

# Transfer Students: Moving Forward by Moving On

BY BLAKE J. ARONSON

**I**S THE COLLEGE YOU'RE NOW ATTENDING THE SAME COLLEGE WHERE you started at as a freshman? Or are you thinking about transferring to another college?

Even if you answered “no” to both questions, chances are good that you know someone who is a transfer student or who is considering becoming one. The National Center for Education Statistics estimates that almost 60 percent of all college seniors have attended more than one institution during their college careers. The National Science Foundation reports that around 40 percent of science and engineering bachelor's and master's degrees are awarded to students who previously attended a two-year college.

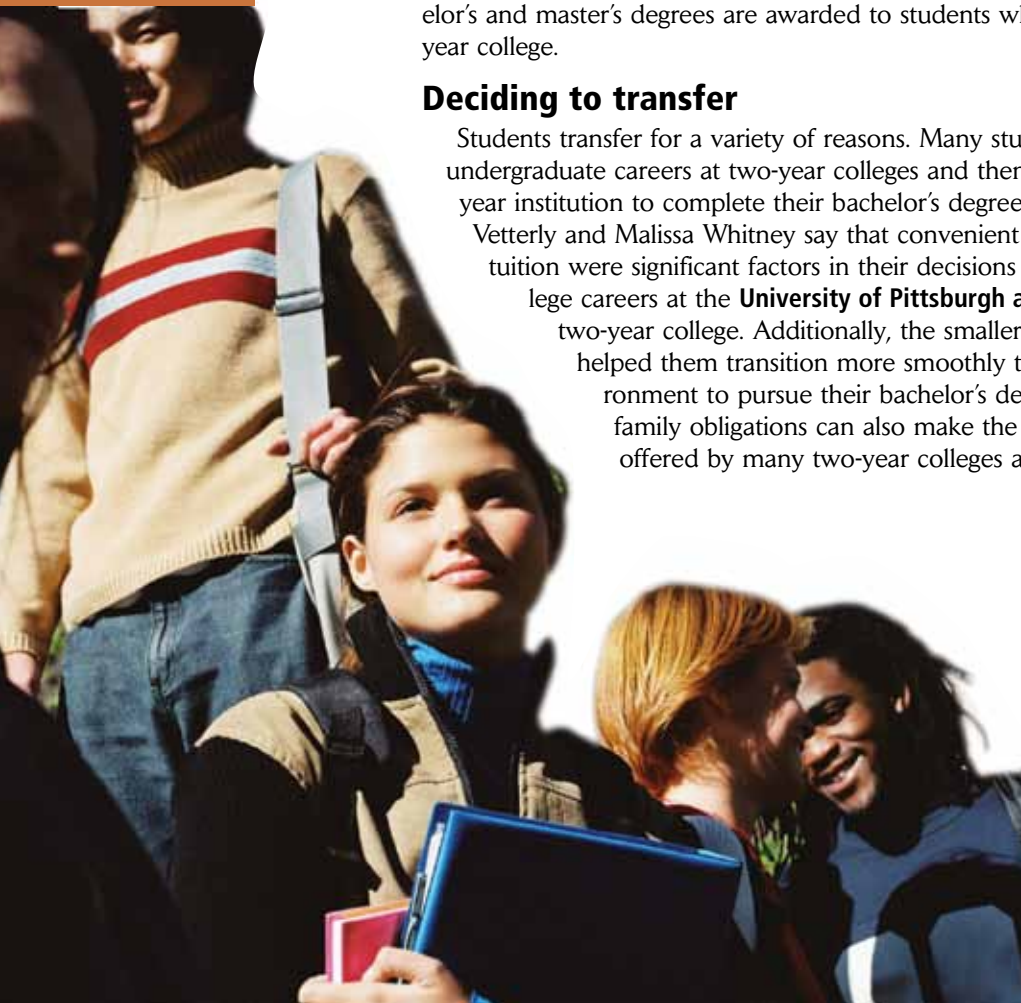
## Deciding to transfer

Students transfer for a variety of reasons. Many students begin their undergraduate careers at two-year colleges and then transfer to a four year institution to complete their bachelor's degrees. Both Stephanie Vetterly and Malissa Whitney say that convenient location and lower tuition were significant factors in their decisions to start their college careers at the **University of Pittsburgh at Titusville, PA**, a two-year college. Additionally, the smaller two-year program helped them transition more smoothly to the college environment to pursue their bachelor's degrees. Work or family obligations can also make the flexible schedules offered by many two-year colleges appealing.



Stephanie Vetterly

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Other students transfer from one four-year program to another. Often, students choose these types of transfers to pursue a particular course or major, to take advantage of an institution's location or reputation, or because their starting institution was not a good fit.

## Overcoming the challenges of transferring

While transferring to a different institution may be a necessary or welcome change, it does not mean that either the process or the experience is easy. According to the 2009 National Survey of Student Engagement, transfer students are more likely to feel marginalized and isolated than non-transfer students. They are less likely to report strong relationships with their faculty and classmates, feel satisfied with their college, and participate in such high-impact experiences as internships, capstone projects, and research with faculty.

