Identifying High-Leverage Transfer Students on Your Campus

Through the Gate Methodology | Tool 1

Project Overview

The RP Group's Through the Gate transfer study aims to identify strategies for increasing transfer among "high-leverage" learners—students who complete all or most of their transfer requirements but who do not make it to university. The study includes:

Phase 1: Mapping the Transfer Landscape (2016 – 2018)

Quantitative research to understand the transfer landscape, determining: (1) how many students in California arrived at or near the transfer gate, but did not go through, and (2) who they are and where they reside

Phase 2: Getting Better Directions (2019)

Qualitative research with students who are ready or nearly prepared to transfer to understand what factors impact their journey and how policy and practice might change to propel them through the transfer gate

The RP Group is conducting this research with support from the College Futures Foundation.

www.rpgroup.org/through-the-gate

Introduction

Applying the Through the Gate transfer study methodology can help your college **identify and assist high-leverage students whose course-taking indicates they are close to a transfer goal** (see sidebar, *Project Overview*).

Your college can use this data collection and analysis to support institutional redesign work such as local Guided Pathways development, equity planning, and other efforts to address California Community Colleges *Vision for Success* goals. It can also help you **quantify which student groups are stuck** near or at the transfer gate—informing immediate action and longer-term structural change designed to increase their transfer success.

User Guide

This tool is specifically designed to guide institutional researchers in applying the methodology, including:

- A description of the Through the Gate study population, informed by a "transfer continuum" identifying student groups at different points on the transfer path, and data sources and elements for conducting this methodology[1]
- Instructions on file preparation and steps for generating the study population on your campus
- Discussion questions your college can use to make meaning of these findings and identify additional research to consider

While this tool outlines the specific methodology used by the Through the Gate research team, consider adapting the approach to your local context.

Identifying the Data Sources

For the purposes of the Through the Gate study, the RP Group used student records found in the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Management Information System (COMIS), which also included data in the National Student Clearinghouse to identify which students transferred to a baccalaureate-granting institution from community college.

At the same time, while the study relied on COMIS in order to make statewide comparisons, your college's local data offer additional data elements that may be worth exploring (e.g., students meeting their transfer-level math requirement through the business or psychology department). We recommend that you tap into the data sources that will provide you with the most up-to-date and comprehensive student records.

Conducting the Study

There are four primary steps to conducting this study on your own campus. The first step is to prepare the data file and apply filters. Next, you will create the derived data elements based on the data in the file you just created. Third, you will place the students in the file into the five transfer continuum groups. The final step is to conduct the analysis. Below are the detailed instructions for each of these steps.

Preparing the Data File

Prepare a data file including student records with the following variables, outlined in Table 1 below. The Through the Gate methodology included student records from a six-year timeframe (fall 2010 through spring 2016).

[1] Find a description of the Through the Gate "transfer continuum" at http://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/Through-the-Gate-Phase-I-Research-Brief.pdf.

Table 1. Description of Variables Gathered

Variable Name	Description	CCCCO MIS Data Element(s)
Student ID	Uniquely identifies a student for all terms (and at all colleges in multi-college district)	SB00
Term ID	Identifies a term within an academic year as well as the academic year itself	GI03
Gender	Indicates whether the student is female or male	SB04
Race/Ethnicity	Indicates a student's primary race/ethnicity	STD10
Age	Indicates the student's age for the term recorded in Term-ID (GI03)	STD01
Local Cumulative GPA	Indicates the cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) earned by the student at the reporting college, specifically the student's cumulative GPA over as many terms as the student has been in attendance at the reporting college, including the current term reported in Term-ID (GI03)	STD8
Local Units Earned[2]	Indicates the cumulative total of earned degree-applicable units at the reporting college, specifically student's cumulative units earned over as many terms as the student has been in attendance at the reporting college	SB16
Award	Indicates the type of degree or certificate the student has earned	SP02
Course ID	Identification of the course as reflected in the college's current catalog of courses	CB01
Course TOP Code	Assignment of the Taxonomy of Programs (TOP) code that best indicates the subject matter of the course	CB03
Course Transfer Status	Indicates whether or not the course is transferable to the University of California (UC) and/or to the California State University (CSU) systems on the basis of articulation agreements	CB05
Enrollment Grade	Indicates the grade or other outcome a student earned for a particular section	SX04
Course Transfer Level	Indicates course level status for English, writing, ESL, reading, and mathematics courses	CB21

[2] Since COMIS does not have a field specific to transferable units, Through the Gate used degree-applicable units and then derived transferable units. However, your local data may contain a transferable units field that you can use, which will likely be more reliable.

Variable Name	Description	CCCCO MIS Data Element(s)
AD-T Completion	Indicates whether or not a student completed an Associate of Arts for Transfer or an Associate of Science for Transfer	Generate ADT = 1 *This data element was provided by the CCCCO, though any other data source indicating whether or not a student earned an AD-T could be used.
Transfer Status	Identifies the date on which a student transferred to/from a college	Generate Transfer= 1 *This data element was provided by the CCCCO, though the National Student Clearinghouse or any other data source indicating when a student transferred could be used.

