

## **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 Two Deliverables*

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

- Two national meetings, with progress reports from co-PIs.
- Presentations at AIR Forum and other venues.
- Research design expanded to include analysis of policy and practice and interviews with key actors; review of implication of findings.
- Refinement and expansion of quantitative analysis.
- Policy and practice advisory and review board meetings.
- Data advisory and review board meetings.
- External project evaluation.

### *Expansion of Research Network*

Expansion of the research network has continued in the Portland area. In January 2007, Portland State appointed representatives from Chemeketa Community College (CHEM) and Clackamas Community College (CCC) to the policy and data advisory committees. Electronic data sharing protocols have been established between Portland State and Mt. Hood (MHCC), Portland (PCC), Chemeketa, and Clackamas Community Colleges, and all four community colleges have delivered data sets to the UTRN for

analysis. This has allowed Portland State to expand the quantitative analysis to include a wider range of student transfers within the metropolitan area.

In July, Arizona State University (ASU) and Maricopa Community College (MCC) joined Portland State and University of South Florida (USF) as co-investigators for the UTRN. Building on the data and policy analyses frameworks established in the first year, ASU and MCC were to appoint policy and data advisory committees and begin quantitative and qualitative research. At the end of 2006, Portland State forwarded data definitions and the charge to the advisory committees to ASU and MCC so that they could begin to plan for implementation in the new fiscal year.

Unfortunately, as a result of reorganization on the ASU Polytechnic campus and personnel changes at MCC, no data analysis was accomplished this year. ASU did produce a policy analysis, which served as the basis for a presentation at the AIR Forum in June 2007, but very little progress was made in other areas of the research. In April, ASU announced that it had appointed Dr. Gail Hackett, Vice Provost and Dean, University College, and Dr. Shelly Potts, Assistant Dean, to take over the project at ASU.

Drs. Hackett and Potts have worked extensively on transfer issues with MCC and will work with existing committees to incorporate the policy advisory and data advisory functions for the UTRN into their ongoing work. Although no new data analysis occurred during 2006-2007, ASU and MCC have collected and analyzed transfer data for other projects that can serve as the basis for the UTRN project. The new team is poised to meet ASU's obligations under the UTRN grant and should be able to come up to speed with both quantitative and qualitative analyses in a short period of time.

## **Communication Plan**

The project website, located at [www.pdx.edu/utrn/](http://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 progresses, the site will 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. The Portland State team presented its work to the Pacific Northwest Association for Institutional Research Conference in October 2006 and to the Oregon University System Student Success Conference in Portland in February 2007. In June, Portland State joined with USF and ASU in a presentation on the policy context for transfer at the AIR Forum in Kansas City.

## **Meeting of Project Leaders**

Project leaders from Portland State, USF, ASU, and MHCC, and project evaluator Dr. Nancy Shulock met in Portland in December 2006 to discuss the progress made on each campus and preliminary findings. A second meeting of Portland State, USF, and

ASU co-investigators was held in June in conjunction with the AIR Forum in Kansas City. The next project meeting is scheduled for July 28 during the Biennial Transfer and Articulation Conference in Tempe, Arizona. Dr. Shulock will also be in attendance. All project meeting minutes are made available on the project website.

### **Advisory Committee Meetings**

Policy and data advisory committees at both Portland State and USF met regularly during 2006-2007. At USF the Policy Advisory Committee met twice, once on February 27 and again on June 22; the June meeting included the Data Advisory Committee. Meetings with sub-groups of the Data Advisory Committee were held roughly every four to six weeks during the year. At Portland State, joint policy advisory and data advisory meetings were held on October 12, November 9, January 25, and April 25; the January meeting was held at MHCC to give committee members an opportunity to speak directly with administrators and students on the community college campus. The Data Advisory Committee met separately on November 29 and February 8, and communicated regularly via email. Minutes from these meetings are available on the project website.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

Portland State developed a protocol for interviews with administrators, faculty and staff concerning the effectiveness of transfer policy and practice in each of the three research sites. Interviews began at Portland State in June; USF and ASU will conduct interviews through the summer and early fall, once they have received IRB approval on their campuses. MHCC and PCC began interviews in May and June; CCC and CHEM will begin later in the summer. If possible, USF and ASU will coordinate interviews on their community college partners' campuses in early fall.

The interview questions focus on organizational and interpersonal issues around transfer policy and practice, and are designed to solicit information on what works well and what does not, from the perspective of individuals who are directly involved in policy implementation. Interview transcripts will be analyzed during fall, with a report to all project participants at the project meeting to be held in Florida during winter 2008.

