Adequacy of UB's Transfer Process: A Recommendation Report

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INTRODUCTION

This study was carried out for the University at Buffalo's office of admissions to examine the current sentiment among transfer students concerning the adequacy of the onboarding process for transfer students, as well as recommend solutions for improvement.

In 2019, University at Buffalo admitted 3,000 transfer students (Campus Reel). With the entire student body being a little under 30,000, in the eyes of the university these transfer students are a welcomed 10% addition to the population. However, recent sentiment from transfer students on campus has indicated that there are inadequate resources provided during the onboarding process. Given its recent elite designation as a flagship of the SUNY system (UBNow), students expect more out of the university. If the university wishes to keep growing both its population and reputation, UB's Office of Admission needs to consider the quality of their onboarding processes.

To determine the best solutions and practices applicable to this problem, I performed the following tasks:

- Record the component of the transfer process that transfer students need most guidance with, and record their personal ideas on potential improvement. I received this information by conducting a survey among transfer students in UB.
- Determine the aspects of the transfer process that UB needs to emphasize, and the resources most transfer students need. I completed this task through quantitative analysis from the data collected.
- Formulate potential solutions by identifying necessary and successful practices to be implemented into UB's transfer process. I performed both secondary and primary research as well as qualitative analysis from the data collected.

I found 46% of survey participants felt they needed the most guidance with academic credit, and student life. Also, I found 53.1% of participants disagreed with the statement "I was impressed with UB's onboarding process". UB's onboarding process falls short in providing ample resources for understanding and going through the academic credit transfer process, and falls short in providing ample information on social life, clubs, and facilitating activities for students.

I recommend that UB reevaluate the transfer credit awarding process into something that works for transfer students of all backgrounds. Furthermore, I recommend UB create a mandatory seminar for incoming transfer students which details the academic credit transferral process, the social life and resources available at the UB, and facilitates peer mentorship.

In the following sections, I present additional information about my research. This includes my methods, results, conclusions and expanded information on recommendations.

RESEARCH METHODS

I began my research by talking with my colleagues who had transferred to UB. I engaged in conversation in an attempt to get a sense of their sentiment as an indicator on whether there is room for improvement. I soon became aware of the variation in experience with the transfer process, and became certain that there exists current problems with the onboarding process for transfer students.

In this section, I explain my research methods and the reason for performing the following tasks:
- Record the component of the transfer process that transfer students need most guidance with, and record their personal ideas on potential improvement. I received this information by conducting a survey among transfer students in UB.
- Determine the aspects of the transfer process that UB needs to emphasize, and the resources most transfer students need. I completed this task through quantitative analysis from the data collected.
- Formulate potential solutions by identifying necessary and successful practices to be implemented into UB's transfer process. I performed both secondary and primary research as well as qualitative analysis from the data collected.

Task 1: Record the components of the transfer process that transfer students need most guidance with, and record their personal ideas on potential improvement.
I received this information by administering a survey to transfer students in UB. With over 3,000 transfer students needing representation, a survey allows for the collection of general ideas from a large population. I strived to receive input from students with all backgrounds. This survey allowed me to create data which could be analyzed to identify the most pressing issues within the transfer process, as well as the most common resources the stakeholders felt could be provided to help future transfer students.

I crafted a survey using Google Forms. A sharable link via a QR code was created, which would then be scanned by the transfer student in order to access and fill out the survey (see Appendix A). The survey consisted of 11 multiple choice questions, and one short response. Of the questions, 8 of them directly concerned the students feelings and experiences towards the process, and the others were used to provide information about the students background. A total of 50 transfer students at UB were surveyed, with data collection running from February 25 to March 25, 2022.

Task 2: Determine the aspects of the transfer process that UB needs to emphasize, and the resources most transfer students need.
I completed this task through analysis from the data collected. I performed qualitative analysis by coding the responses collected in the survey using NVivo software. A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data… Qualitative coding allows you to interpret, organize, and structure your observations and interpretations into meaningful theories (Saldana, 2013). Relevant to my study, I coded a document consisting of the short response answers pulled from the survey. I assigned each

response to a node, with each node corresponding to an aspect of the transfer process that needs improvement. I also ran a word frequency query on the top 150 words contained in the responses, as a means of determining the language being used by students in their responses. I created a sentiment analysis map using Miro to assign certain words to be representative of each node (see Appendixes B & C).