Apply Filters

To replicate the Through the Gate study population, consider applying the following filters:

- Identify students with enrollment records at your college anytime over at least a six-year period (Through the Gate used fall 2010 through spring 2016, but you may want to look more recently); you may also need to look at the prior terms students were enrolled to make sure you are capturing all earned units rather than just units accumulated within the study timeframe
- Exclude students who had an enrollment record at any baccalaureate-granting institution prior to any enrollment record at a California community college, as well as students who had earned a bachelor's degree prior to their transfer from a college to a university[3]
- Limit your sample to students who demonstrated behavioral intent to transfer by having earned at least 12 transferable units
- Omit any students first enrolling in the college during the last academic year in your chosen timeframe, as they likely did not have enough time to reach the study's milestones of interest (for Through the Gate it was 2015-2016)

[3] This filter eliminates students who are concurrently enrolled at a university and taking CCC classes. However, it also removes students who first began their higher education journey at a university, decided to leave and attend a CCC, and then transferred later.

Generating Derived Elements

Using the calculations outlined in Table 2 on the next page, generate the following elements:

- Total transfer units earned, with inclusion only of earned units that are transferable to the California State University and/or University of California systems, given that in COMIS each student's unit total is derived from degree-applicable units earned and that this study is concerned with transfer
- Successful completion of transfer-level English
- Successful completion of transfer-level math

Note that Table 2 describes variables available in COMIS. For a complete description of each variable including the assigned values, visit the CCCCO data element dictionary.[4]

[4] View the CCCCO data element dictionary at http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/TechResearchInfoSys/MIS/DED.aspx.

Table 2. Description of Derived Variables

Derived Element	Group Description	Formula
Total Transfer Units	Indicates the cumulative total of earned transfer applicable units at the reporting college, specifically the student's cumulative total over as many terms as the student has been in attendance at the reporting college, including the current term being reported	Total Transfer Units = sum SB16 (Local Units Earned) if CB05 (Course Transfer Status) = 'A' or 'B' and if SX04 (Enrollment Grade) = 'A' or 'A+' or 'A-' or 'B' or 'B+' or 'B-' or 'C ' or 'C+' or 'C-' or 'P'
Successful Completion of Transfer-level English	Indicates whether or not a student completed a transfer-level English course	Generate English = 1 (IF) CB05 = 'A' or 'B' (AND) CB21 = 'Y' (AND) CB03 = '150100' (AND) '152000' (AND) SX04 = 'A' (OR) 'A+' (OR) 'A-' (OR) 'B' (OR) 'B+' (OR) 'B-' (OR) 'C ' (OR) 'C+' (OR) 'P '
Successful Completion of Transfer-level Math	Indicates whether or not a student completed a transfer-level math course	Generate Math = 1 (IF) CB05 = 'A' or 'B' (AND) CB21 = 'Y' (AND) CB03 = ''170100' (AND) SX04 = 'A' (OR) 'A+' (OR) 'A-' (OR) 'B' (OR) 'B+' (OR) 'B-' (OR) 'C ' (OR) 'C+' (OR) 'P '

Identifying the Study Population

Based on their highest level of achievement, group the remaining students into categories representing the five stages of the transfer continuum. This continuum is hierarchical and students should be uniquely placed into only one of the five groups;

- **Transfer achievers**: Students who made it through the gate by transferring to any university, with or without a degree or having earned 60 units

- **Students at the gate**: Transfer-ready students who completed 60± transferable units (including both transfer-level English and math) and/or earned an AD-T, but had not yet transferred
- **Students near the gate:** Transfer-prepared students who completed 60± transferable units, but who were missing transfer-level English and/or math and had not yet transferred
- **Momentum students**: Individuals who demonstrated momentum toward a transfer goal by completing 45 to 59 transferable units and maintaining a 2.0 GPA
- **Transfer explorers:** Students on the continuum who were the furthest away from transfer, having completed between 12 and 44 transferable units after at least six years of enrollment

Note: You may also choose to change the defining requirements of each group along the continuum given your local environment and expectations; for example, you might decide students who are in the near or at the gate groups should have a higher than 2.5 GPA rather than 2.0 GPA.

Table 3 on the next page outlines the steps to take in generating the grouping variables along the transfer continuum.

A value of 1 is assigned for each grouping variable if the condition in the last column (on the same row) was met. The indicators of each student's transfer status are therefore hierarchical, with transfer achievers at the top of the hierarchy and transfer explorers at the bottom. If a student is placed into more than one group by the generated indicator variables, assign that student into the group highest in the hierarchy.