Also during fall 2007, Portland State will develop a protocol for student interviews, to be conducted during spring 2008. USF has already completed a qualitative study of the transfer student experience, so may not participate in this phase of the research. It is expected that ASU and the community college partners will participate; in anticipation of this, MHCC conducted an informal session with students during June 2007. The notes from this conversation will be used in developing the protocol for the broader set of interviews.

USF completed a pilot study of the 57 students who compiled e-journal entries about their transfer experiences approximately every two weeks until mid-semester. Twenty-seven of the pilot study respondents were recruited before transfer from Hillsboro Community College (HCC) and St. Petersburg College (SPC) to USF during November and December 2006. An additional 30 students were recruited immediately upon transfer to USF in January. The students provided 285 substantive journal entries, responding to prompts that described their transfer process. Themes from students' writings were identified and coded. Their responses fell into the following themes,

- Concerns before transfer.
- Challenges upon initial entry to the university.
- Helpful factors identified by transfer students once semester was underway.
- Barriers identified by transfer students once semester was underway.

Results from students' e-journal entries about the mid-semester mark after transfer to USF indicated a need for:

- 1) Centralized transfer counselors at the community college and university;
- 2) Transfer counselors within each USF college;
- 3) On-campus orientations;
- 4) User-friendly online resources, including transfer guides and virtual advisors;
- 5) Communities for transfer students with peer mentors; and,
- 6) First semester University Transfer Experience courses.

### **Data Collection and Analysis: Procedures and Preliminary Findings**

During the second year of UTRN, work continued at Portland State on database tracking of students from community colleges to Portland State and on to the baccalaureate. Data files from MHCC were combined with those from PCC on students who enrolled for the first time at community college during the summer or fall of 1999 or 2000. Records have been matched with those from the Portland State student data system. CHEM and CCC also have provided data files, expanding the data base to include Portland State and the four primary community colleges in the Portland metropolitan area. These additional data will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of student movement among institutions in the metropolitan region.

During year two, the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) provided data about student attendance and degree attainment at institutions other than those included in the study. These data have been incorporated into an analyses of student attendance patterns, including twenty-four terms of student attendance at home community colleges, a Portland metropolitan community college other than the designated home institution, Portland State, and any combination of these institutions.

Year Two also focused on the definition and coding of attendance patterns among metro area institutions and those reported by NSC. Initial patterns represented students who followed a “linear” path from the home community college to the university and those who “swirled” among several institutions in the Portland metro area. A second round of coding identified different types of swirling patterns: those that were largely linear, those that involved attendance at multiple community colleges, and those that represented a complex combination of metropolitan institutions.

Initial findings are:

- Women are slightly more likely than men to earn an associate degree, transfer to a four-year institution, and earn a bachelor’s degree.
- Asians and Caucasians are more likely than other group to earn an associate degree.
- Asians were more likely than other group to transfer to a four-year institution.
- Among successful transfers, Asian students were less likely than any other group except Hispanics to earn a bachelor’s degree.
- Students who earn an Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer (AAOT) degree or an Associate of Science (AS) are more likely than students who earn other types of associate degrees and students who do not earn degrees to transfer and earn bachelor’s degrees.
- Students who graduate with majors with well-articulated agreements with the community colleges (business, engineering and sciences) are less likely to have earned an associate degree and more likely to have followed a swirling enrollment pattern than students who earned other types of degrees.

Year Three will focus on more completely describing student enrollment patterns, looking for predictors of success and defining the enrollment patterns in more detail, to include number of institutions attended, number and length of interruptions in attendance, and part-time and full-time enrollment status. These data will allow a more nuanced understanding of student enrollment patterns and the elements of those patterns that are related to student success.

At the close of Year Two, several challenges remain. First, a method for identification of low-income and first-generation status continues has not been agreed upon between the university and the community colleges. These are key indicators for the project and Portland State is making every effort to come to agreement on how to measure and code these variables early in Year Three. Second, indicators of student transfer and degree attainment intent are still under discussion. These issues will be more fully explored during fall 2007.

On November 2006, USF's legal counsel and registrar approved a Data Flow Plan. The director of the office of decision support services designated the coordinator of computer applications to work directly with Dr. Ignash to develop the quantitative database and run the cohort analyses. Assistance in developing the database is also being provided by the Florida Dept. of Education, Division of Community Colleges and the Florida K-20 Education Data Warehouse. USF is using the data protocol established by Portland State, adapting it to its own environment, where necessary.

