

## Biography of Bonita Jacobs

Dr. Bonita C. Jacobs is the Executive Director of the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students and an Associate Professor at the University of North Texas, a research university of over 36,000 students. She holds B.A. and M.Ed. degrees in Spanish and counseling from Stephen F. Austin State University with additional studies in Morelia and Monterrey, Mexico, and a Ph.D. in educational administration from Texas A & M University. She was Vice Chancellor for Student Development at Western Carolina University prior to assuming a position as Vice President for Student Development at UNT, a position she held for eleven years.

She is a former editor of *The Journal of College Orientation and Transition* and is the recipient of numerous awards including:

- “Outstanding Contributions to the Orientation Profession Award” and “The President’s Award” from NODA.
- “Ted. K. Miller Achievement of Excellence Award” from the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS).
- “John Jones Award for Outstanding Performance as a Senior Student Affairs Officer” from NASPA Region III.
- NASPA “Gold Excellence Award” for the UNT Student Money Management Center.

Dr. Jacobs has served as Faculty for the ACPA “Mid-Level Management Institute;” President of the Texas Association of College and University Student Personnel Administrators; Board Member for the APLU Council on Student Affairs, and Advisory Board Member for the “National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition.”

She has numerous publications including *The College Transfer Student in America: The Forgotten Student* and over \$3 million in grant funding.

# **FACILITATING A SEAMLESS TRANSFER FROM TWO-YEAR TO FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS**

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## **National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students**

The National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS), located at the University of North Texas, conducts, promotes, and disseminates disciplined inquiries to inform and improve transfer policy and practice; and is poised to become the leading higher education entity solely focused on advancing national and statewide transfer agendas and supporting transfer student success.

Founded as the Institute for the Study of Transfer Students in 2003, the Institute sponsored the first annual, multi-disciplinary national conference to discuss transfer students and their unique issues in completing baccalaureate degrees. To reflect a growing national influence and agenda, a new name, The National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS), was developed in 2009. The 8th Annual National Conference in January 2010 drew over 330 participants from 34 states for three days of research and practitioner presentations, professional networking, and the exchange of best practices.

NISTS has engaged in several grant-supported service projects and research efforts. These include the one-day Texas Transfer Conference (May 2009) funded under contract from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, at which some 1,000 people participated simultaneously at eight statewide sites. Currently, NISTS is conducting a qualitative study of campus perceptions of the efficacy of state transfer policy in Texas, funded by the TG Public Benefit Grants Program under the control and authority of the University of North Texas (UNT).

## **Transfer Patterns**

Seamless transfer has long been an issue in higher education. However, with the growing need to increase the number of graduates in order to meet economic and labor needs, heightened attention should also be focused on transfer student success.

Further, economic circumstances are accelerating the growth in the number of transfer students who begin a community college with the intention of transferring to a 4-year institution. According to the National Center for Education statistics (NCES), in 2005 nearly 60% of students who attained a bachelor's degree had attended two or more institutions prior to graduation. That equates to roughly 2.5 million new transfer students each year and that number continues to grow.

Research from the THECB indicates that only 20% of Academic Associate (AA) graduates apply to four-year institutions. National and state research shows this lack of progress is most acute among minorities, economically disadvantaged, and first-generation students. When coupled with a weak policy/practice environment, this risk is exacerbated, as illustrated in recent research (Gross & Goldhaber, 2009) questioning the efficacy of state policies relating to increasing transfer success and graduation from a 4-year institution.

Traditionally, transfer students most often completed a two-year college degree before they transferred to the four-year institution. In our more mobile society, students frequently transfer multiple times and transfer may or may not involve transitioning across the two-year and four-year line. Traditional transfers are the two-year to four-year; lateral transfers are those who transfer from a two-year to a two-year or a four-year to a four-year; reverse transfers are those who transfer from a four-year to a two-year, and swirling transfers are those who transfer between multiple institutions. An increasing number of students are dually enrolled at two or more campuses simultaneously. Data indicate that only a small percentage (approximately 6%) of today's transfer students enter with a two-year degree and that many community college students transfer with substantially less than two years of college work. While the overwhelming majority of community college

students who complete the two-year degree are able to obtain admission to a four-year institution, the percentage that applies and matriculates is small.

### **Transfer Student Services**

The data about transfer students underscores the fact that they are multifaceted and quite distinct among themselves in terms of life experiences, campus expectations, and life styles; yet, they have often been treated as a single subset with a single set of needs.

On many campuses, transfer student services have become a critical component of the enrollment management portfolio and, given the rapid growth in the number of students transferring, will continue to become more critical.