Be prepared to deal with feeling isolated as a transfer student. You will face the same challenges that all first-year students encounter — adjusting to a new campus, a new culture, and

## Making Transfer Students Welcome

Increasingly, colleges are trying to address the challenges faced by transfer students. Some colleges offer academic advisors specifically to assist transfer students. Others, like **Miami University of Ohio**, **Minnesota State University at Mankato**, and the **University of California at Santa Barbara**, offer “transfer success” courses that provide continuous orientation to transfer students over the course of the term. Still other institutions, such as the **State University of New York College at Oswego** and **Texas Tech University in Lubbock**, offer peer-mentoring programs for new upperclassmen.

Students themselves can help their transferring classmates. If you see a new face in your chemistry class, be sure to introduce yourself. Offering to show transferring students around campus, inviting them to study groups and social events, and offering advice on courses are all ways to make transferring students feel welcome.

A welcoming atmosphere can make all the difference. For example, McBride has nothing but praise for how his institution supported him: “The **University of Arkansas** did everything they could,” he says, “to make me feel welcome during the application process and after.”

## How ACS Student Chapters Can Help Transferring Students

ACS student chapters can play a key role in helping transfer students acclimate. ACS student chapters provide an instant network of people with at least one common interest (i.e., chemistry). Additionally, recruiting transfer students is a smart and mutually beneficial way to boost membership. Here are some things ACS student chapters can do:

- Host a “Welcome to Our College” event at the beginning of the year. Target upper-level classes, in addition to introductory courses.
- Have regular study sessions. Share notes, old exams, and insights about different professors.
- Visit local two-year colleges and other institutions that students might transfer from. Share information about your chemistry program and your chapter's activities.
- Partner with student chapters at two-year colleges and other transferring institutions. If they do not have an ACS student chapter, help them get one started.
- Make time to reach out to the new faces in your chemistry classes.

Transfer students are often trying to find a balance between academics and social activities. Chapter members are in a great position to help students find that balance.

new financial aid. The courses will be more challenging and you'll be taking them alongside students who have known each other for a while and have already made connections. Vetterly found living on campus helped with the adjustment. “I hate to use the phrase,” she says, “but I feel like I'm getting more of the ‘full college experience.’” Getting involved in study groups and campus organizations (like an ACS student chapter) can help transferring students make new friends and assimilate more easily.

Of course, living on campus can be an adjustment in itself. Ethan McBride, who recently transferred to the **University of Arkansas at Little Rock**, had to get used to using public transportation, eating primarily on campus, and attending social events, none of which he had done as a commuter student prior to his transfer.



Ethan McBride

## Choosing a Transfer Institution

Deciding which institution to transfer to can be every bit as challenging as finding the right college to start at. If you are considering or planning to transfer colleges, be sure to consider the following:

- Policies and standards: Will your courses transfer? Can you transfer mid-year? What deadlines are you facing?
- Housing: Can you live on-campus? If not, is there affordable housing near campus?
- Academic system and environment: Does the institution follow semesters or quarters? Do you like the level of competitiveness? Are there opportunities to work (and socialize) with your classmates?
- Support systems: How does the institution support transfer students? What type of access will you have to tutors, counselors, financial aid officers, etc.?
- Social activities: Is there an ACS student chapter? Are there other activities you would enjoy?

Meanwhile, although Erine O'Connor had no trouble adjusting to the social scene, the exams at **The College of New Jersey in Ewing** were a revelation for her. "The work load has not bothered me, because my professor for Organic Chemistry I and II at my community college really prepared me," she says. However, she adds, "The tests are very difficult."

While a new campus presents a wide variety of new opportunities, Vetterly cautions transferring students against trying to do everything at once. In particular, she says, "don't try to cram all your classes into one semester."

### Prepare to transfer

Are you planning to transfer? If so, study hard. According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling, most colleges assign "considerable importance" to post-secondary grades when considering whether to accept transfer students. McBride agrees,



Erin O'Connor

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crediting his first institution, **Texarkana College**, with preparing him for the transition. He says that the high expectations of his professors, the academic rigor of the courses, and an emphasis on good study habits helped prepare him to succeed.

Do your research to determine whether your courses will transfer to your new institution. Not all institutions will give you credit for the college-level courses you have taken. Find out which courses will transfer, and also which required courses you will still need to fulfill at the new institution.

You will also want to visit the campus. Spend the night, if you can. Get a feel for the campus and make sure it is a good fit for you. Consider whether you like the other students and the neighborhood, and even the weather. Know the housing situation. How plentiful is on- and off-campus housing for incoming transfer students? Whitney discovered that visiting her new campus helped her become familiar with the layout before classes started.

Whitney and McBride found talking with professors to be invaluable in learning the in's and out's of the new administration, finding the courses they needed, and preparing for the new campus culture. Connecting with professors, McBride says, "not only opens your mind to new ideas, it opens up doors for your career down the road." In the short term, it can help you identify courses and undergraduate research opportunities you may want to pursue; in the long term, such connections can become the first step in a mentor relationship that can help shape your professional career.

McBride also recommends hanging on to the notes and materials you accumulated at your first institution. "You never know when that old organic chemistry test on alcohols might come in handy. It is sort of like having your own personal study group on campus, where you can reference anything you need from your previous courses."

Vetterly, McBride, Whitney, and O'Connor all agree that the benefits of college transfer have compensated for the challenges. All are excited by the opportunities at their new institutions and are considering post-graduate degrees. "The more you achieve," McBride says, "the less difficult it seems to get to the next level. Soon enough, you might find yourself a leader in a new and innovative field — all because you were excited about it." 



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