

**Lumina Foundation for Education
Grantee Interim Narrative Report**

Portland State University

Grant Number: 2897

Period Covered by Report: July 1, 2008 to July 30, 2009

Project Overview

The Urban Transfer Research Network (UTRN) is a collaborative multi-institutional research project focused on underrepresented students who begin their postsecondary careers at community colleges with the goal of attaining at least the Bachelor's degree. The purpose of the research is to chart the pathways and success of the target student populations and inform institutional policy and practice as it affects student transfer success. Ultimately, the goal of the project is to increase the community college transfer rate and success rate of students attaining the Bachelor's degree.

Progress on Grant Objectives, Activities and Timeline

Year Four Deliverables

The project timeline listed the following deliverables for the fourth year:

- Two national meeting, with progress reports from co-PIs.
- Presentations at AIR Forum and other venues.
- Implication of findings for policy and practice.
- Refinement and expansion of quantitative analysis.
- Policy and practice advisory and review board meetings.
- Data advisory and review board meetings.
- External project evaluation.

Year Four Activities

During Year 4, ASU completed the remaining data tables and analysis needed to parallel its work with Portland State's. The partners performed further quantitative analyses of student characteristics and mediating factors captured in the two data sets and

finalized the analysis of interviews with administrators, faculty and staff, which were conducted in 2008. Interviews with students both in the community colleges and the four-year institutions were launched during spring in Portland and later in the summer in Arizona. Analysis of the student interviews will be reviewed along with the quantitative data and interviews with administrators to provide a broader picture of transfer and degree completion in both states, and generally across the two sites. It is expected that locally and nationally relevant recommendations will emerge in the final year of the project.

Portland State has signed an agreement with the Oregon University System to permit UTRN access to a data base of community college and university data used internally by OUS and the joint articulation boards. This will allow the Portland State team to conduct a limited analysis on more recent cohorts, without having to build an additional data set. This analysis will provide information on factors affecting transfer and completion for students who entered the system after 1999-2000 and so may have been affected by more recent policies or practices.

Meeting of Project Leaders

Project leaders from Portland State and ASU met in Portland July 21-22, 2008, in Tempe March 2-4, 2009, and in Atlanta during the AIR Forum May 31-June 2, 2009. Project evaluator Dr. Nancy Shulock joined the group in July 2008 to discuss the progress made on each campus and the preliminary findings. Project meeting minutes are available on the UTRN website.

Advisory Committee Meetings

Subcommittees of the Data and Policy Advisory boards at Portland State met regularly during 2008-2009. The full Data Committee met November 6 and March 30, while a subgroup formed to implement the methodology for analyzing the qualitative data met weekly during April and May. The research team from Arizona joined in these discussions through teleconferencing. The Joint Data/Policy Committee met January 20, while a subgroup exploring how data and findings emerging from the research could inform policies on the local, state, and national levels met monthly throughout the winter and spring. A summary of the work carried out by parallel committees in Arizona is included in the appendix.

Qualitative Analysis

Analysis of the administrator, faculty and staff interviews conducted in 2008 was concluded at the end of Year 4. ASU and Portland State followed the same protocol, comparing most frequently mentioned factors between sites. The two teams compared factors between institution types (community colleges, university) and identified those that occurred in both sets of interviews from underrepresented students.

As expected, there were similarities and differences between ASU and Portland State, and between community colleges and universities. Factors found to facilitate transfer were:

- University representatives present on community college campuses.
- Strong articulation agreements.
- Student contact with faculty / staff / advisors at the community college.
- Faculty / staff / advisor contact among institutions.

- Orientation sessions.
- Student contact with faculty, staff, or administrators across institutions.
- Students' involvement in campus activities or clubs at community college.

Additionally, individual facilitating factors were found for Arizona and for Oregon. These included transfer module policies, presence of a transfer center or office, and state-level articulation taskforces and committees in Arizona, and formal peer mentoring at community colleges, university visits for prospective transfers, and the co-admission program between Portland State and metro area community colleges in Oregon. Those found to be barriers to transfer were:

- Students and families intimidated by large, urban environment.
- Students' lack of understanding of the academic culture or expectations.
- Cost of attending higher education.
- Lack of access or exposure to faculty, staff, or administrators at the institutions.
- Personal factors such as busy lives, commuting, or competing responsibilities.

A full summary of these findings is available on the UTRN website.

In addition to the analysis of administrator interviews, the partners completed work on a protocol for interviews with students and received institutional review board approval to move forward. The student interview protocol was designed to parallel as closely as possible that used in the administrator interviews, and included a plan for sampling students in the community colleges and in four-year institutions who represented four phases of the transfer and completion process: beginning, near transfer, recently transferred, and near graduation.