Florida has a highly centralized state database that combines information from K-12 and higher education, as well as the Department of Labor, to provide a rich source of longitudinal information that can help to inform UTRN. To date, common state variables (field IDs and element numbers) have been selected and compiled in a SAS database. Preliminary analyses have been run on a cohort of transfer students from HCC and SPC to USF. Retention tables, including 10 years of data representing entry and enrollment, have been compiled. In addition, variables such as those related to financial aid have been pulled from the common dataset and stored in separate files for use in UTRN research.

These files will be linked during summer of 2007, allowing for preliminary findings during fall 2007.

### **Evaluation**

Due to unavoidable circumstances, Dr. Shulock, external project evaluator, had not completed the evaluation report for 2006-2007 in time for this report, but received an extension of her contract through July 31 to do so. As usual, the project will consider recommendations from her report and incorporate them into the activities for Year Three, 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 December 2006, and periodically by phone during the year. She worked especially closely with the data advisory group. Dr. Shulock will attend the project meeting on July 28 in Arizona. Her input has been invaluable in aligning project goals between Portland State and USF and in clarifying the direction that should be taken by the quantitative and policy research.

### **Sustainability**

Links between the Lumina research and other funded research projects and with local or regional initiatives have been established, and the network has expanded in the Portland area to include institutions not mentioned in the grant proposal. Two developments in the Portland area provide additional audiences and opportunities for dissemination of UTRN findings and recommendations. First, the Portland Area Higher Education Consortium, formed two years ago, has begun to focus on improving existing transfer agreements and strengthening co-admissions and co-enrollment programs in the metropolitan area. Results of the policy analysis and administrator interviews will

provide valuable information for this effort. Second, the Oregon State Board of Higher Education has formed a new task force to examine factors leading to student success and degree attainment, as well as increased research productivity, in the metropolitan area. The common goals and possible cooperation between the UTRN and this committee were discussed on June 28 in a Portland State Council of Academic Deans' meeting with George Pernsteiner, Chancellor of the Oregon University System, and board member Jim Francesconi. As findings and recommendations emerge from the UTRN, they will be provided through presentations to the committee and via the project website.

### **Financial Report**

Financial reports for Portland State, MHCC, USF, and ASU are attached. ASU's financial report shows substantial unspent funds for 2006-2007 as a result of its lack of progress after joining the project in Year Two. Because ASU did not meet its obligations for Year Two, Portland State plans to retain half of the amount of unspent funds in the overall project's subcontract line, and provide a new subcontract to ASU for the amount originally budgeted for 2007-2008, plus one-half of the unspent balance for 2006-2007. After a review of ASU's expenditures for 2006-2007, Portland State may redistribute the remaining unspent balance to the ASU budget for Year Four. MHCC's unspent balance for 2006-2007 will be carried forward in the subcontract for 2007-2008; the campus met its obligations this year and has served as a full partner in the research. The subcontract for USF for 2007-2008 also will reflect its unspent balance for 2006-2007.

Portland State awarded a subcontract of \$5,000 to PCC as a new partner in the project, to cover the costs of data extraction and file creation, using a portion of MHCC's unspent balance for 2005-2006. The remainder of the unspent balance was used to fund a

half-time Research Assistant position at Portland State, which took over the data analysis function originally budgeted for MHCC (this was discussed in the Year One report). In 2007-2008, interest earned on the fund account will be used to provide \$5,000 subcontracts to PCC, CHEM, and CCC, and to fund a graduate research assistant to assist with the analysis of the administrator interviews, and in developing and conducting interviews with transfer students during 2008.

USF has developed a satisfactory plan for spending down its unspent balances during 2007-2008. Dr. Ignash will devote a substantial proportion of her time to the project in Year Three, as she will take a sabbatical leave during 2007-2008 to focus on research. Her focus will be on moving the quantitative and policy analysis forward at USF. ASU's plan for 2007-2008 will be finalized at the project meeting to be held in conjunction with the Biennial Transfer and Articulation Conference in Tempe, Arizona, on July 28<sup>th</sup>. Portland State's budget will carry forward a small unspent balance from 2006-2007 and use the funds to cover 10 percent of salary and other personnel expenses for a senior institutional researcher who is supervising the half-time Research Assistant and assisting with analysis of the five participating campuses in the Portland metropolitan area.

The financial statements for all participating campuses and the overall project are attached. They are intended to reflect expenditures and unspent balances for Year Two of the project, although the total budget for all years combined is included for reference.

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