Task 3: Formulate potential solutions by identifying necessary and successful practices to be implemented into UB's transfer process.
I began by comparing my qualitative findings with the quantitative data from the word frequency analysis to inform my conclusions about the flaws of the onboarding process and student sentiment. I then consulted secondary research sources. I first referenced a report from the American Council on Education detailing their findings for best practices in reimagining university transfer processes with an emphasis on student success. Furthermore, I considered the recommendation report from Utah Valley University which shared more best practices and markers for success among transfer student processes. Lastly, I referenced an academic publication on transfer shock, and the correlation between social success and academic success in transfer students.

RESULTS

Task 1: Record the components of the transfer process that transfer students need most guidance with, and record their personal ideas on potential improvement.
To perform this task, I administered a survey to 50 UB transfer students. The survey consisted of 11 multiple choice questions, and one short response

Here are my major findings from the survey:
- 46% of participants felt they needed the most guidance with academic credit, and student life (see Figure 1 for results).
- 53.1% of participants disagreed with the statement "I was impressed with UB's onboarding process"(see Figure 2 for results).
- 48% of participants explicitly agreed with the statement "UB's onboarding process made me feel welcome".
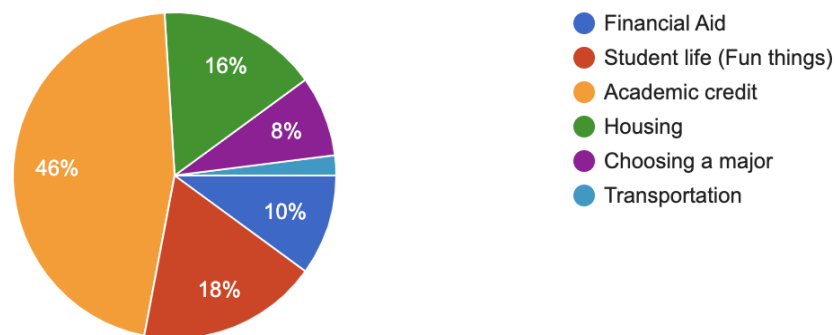
Student Needs During the Onboarding Process

Figure 1: Student Needs During the Onboarding Process

Student Response to the Statement "I was impressed with UB's onboarding process"
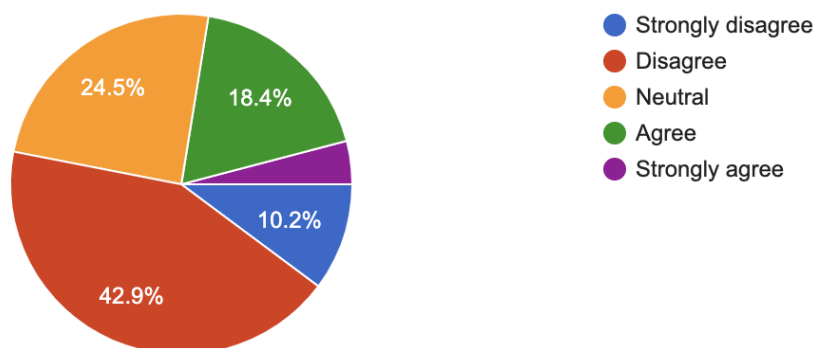

Figure 2: Student Responses to the Statement "I was impressed with UB's onboarding process"

Task 2: Determine the aspects of the transfer process that UB needs to emphasize, and the resources most transfer students need.

I performed qualitative analysis by coding the responses collected in the survey. I assigned each response to a node, with each node corresponding to an aspect of the transfer process that needs improvement. I also ran a word frequency query on every word contained in the responses, as a means of determining the language being used by students in their responses. I created a sentiment analysis map using Miro to assign certain words to be representative of each node (see Appendixes B & C).

My analysis found:
- Among survey responses, Social Resources and Academic Credit were referenced the most, with nearly double the average number of references (see Table 1).
- Applying the sentiment map to the short responses, the nodes with the highest word frequency count were academic credit transfer, accounting for 7.37% of words analyzed, and social resources, accounting for 6.52% of words analyzed (see Table 1).

Table 1: References and Word Frequency of Nodes

Node	References	Word Frequency
Deadline Realization	3	3.66
Financial Guidance	1	1.41
Social Resource	4	6.52
Understanding Credit Transfer	11	7.37
Resource Realization	9	6.24
Total	28	25.2
Average	5.6	5.04

Task 3: Formulate potential solutions by identifying necessary and successful practices to be implemented into UB's transfer process.