Portland State began data collection during Spring Term and ASU began later in the summer. Analysis will be conducted during the fifth year, and will be findings posted on the website. As the project concludes, findings from all components of the research will be drawn together to form a basis for the final set of locally and nationally-relevant findings.

Quantitative Analysis

In Year 4, ASU and Portland State further refined their cohort definitions, completed analysis of student characteristics, and conducted block regressions to develop predictors of transfer success and completion. In looking at student characteristics in the two data sets, no gender differences were found in rates of transfer, while Asian students were more likely to transfer than other ethnic groups and younger students were more likely to transfer and complete bachelor's degrees than older students. At ASU, African American and Native American students were the least likely to transfer and earn degree, and students with Pell grants were less likely to transfer and earn a degree. At Portland State, Hispanic/Latino students were the least likely to transfer and earn degree, but no differences were found in transfer and degree completion rates based on income status.

The following summarizes preliminary common findings for the two sites:

- Students who take more lower-division college credits experience greater transfer success. Hispanic students take the fewest lower division credits in the first year.
- Students who enroll full-time or take more credits per term transfer at higher rates. While those who receive need-based aid earn more of all types of credits in the first year, they are less likely to transfer than other students.

- Students who take more developmental credits during their first year are less likely to transfer; this is particularly true of African-American students, who earn the most developmental credits in the first year.
- Most students in the cohort attended only one community college and never transferred out. Of the three enrollment patterns exhibited by the cohort, the “structured swirl” and “linear path” led to higher transfer and degree completion rates than the “complex swirl.” (These patterns are described in earlier reports and on the website.) Engineering students were more likely to follow the structured swirl, while those in business, social science or humanities were more likely to follow the linear path. Those receiving need-based aid were more likely to follow the linear path.
- Most students had not earned an associate degree at the community college at departure.
- Most students who transferred had not earned an associate degree.
- Students who had earned a transfer degree were more likely to transfer than either those who had not, or who had earned some other type of degree at the community college.

Evaluation

Dr. Shulock, external project evaluator, will complete the evaluation report for 2008-2009 during September 2009 to allow for interviews with campus representatives over the summer. As usual, the project will consider recommendations from her report and incorporate them into the activities for the final year, as appropriate. In addition to the forthcoming written report, the evaluator discussed suggestions and concerns with the

co-principal investigators during the project meeting in July 2009, and periodically by phone during the year. Her input has been invaluable in aligning project goals among the research sites and in clarifying the direction that should be taken by the quantitative and policy research.

Expansion of Research Network

Plans for expansion of the research network into are moving forward. Following a presentation at the AIR Forum in Atlanta, the University of Washington Tacoma formally agreed to join the network. Clark College in Vancouver, Washington will come to a decision during August 2009. Other institutions in Illinois and Nebraska are considering joining the network. Plans to formalize the network through the UTRN website are moving forward. A document describing the network organization and set of expectations for membership has been developed and made available through the website, as well as in handouts distributed at various conferences and meetings.

Communication Plan

The project website, located at www.pdx.edu/utrn/, is the primary communication vehicle for UTRN. The purpose of the site is twofold: 1) dissemination of general project information, preliminary reports and presentations; and 2) coordination of project activities including meetings, current research details and preliminary analyses. As the project has progressed, the site has continued to serve as a reflective portfolio of UTRN's work and its recommendations on improving policy and practice leading to increased baccalaureate attainment for underrepresented students. Meeting minutes are available on the site, as well as periodic research briefs communicating new findings, the latest analyses, and the next directions for research. These are available in print form or

electronic version via the website. Other print media, such as a brochure and fact sheet, offer general information about UTRN, its purpose and research design. These are available for distribution at presentations, conferences and other events.

UTRN participants made several presentations at conferences throughout the year. Portland State team members presented their work to the European Association for Institutional Research Forum in Copenhagen, Denmark in August 2008 and the Pacific Northwest Association for Institutional Research Conference in October 2008. In May, Portland State and ASU presented three sessions on the UTRN at the AIR Forum in Atlanta, Georgia.

Sustainability

As mentioned in earlier reports, links between the Lumina research and other funded research projects, and with local or regional initiatives, have been established. The network has expanded in the Portland area to include institutions not mentioned in the grant proposal. In Arizona, the project is viewed as part of university and statewide efforts to improve transfer and transfer success; personnel working on the UTRN project are involved on relevant committees at all levels.

Financial Report

The financial statements for all participating campuses and the overall project are attached. The worksheets include expenditure itemization for the amount of interest earned on the grant account at Portland State.

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