
* Peter Gray, Professor of Economics

Eastern Washington University

* Duanning Zhou, PhD, Professor of MIS, Department Chair
* Jodi Strote, Academic Advisor
* Keith Klauss, Transfer Center Director

Washington State University at Pullman

* Susan Gill, PhD, Chair, Department of Accounting
* Ken Butterfield, PhD, Chair, Department of Management, Information Systems, and Entrepreneurship
* Gloria Tong, M.Ed., Director, Center for Student Success, Cason College of Business
* Nancy Swanger, PhD, FMP, W. Terry Umbreit Distinguished Professor, School of Hospitality Business Management

Concordia University

* David Tucker, PhD, CPA, Professor of Accounting, School of Management
* Mr. Gloria Ngezaho, Transfer Coordinator, Office of Admissions

University of Washington

* Adam Shinn, Associate Director of Student Services

Western Washington University

* George D. Sanders, PhD, MBA, CPA, Chair Department of Accounting
* Terri Hall, Pre-Major Advisor, College of Business and Economics

Warner Pacific College

* Roger Martin, PhD, Professor of Accounting
* Celeste Cameron, Director of Enrollment

University of Portland

* Lisa J. Reed, J.D., Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs, Pamplin School of Business Administration
* **Linda Cannard,** Associate Director of Transfer Admissions
* Jeromy A. Koffler,Director of Student Activities

Portland State University

* Jenifer Loney, PhD, Senior Instructor, School of Business Administration
* Becky Sanchez, Director, Undergraduate Programs
* Tom Gillpatrick, Executive Director, Center for Retail Leadership

As a result of my interviews, Clark College has better connectedness with these schools. In every instance, I had a congenial interaction with these individuals and followed etiquette protocols such as sending everyone a thank-you email very soon after the interaction. Many thanked me for reaching out. I received no grant for this sabbatical.

To start, let me point out that each four-year college in our area seems to have its own niche in the marketplace. As a result, if our students make a good choice, they can have a rich experience at their four-year college. Some of the niches that I observed at the four-year schools in our area offer are:

* some emphasize paths to a career with opportunities for employer contact and internships with the goal of making the student employee ready
* some are commuter schools for our place-bound students
* some are residential schools for our traditional students
* some schools are very participative in sports
* some have big-league sports teams
* some have programs aimed at adults with a certain level of maturity and work experience
* some emphasize a social conscience and offer many opportunities to volunteer
* some emphasize a strong sense of community
* some offer an expensive and highly reserved social setting
* some offer a liberal arts emphasis aimed at developing the whole person

A few issues were cited in multiple interviews. When students transfer to a four-year school, they are often not prepared for the faster pace. The material moves more quickly and the peers are more competent and competitive in upper division courses. Transfer students are now among classmates who are studying in their majors. The courses are more subject specific. Transfer students often do not anticipate the increased workload and try to take the same number of hours that they did at their two-year school with disastrous results. The four-year school gives less feedback and less immediate feedback. As a result, when transfer students find out how they are doing, it is often too late to salvage their GPA, which starts anew at each school. Some four-year schools grade on a curve with only a few A’s. This makes attending school very competitive.

The lack of writing ability of college students was the most frequently mentioned concern brought up by the faculty. Students at both the four-year colleges and community colleges, pass rigorous composition courses but seem to forget what they have learned. To address this issue, some four-year schools require a senior-level technical writing course. Writing across the curriculum in which every course contains a written assignment is a possible solution to this issue at the community college. For example, the Business Department used to have a requirement that every course have at least one substantial, graded written assignment. I am going to campaign to get this requirement reinstated. We need to encourage the retention of both writing conventions and rhetorical skills.

To minimize time to graduation and the expense of a college education, many of the interviewees pointed out the advantage of the Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA). The DTA is agreed to by almost all of the Washington State four-year schools and, through an articulation agreement, by many private schools in the area. Students are advised to contact their four-year school for guidance as soon as they decide where they are going because the DTA has some leeway that can make a real difference. For example, some four-year schools will only accept Public Speaking as part of the communication requirement while other will accept Small Group Communication. Many of the religious schools will accept courses such as *The Bible as Literature* and *World Religions* as fulfilling some their religious requirements. An adviser at the gaining institution can offer guidance in this regard. Because each school is idiosyncratic, a student should attend every orientation that is available, because they can save a lot of time and money by learning of a school’s idiosyncrasies beforehand rather that rectifying them after the fact. Many schools have checklists that are easy to follow.