Through secondary research across 3 academic sources, I was able to relate academic research and conclusions on best practices, to the needs portrayed by my analysis. I identified the best practices as follows:
- Mandatory targeted orientation programs designed specifically for transfer students. Researchers noted that orientation programs can ameliorate the effects of transfer shock and offer opportunities for socialization (Chemely-Wiik, 2021)
- Intentionally integrate the recognition of prior learning as a critical component of how your institution serves the various transfer students who enroll with transfer credit and credit for prior learning. This may require a purposeful integration into your strategic priorities through the strategic planning process. It also requires that the campus community recognize transfer students who bring with them prior learning are an asset to

the institution and to all students' curricular experience (ACE, 2021, p. 13)

- Educators could offer academic resources to transfer students throughout their first year through informal programs and meetings. An investment in a peer mentorship program would also prove beneficial for students, encouraging campus integration. Another part of the integration program could include campus resources, such as the career assessments from counseling or career centers that would be used to help students define their academic goals (Clausen, 2015, p. 24)

CONCLUSIONS

In this section, I provide the conclusions based on the primary and secondary research and analysis on UB's transfer process, and on successful transfer processes.

Task 1: Record the components of the transfer process that transfer students need most guidance with, and record their personal ideas on potential improvement.

Based on the survey data, I conclude that there are problems with UB's transfer process. These include problems with social resources, academic credit resources, financial guidance, deadline realization, and resource realization. I concluded that while UB does make transfer students feel welcome, this welcome feeling is not supported with an amount of resources that leave the transfer students impressed or satisfied. There is significant room for improvement, specifically in providing resources for academic credit and student social life.

Task 2: Determine the aspects of the transfer process that UB needs to emphasize, via the resources most transfer students need.

Through the quantitative and qualitative analysis, I was able to confirm that UB's onboarding process falls short in providing ample resources for understanding and going through the academic credit transfer process, and falls short in providing ample information on social life, clubs, and facilitating activities for students.

Task 3: Formulate potential solutions by identifying necessary and successful practices to be implemented into UB's transfer process.

I concluded that a successful transfer process should be standardized to include mandatory seminars on the academic credit transferral process, the social resources available at the university. A successful transfer process also engages students' specific interests and plans through peer mentorship, and has an evolving transfer credit process which aims to evaluate prior learning as a means of determining what transfer credit should be awarded, as opposed to basing determinations on students' prior class names and credits taken. Students come from all types of schools, with all types of credit balances and requirements. In order to account for this, a more holistic approach is needed for the academic credit awarding process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I recommend UB implement both of the following solutions into their transfer process:

Solution 1: Evolve the transfer credit awarding process into something that works for transfer students of all backgrounds.
This new transfer credit process will aim to evaluate prior learning as a means of determining what transfer credit should be awarded, as opposed to basing determinations on students' prior class names and credits taken. Students come from all types of schools, with all types of credit balances and requirements. In order to account for this, a more holistic approach is needed for the academic credit awarding process.

Solution 2: Create a mandatory seminar for incoming transfer students which details the academic credit transferral process, the social life and resources available at the UB, and facilitates peer mentorship.
This seminar should consist of information regarding how to advocate for academic credit, while also focusing on consistency and clarity about deadlines and due dates. Students should be able to view this course on their ublearns, and have all the resources and presentations linked there. This seminar should be a place for Student Association representatives to give presentations and showcase their clubs and contact transfer students directly. Also, incoming transfer students who identify themselves as having certain academic/career interests, should be connected to peer mentors in their respective field of interest.

I believe that these solutions need to be implemented together if there is any hope for success in improving the transfer process. Catering school resources to accommodate individual needs will increase positive sentiment among students going through the process.

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Appendix A: Survey

Survey Concerning Adequacy of UB's Transfer Process

UB does not provide ample resources for transfer students during their onboarding process, causing them to feel unwelcome and unseen. In 2019, University at Buffalo admitted 3,000 transfer students (Campus Reel). With the entire student body being a little under 30,000, in the eyes of the university these transfer students are a welcomed 10% addition to the population. However, recent sentiment from transfer students has indicated that there are inadequate resources provided during the onboarding process. Given it's recent elite designation as a flagship of the SUNY system (UBNow), students expect more out of the university. If the university wishes to keep growing both its population and reputation, UB's Office of Admission needs to consider the quality of their onboarding processes. This report investigates the current onboarding process for transfer students, and synthesizes recommendations on how it can better support incoming students.

Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability. Keep in mind this is a study about transfer students. If you did not transfer to UB from another university, this survey is not meant for you. Regardless, thank you for your time.

1. Did you transfer to University at Buffalo from another university?

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes

    ◯ No

2. Did you transfer from another SUNY? If not, please type your previous school in the box

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes

    ◯ Other: _____

3.   I had a solid academic plan before transferring to UB

Mark only one oval.

( ) Yes

( ) No

4.   UB's onboarding process helped me execute this plan

Mark only one oval.

( ) Strongly disagree

( ) Disagree

( ) Neutral

( ) Agree

( ) Strongly agree

( ) I did not have a plan

5.   UB's onboarding process allowed me to form a strong academic plan

Mark only one oval.

( ) Strongly disagree

( ) Disagree

( ) Neutral

( ) Agree

( ) Strongly agree

( ) I already had one

6.   UB's onboarding process made me feel welcome

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

7.   I was assigned or contacted by an advisor as part of the onboarding process

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

8.   I was impressed with UB's onboarding process

Mark only one oval.

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Neutral

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly agree

9.   UB's onboarding process made me excited to come to UB

Mark only one oval.

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Neutral

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly agree

10.   I am glad I transferred to UB

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

11.   When transferring, which aspect of onboarding did you need the most guidance with?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Financial Aid

◯ Student life (Fun things)

◯ Academic credit

◯ Housing

◯ Choosing a major

◯ Other: _____

12.   In one or two sentences, describe what UB could've done to make the onboarding process more enjoyable.

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Google Forms

Appendix B: Word Frequency Results

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
transfer	8	17	4.84%	transfer, transferring
students	8	14	3.99%	student, students
process	7	9	2.56%	process
credit	6	9	2.56%	credit, credits
resources	9	8	2.28%	resources
needed	6	6	1.71%	needed, needing, needs
make	4	5	1.42%	make
contact	7	5	1.42%	contact, contacted
better	6	5	1.42%	better
plan	4	5	1.42%	plan, planning
major	5	5	1.42%	major, majors
academic	8	5	1.42%	academic, academics
helped	6	4	1.14%	helped, helpful
classes	7	4	1.14%	class, classes
welcome	7	4	1.14%	welcome
specific	7	4	1.14%	specific, specifically
school	6	4	1.14%	school
life	4	4	1.14%	life
wish	4	3	0.85%	wish
understand	10	3	0.85%	understand
think	5	3	0.85%	think
semester	8	3	0.85%	semester
housing	7	3	0.85%	housing
felt	4	3	0.85%	felt
done	4	3	0.85%	done
course	6	3	0.85%	course
clubs	5	3	0.85%	clubs
clear	5	3	0.85%	clear

campus	6	3	0.85%	campus
advisor	7	3	0.85%	advisor
step	4	3	0.85%	step, steps
nice	4	3	0.85%	nice, nicely
would've	8	2	0.57%	would've
wanted	6	2	0.57%	wanted, wants
tell	4	2	0.57%	tell
sound	5	2	0.57%	sound
signing	7	2	0.57%	signing
seminar	7	2	0.57%	seminar
seas	4	2	0.57%	seas
present	7	2	0.57%	present, presentation
portal	6	2	0.57%	portal
onboarding	10	2	0.57%	onboarding
none	4	2	0.57%	none
like	4	2	0.57%	like, liked
knew	4	2	0.57%	knew
just	4	2	0.57%	just
getting	7	2	0.57%	getting
feel	4	2	0.57%	feel
experience	10	2	0.57%	experience
exactly	7	2	0.57%	exactly
ended	5	2	0.57%	ended
different	9	2	0.57%	different
connected	9	2	0.57%	connected, connecting
come	4	2	0.57%	come
anything	8	2	0.57%	anything
already	7	2	0.57%	already
activities	10	2	0.57%	activities, activity
required	8	1	0.28%	required
representatives	15	1	0.28%	representatives
related	7	1	0.28%	related