Table 3. Study Population Groups

Group	Group Description	Generate …	If…
Transfer Achievers	Students who have a corresponding record from the National Student Clearinghouse after the last term of enrollment at CCC	Transfer Achievers = 1	Transfer = 1
At the Gate Students	Students who have earned an AD-T or have earned at least 60 transferable units, a GPA greater than or equal to 2.0, and who have successfully completed transfer-level English and math	At the Gate Students = 1	[Transfer Achievers ≠ 1 (AND) ADT = 1] (OR) [Transfer Achievers ≠ 1 (AND) Transferable units earned >= 60 (AND) SB20 >= 2.0 (AND) Successful completion of transfer-level English = 1 (AND) Successful completion of transfer-level math = 1]
Near the Gate Students	Students who have earned at least 60 transferable units and a GPA greater than or equal to 2.0, but who have not yet completed transfer-level English and/or math	Near the Gate Students = 1	Transfer Achievers (OR) At the Gate Students ≠ 1 (AND) Transferable units earned >= 60 (AND) SB20 >= 2.0

Group	Group Description	Generate …	If…
Momentum Students	Students who have earned at least 45 transferable, but fewer than 60 transferable units, and a GPA greater than or equal to 2.0	Momentum Students = 1	Transfer Achievers (OR) At the Gate Students (OR) Near the Gate Students ≠ 1 (AND) Transferable units earned >= 45 (AND) Transferable units earned < 60 (AND) SB20 >= 2.0
Transfer Explorers	Students who have earned at least 12 transferable units, but fewer than 45 transferable units within at least six years of student's first-time enrollment	Transfer Explorers = 1	Transfer Achievers (OR) At the Gate Students (OR) Near the Gate Students (OR) Momentum Students ≠ 1 (AND) Transferable units earned >= 12 (AND) Transferable units earned < 45

Conducting the Analysis

Explore how each transfer group differs through basic descriptive statistics. Through the Gate initially examined the near- and at-the-gate, and transfer achieving groups across basic demographics: gender, race/ethnicity, and region. This analysis was intended to provide a high-level view of statewide data examining who stops near or at the gate and who transfers. **However, you can make this analysis more meaningful at your college by also disaggregating your data along additional student characteristics and behaviors.**

Engage with your colleagues to inform specific research questions for these data to help you prioritize how to disaggregate the data. For example, explore whether veterans are more represented in the near-the-gate population or transfer-achieving group. Or you may find it beneficial to examine how students' involvement in special programs influence their transfer status. Or, perhaps you want to explore whether students with an educational plan or who have enrolled in certain courses or along specific pathways are more likely to be in the transfer-achieving group.

Through the Gate encourages colleges to dive deeper into their local data in order to shed light on the specific factors that may be influencing whether students from your institution transfer to a university and explore who your makes up your high-leverage student population to inform immediate action and targeted interventions that will help these students through the transfer gate.

Discussion Questions

Once the analyses are complete, consider using the following questions to spur dialogue around the identification of where in the transfer continuum students at your college place:

- What does the transfer continuum look like on your campus (or district or region)? Specifically, which student groups are stuck near or at the gate? Which ones are transfer achievers?
- How do these findings align with and/or differ from the statewide results found in *Mapping the Transfer Landscape for California Community College Students*?[5]
- What might be holding back different student groups that have taken such important steps toward achieving their bachelor's degree?
- What more do we need to learn about these student groups?

Next Steps

Applying this methodology positions your college for **further examination of which factors are associated with students' transfer odds, including their likelihood for getting stuck near or at the transfer gate**. Users can conduct this additional analysis using the model described in *Determining Students Transfer Odds on Your Campus: Through the Gate Methodology Tool 2*[6] and compare to the statewide results outlined in *Transfer Odds: Technical Report Examining Factors Impacting whether Students Achieve Transfer or Get Stuck Near or At the Gate.*[7]

This research also sets your college up to explore ***why* students might be getting stuck near or at the transfer gate on your campus.** As a next step, consider gathering the perspectives of

[5] View *Mapping the Transfer Landscape for California Community College Students* at https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/Through-the-Gate-Phase-I-Technical-Report.pdf.
[6] View *Determining Students Transfer Odds on Your Campus: Through the Gate Methodology Tool 2* at https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/Through-the-Gate-Transfer-Odds-Modeling-Tool.pdf.
[7] View *Transfer Odds: Technical Report Examining Factors Impacting whether Students Achieve Transfer or Get Stuck Near or At the Gate* at https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/ThroughtheGate/Through-the-Gate-Transfer-Odds-Technical-Report.pdf.

students themselves.[8] Also, while not the focus of the Through the Gate study, you may elect to talk to transfer achievers to learn what helped them successfully make the transition to a university. Interviews and focus groups with students may cover topics such as policies and practices in both the CCC and CSU systems that may be impeding the progress of high-leverage learners, as well as the social, cultural, financial, academic, and personal obstacles students might face. In talking directly with students who are near or at the transfer gate, you may be able to gather critical insights that can help refine existing strategies to increase transfer and inform new efforts to reduce barriers for and improve the success of transfer-bound students.

For More Information…

Visit www.rpgroup.org/through-the-gate

Contact Alyssa Nguyen, Project Director, anguyen@rpgroup.org

[8] Find more information on how to gather student perspectives in *Collecting Student Voices for Guided Pathways Inquiry and Design*, found in the California Community Colleges Vision Resource Center at http://visionresourcecenter.cccco.edu.