Transfer students connect with the four-year campus culture in different ways. If they attend a residential school, living on campus puts them in the thick of things and they seem to integrate smoothly. If they attend a commuter school, they have to make an effort to connect with the new school. There are many clubs at four-year schools including very active accounting and business clubs. Study groups are another good way to network and become part of the new culture. I first learned this in the pilot study and started giving credit for participating in study groups. I include a short presentation on small group leadership, which covers ideas on how to keep the group on task, how to keep the participants socially engaged, and how to preclude dysfunctional group behaviors. I hope students can develop these skills at Clark and take them with them to their transfer school. If they form study groups every quarter after transfer, it will not take long before they have a substantial network of friends.

Some professors at four-year colleges questioned the value of using programmed instruction like Learn Smart or My Accounting Lab. As students progress further in school, ancillary study materials are less available. The student has only the textbook in upper division and graduate courses. It seems as though some students attend upper-division courses without the ability to master the material from reading the textbook. In discussing this, I found a surprising number of four-year college professors have connections with community colleges. Many have previously taught or currently teach on an adjunct basis in community colleges. They appreciate our position between high school and upper division classes and see pedagogical support such as programmed instruction and tutoring labs as essential. My philosophy is that people who enter a school of business want to grow into professionals. I have always tried to enable this growth by requiring meaningful and manageable assignments to build their skills and confidence. Programmed learning is in this category. These conversations have reinforced that philosophy.

Several of the professors in upper division classes complained that students lack math skills. Some students did not transfer accounting concepts such as break-even analysis to non-accounting courses. Since they passed rigorous math and accounting courses at Clark, it appears that it is a matter of not transferring their skills to the new setting. I consulted with Mark Elliot, Math Professor at Clark College, who pointed out that if students know why you do a mathematical procedure, they can transfer it to a new situation because they understand what is happening. If a student only memorizes and the new situation is different, they cannot transfer their skills. I am going to tell my students to always ask why!

If students are satisfied with their choice of majors, they have an increased sense of purpose and commitment. This is an issue because of the narrow range of business courses in the Clark College DTA which only consists of the accounting and statistics series. How can they make these choices? Business clubs and the course *Introduction to Business* can expose students to many aspects of a business career, beyond just accounting and statistics. The Business Division is currently forming a Business Club. Unfortunately, *Introduction to Business* is not included in the DTA and is required only by Portland State University.

One of the benefits of my sabbatical is to pass along to other faculty a good methodology for their sabbatical. With modification, this method could be implemented by vocational faculty by interviewing businesses that hire our students. I see it as complementing the advisory committees. I found that the best way to make contact with faculty, administrators, and advisors at the four-year schools was to:

* I approached the Dean’s administrative assistant,
* I identified myself as a Clark College faculty member who teaches accounting and Business Statistics,
* I presented my business card (it seems to legitimize, much like a policeman’s badge),
* I explained my purpose, which is to gather information to develop the best possible curriculum to ensure our students’ success at their school,
* I showed the two pages of questions as the type of information that I would like to bring back to Clark to guide us in curriculum development (increases my credibility),
* I asked for a referral to the most appropriate person to talk to,
* Most often, I was then referred to someone who was both knowledgeable and interested in talking to me,
* I was prepared to be flexible and patient as everyone has a busy schedule – sometimes I had to wait awhile or come back the next day,
* I could almost always talk to an adviser who functions much like a salesman and who saw me as a potential sales lead,
* I always followed up with a thank-you email
* Sometimes, I had to use an introductory email
* Several schools thanked me for “reaching out” to them and wanted more interactions like this

After some trial and error, I developed an effective interview method. This approach leads to unexpected findings such as the value of using programmed instruction like Learn Smart or My Accounting Lab and the lack of writing ability of transfer students, which I never would have expected. I found that the best way to conduct the interviews was to:

* identify myself as a Clark College faculty member
* present my business card (legitimacy)
* explain my purpose
* present the two pages of questions as the type of information that I wanted to bring back to Clark (credibility)
* carry on the interview in a conversational style by sharing mutual experiences (this keeps the interview flowing but tainted it with my input which I tried to minimize),
* Often they do not know who Clark students are, so I asked how transfer students do, how students do when they move into upper-division classes or what common problems do students have when entering their classes.