reached	7	1	0.28%	reached
putting	7	1	0.28%	putting
provided	8	1	0.28%	provided
prospects	9	1	0.28%	prospects
previous	8	1	0.28%	previous
possible	8	1	0.28%	possible
paths	5	1	0.28%	paths
outreach	8	1	0.28%	outreach
others	6	1	0.28%	others
organized	9	1	0.28%	organized
order	5	1	0.28%	order
opportunities	13	1	0.28%	opportunities
one	3	1	0.28%	one
now	3	1	0.28%	now
nothing	7	1	0.28%	nothing
next	4	1	0.28%	next
necessarily	11	1	0.28%	necessarily
names	5	1	0.28%	names
multiple	8	1	0.28%	multiple
missing	7	1	0.28%	missing
mine	4	1	0.28%	mine
meet	4	1	0.28%	meet
made	4	1	0.28%	made
little	6	1	0.28%	little
limited	7	1	0.28%	limited
lift	4	1	0.28%	lift
lay	3	1	0.28%	lay
later	5	1	0.28%	later
late	4	1	0.28%	late
last	4	1	0.28%	last
large	5	1	0.28%	large
joke	4	1	0.28%	joke
job	3	1	0.28%	job
issues	6	1	0.28%	issues
involved	8	1	0.28%	involved

intended	8	1	0.28%	intended
informed	8	1	0.28%	informed
include	7	1	0.28%	include
however	7	1	0.28%	however
handled	7	1	0.28%	handled
guidance	8	1	0.28%	guidance
groups	6	1	0.28%	groups
great	5	1	0.28%	great
graduation	10	1	0.28%	graduation
got	3	1	0.28%	got
general	7	1	0.28%	general
future	6	1	0.28%	future
fun	3	1	0.28%	fun
friends	7	1	0.28%	friends
follow	6	1	0.28%	follow
focused	7	1	0.28%	focused
familiar	8	1	0.28%	familiar
extracurriculars	16	1	0.28%	extracurriculars
extra	5	1	0.28%	extra
explanation	11	1	0.28%	explanation
existence	9	1	0.28%	existence
enjoyable	9	1	0.28%	enjoyable
else	4	1	0.28%	else
easy	4	1	0.28%	easy
easier	6	1	0.28%	easier
early	5	1	0.28%	early
detailed	8	1	0.28%	detailed
description	11	1	0.28%	description
depth	5	1	0.28%	depth
depend	6	1	0.28%	depend
deadline	8	1	0.28%	deadline
curriculum	10	1	0.28%	curriculum
cult	4	1	0.28%	cult
counted	7	1	0.28%	counted
could've	8	1	0.28%	could've

continue	8	1	0.28%	continue
consider	8	1	0.28%	consider
concerns	8	1	0.28%	concerns
clearer	7	1	0.28%	clearer
choice	6	1	0.28%	choice
checklist	9	1	0.28%	checklist
chances	7	1	0.28%	chances
certain	7	1	0.28%	certain
car	3	1	0.28%	car
builder	7	1	0.28%	builder
besides	7	1	0.28%	besides
benefit	6	1	0.28%	benefit
application	11	1	0.28%	application
answers	7	1	0.28%	answers
another	7	1	0.28%	another
allowed	7	1	0.28%	allowed
aid	3	1	0.28%	aid
advertised	10	1	0.28%	advertised
adequate	8	1	0.28%	adequate
accept	6	1	0.28%	accept

Appendix C: Sentiment Map

Q: In one or two sentences, describe what UB could've done to make the onboarding process more enjoyable.

Social Resource: Being knowledgable about social events, social life, clubs, extracurriculars, and knowing where things are located on campus. Being connected to other students.
- Major
- Life
- Campus
- Clubs
- Activities
- Connected
- Extracurriculars
- Friends
- Fun
- Meet

Understanding Credit Transfer: Knowing what classes can transfer, what curriculums require, how to plan around your credits.
- Credit
- Academic
- Plan
- Course
- Curriculum
- Clearer
- Explanation
- Organized

Resource Realization: Realizing what resources are available to transfer students.
- Resources
- Contact
- Advisor
- Understand
- Existence
- Guidance
- Opportunities

Deadline Realization: Understanding what is due, and when. Checklist management.
- Contact
- Checklist
- Clearer
- Deadline
- Detailed
- Organized
- Explanation
- Housing
- Required

Financial Guidance: Understanding financial aid, what is required, and where to view housing options and applications. Also can include information on loan transferrals.
- Aid
- Housing
- Required

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