While admissions offices, registrars, orientation directors, and advisors have a long history with the transfer process, seamless transfer also requires the receiving institution to focus on the unique needs of transfer students once they have matriculated. The National Survey of Student Engagement's (NSSE) findings indicate that transfer students on four-year campuses are less engaged than their native counterparts. Their responses indicate a lower engagement ratio for working with classmates outside of class, tutoring other students, communicating with professors via email, discussing career plans, working with a faculty member on a project, and perceiving the campus environment to be supportive.

To increase the engagement of transfer students and facilitate a seamless transfer, a number of Best Practices have emerged.

- **Transfer Orientation.** The National Orientation Directors Association report a growing number of schools with orientation programs targeted to transfer students and, further, that these programs are likely to be adjusted to meet the needs of this population. Orientations may now include evening schedules, on-line options, and even program options.
- **Academic Advising Initiatives.** Advising, at both the two-year campus and the four-year campus, is one of the most important keys to successful transfer. Intrusive advising and career services can aid in the reduction of the number of credit hours that do not transfer toward the degree.

- Transfer Centers. Transfer Centers can be found on both two-year and four-year campuses; the former being to help students begin the transfer process while in the community college and the latter being to help students matriculate to the four-year campus. Early identification of students who plan to transfer is important.
- Peer Mentoring. Transfer students report that they are concerned about “fitting in” on a four-year campus. Trained peer mentors or transfer ambassadors (TransAm) can be invaluable in alleviating these concerns and for providing accurate campus information.
- On-Line Blogs. Campuses use on-line blogs to distribute in “real time” a wide range of information to students and potential students. Interestingly, these blogs can be particularly helpful in personalizing the transition process.
- Computer Network Lists. Particularly for students who commute and have a limited number of hours on campus, network listservs can be an invaluable tool to encourage student engagement.
- Veterans Centers. Most veterans who are entering higher education are bringing with them transfer credit, and often from multiple institutions. In addition, veteran students often have transitional issues that go beyond the typical transfer student needs.
- Family Affiliation Programs. It is important to involve parents, spouses, partners, and other family members in the transfer process. Parent associations are particularly meaningful for younger transfer students, and over 40% of new transfer students are under the age of twenty-two. Family affiliation programs are equally important to many of the students who often work and rely on the emotional support of friends and families while they are pursuing the college degree.
- Transfer Student Housing. Four-year campuses report that there is an increasing number of transfer students who prefer to live in campus housing, a factor that has altered the criteria for projecting housing capacity

requisites. Transfer wings of residence halls are found on some campuses and they often include learning communities designed for transfer students.

- Transfer Scholarships. Transferring students have traditionally been ineligible for a large portion of scholarships for entering students. In recent years, an increasing number of four-year campuses are adding transfer scholarships to their portfolios.
- Focus Groups. It is important to ask students about their transition experience through the use of surveys, focus groups, etc. Transfer Talk-Backs can provide invaluable information.
- Academic Departmental Initiatives. Academic departments offer a wide range of mentoring programs, tutoring, student organizations, and activities that promote transfer student adjustment.
- Phi Theta Kappa/Tau Sigma Honorary Societies. Phi Theta Kappa is an honorary organization for outstanding community college students and they have been quite active in promoting academic excellence, awarding transfer scholarships, and encouraging a seamless transfer. Tau Sigma is an honorary organization for students on the four-year campus who achieve high academic excellence during their first semester of transfer.
- Student Led Initiatives; e.g., Welcome Week, Transfer Receptions, Family Week-Ends, etc. Some transfer students report that they do not feel welcome on their new campus. Activities such as the ones mentioned serve several purposes. They encourage involvement with the campus, they display appreciation for familial support, and they help students feel more welcome.
- Awarding of Degrees Through Reverse Transfer. Through this program, students who transfer before they complete the associate's degree are awarded the degree once they have completed the hours on the four-year campus. This requires the four-year campus to alert the two-year campus that the student has completed the coursework so that the degree can be awarded.

- Re-Entry Initiatives. More than 3.4 million of the state's working-age adults (18-64) have completed some college, but have not earned a degree - an associate's degree or higher. Additionally, Texas postsecondary institutions serve both young adults (25-39) and older adults (40-64) with only a high school diploma at a lower rate than the U.S. average. (CAEL and NCHEMS, 2008). Re-entry initiatives are increasingly important.

### **Conclusion.**

The transfer issue is pervasive among different types of campuses and among different professionals within those campuses. It is increasingly important for campus leaders to understand trends and issues relating to transfer students and that they custom their programs and services to their individual milieu of transfer student backgrounds. There are many myths about transfer students, but one thing that is clear is that transfer students are very diverse among themselves. There are honor students and students who struggle academically, non-traditional and traditional, part-time and full-time. One of the challenges of the four-year institutions is to not treat them as one-size-fits-all.