Over the course of these 22 interviews, I have obtained information that may be useful to a number of people at Clark College. I plan to disseminate the information in the following fashion.

* I have given a copy of the sabbatical report to Dean Bowers.
* I have already given this report to the Business Division Chair.
* I have already given this report the full-time business faculty.
* I will deliver a copy to Dean Walstead.
* I have kept our Business Advisory Committee informed of my progress at the spring 2015 meeting and I will give them a copy in the fall.
* I have kept our Business Division informed of my progress and presented some of my findings at the spring 2015 Business Division meeting.
* I plan to talk to Joe Pitkin, our assessment liaison, to see if it would be appropriate to present my findings to the Outcomes and Assessment Committee.
* I will pass the report to Kelsey DuPere, Director of Advising.
* I will present my findings to the students in my classes so that they can be better prepared to transfer.

In summary, we are a “Next Step” and there is one that follows us. We need to make sure that our students are prepared to succeed when they move on to the next step. I contributed to this by going to the four-year schools that our students transfer to and ask what will be required of them. I brought back information that will guide us in making assessment and curriculum decisions. I can offer better guidance to my students as to what will be expected of them when they transfer. I developed a methodology that other faculty can use to develop their assessment and curriculum in this fashion.

I personally found this to be a rich and enjoyable experience. Prior to this sabbatical, I thought that my primary job was to enable my students to master content. I put in considerable effort toward being a content expert. In reality my classes are one step in a series of steps. We have to work with what students bring from previous steps, do our best to ensure that they succeed in subsequent steps, and continue to be a content expert.

Questions for interviews

Preparing Clark College Students for Successful Transfer

What strengths do transfer students bring to your school? What do you think creates them?

What deficits do transfer students bring to your school? What do you think creates them?

How are transfer students doing in terms of academic skills?

* Time management
* Organization
* Setting Priorities
* Studying effectively
* Critical thinking
* Forming study groups
* Writing
* Effectively contributing in class
* Integrating with other disciplines
* Taking responsibility for their own learning
* Asking for help
* Putting in sufficient time
* Coming to class prepared

What changes do you see happening at your school in the next six years? How will your needs change?

How do transfer students fit into your mission and vision?

What are community colleges doing to help their students succeed at your school?

What aspects of your school create adjustment issues for transfer students?

* Class size
* Class time (Day, evening, etc.)
* Age of student body
* Semester vs. quarter
* Other aspects of the your school’s environment

What does your school do to advance your students’ career?

How can we work with you to benefit special populations?

* Minority students
* First-generation-to-attend-college students
* Disabled students
* Other populations

How are transfer students coping with the costs of college? Are they briefed on the availability of financial aid and work study?

What is your transfer-student orientation like?

What services are available to transfer students?

Are transfer students’ general education courses (math, English, etc.) adequately preparing them for success at your school?

Do transfer students connect with your school’s campus culture? Are they involved in campus activities, programs, and professional organizations?

Is mentoring available for transfer students?

Who can our students contact for information and guidance?

In what way are needs of transfer students different from other students?

How do transfer students differ from those students that started as freshman?

Are there any ways that our students can be included in activities at your school before transfer?

What is the format of your school classes: in-class, online, hybrid, etc.? What are your class sizes? How do our students do?

Are transfer students over-extended?

* Paid employment
* Volunteer
* Extracurricular
* Family
* Taking too many classes

What issues do transfer students face in adjusting to your school?

* Workload
* Less outside help
* Faster pace
* Adjusting to the semester system
* Level of difficulty
* Synthesizing
* Types of exams
* Writing

Is anything missing from the academic preparation of Clark College/Transfer students?

What will aid Clark College/Transfer students in making the transition to your school?

What can we do to ensure that Clark College/Transfer students succeed when they transfer to your school?

(Almost all of these topics were included in each of these publications: Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon, 2004; Braxton et al., 2014; College Board 2011; Pascaracella and Terenzini, 2005)

Reference

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Consultants

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