KEY THEMES FROM BREAKOUT SESSIONS

On April 7th, Graduate NYC and the Research Alliance for New York City Schools hosted a forum exploring college transfer policies, practices, and research within the CUNY system. Following presentations from two current CUNY students who have experienced the transfer process, and a thought-provoking panel discussion with the current presidents of Queens College, LaGuardia Community College, Brooklyn College, and Kingsborough Community College, attendees were invited to delve deeper into transfer-related topics through informal breakout discussions**.**

Each small group discussion included a mix of college administrators, CUNY Central staff, CBO/nonprofit staff, high school staff, researchers, and others, which created a unique opportunity for conversations *across* different kinds of institutions and different roles that all play a part in supporting students through college transfers.

Please note that the facilitators in each breakout room used the same prompts, so all groups had the opportunity to address similar issues. This document summarizes common themes, questions, and ideas for future work that emerged from the group discussions.

COMMON THEMES RAISED
1. Increasing **awareness** about the prevalence of transfer students and their unique needs is vital.
2. More **data** is needed
   a. Student level: Who are transfer students and how can they be served better?
   b. College level: If data about retention and graduation doesn't accurately account for transfer students, the numbers will be skewed and can give the impression that community colleges are doing worse than they are (which, as one participant pointed out, impacts students' impressions of community colleges– "the numbers look terrible").
3. The focus should be: How many **credits** will go **toward _____ degree**?"
   a. Not only "How many of my credits will transfer?"
4. Transfer from 2- to 4-year college is **"College Access 2.0".** College access advisors are increasingly aware their work is not done once they get a student into community college; students who pursue transfer will face similar challenges and triumphs.
5. Need for more **information sharing** between offices at CUNY, both *within* individual campuses and *between* senior and community colleges.

TRANSFER CHALLENGES/BARRIERS DISCUSSED
1. CUNY CULTURE: CREDITS, COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION
Participants shared stories about credits not transferring. For many, it was more difficult to facilitate credit transfer between CUNY schools than to transfer credits from CUNY to schools outside of CUNY.
   • Many participants discussed poor communication, including:
      o Receiving conflicting messages from different staff and campus offices (repeated reference to getting "the run around").
      o Need for better information sharing between offices *within* and *between* individual campuses.
      o Lack of communication with faculty. There was acknowledgement there's some work being done to support the program and administration but the faculty working with students don't always have that opportunity to meet and be a part of the conversation.
   • Experiences with inconsistent policies at different colleges.
   • General concern that students' voices and experiences are being ignored or denied.

- Lack of accountability for institutions related to transfer students and their success.
- Databases often have out-of-date financial information, which in turn impedes course registration.
- Financial aid for transfer students is a particular challenge. Few answers were offered. Some students have good support in this area, but this is the exception.

2. ADVISEMENT
   - It's a challenge to provide hands-on, personalized advisement at in a system with a huge number of students with different needs.
   - It's important to create a good match between college and student. Advisors should think about which schools have supports for what students may (or may not) need.
   - It's important to coordinate consistent advising, so that students are guided down clearer paths.

3. STUDENT KNOWLEDGE GAPS
   - Students need to understand the difference between A.A. and A.S. degree (which have different liberal arts requirements).
   - Community college transfer students need to understand the landscape of the 4-year/senior colleges.

4. DIFFERENTIATED STUDENT NEEDS
   - Transfer students come and go under such different circumstances, with different needs and timing. How can one system support all of these needs?
   - Diversity of students, particularly in terms of cultural practices and attitudes, makes it a challenge to prepare all students for the institutional challenges of college.

PROMISING TRANSFER STRATEGIES FOR PRACTIONERS
- Set students toward their end goals as early as possible.
  - Students should discuss the transfer pathway at the start of their higher education journey so they make informed decisions about paths/courses/majors to pursue and how transfer will (or will not) play a part in that path.
  - Explain the ways that degrees work (A.A. vs. A.S. degree) and what students will need to do to ensure they achieve their transfer and other goals
- Prepare students to manage transfer fairs. Create worksheets, questions, and game plan in advance of transfer fairs (This happens at Gutmann).
- Develop and nurture cohorts of transfer students so they can support each other, and to create a formal avenue for resources and support.
- Students and advisers should invest time in understanding CUNY's DegreeWorks, which can help show students the classes they need to graduate and stay on track.
  - This does not solve the issue of how financial aid relates to course-taking, which seems pretty confusing for many in the CUNY system and can result in students losing financial aid.

POSSIBLE AREAS FOR FUTURE WORK, COLLABORATION AND RESEARCH

A. **Graduate NYC**
   Some breakout participants discussed future events they would like Graduate NYC to offer:
- Bring more faculty into the conversation. "Advisors cannot resolve these issues without faculty".
- Bring more tech people into the conversation (To help address complexity of multiple systems, including CUNY First, Degree Works and TIPS systems. For instance, why isn't TIPS updated more frequently. Why aren't more CUNY staff using it if that is the reality?)
- Hold a panel with college advisors to discuss the challenges that they face and best practices / strategies for addressing these challenges.

- Advocate for institutional policy shifts and resources/training to address these issues.

B. Individual CUNY colleges and CUNY as a system

NOTE: Some of the following suggestions can be implemented by individual schools or by CUNY central staff. Others will require close collaboration between CUNY campuses and the system's central offices.

- Like Graduate NYC, individual colleges should bring more faculty and technical staff into conversations about transfer supports.
- Create opportunities for different departments (academic, advising, admissions, financial aid, transfer offices, etc.) to communicate on campus.
- Develop a centralized training for advisers across CUNY so more standardized approaches to student guidance.
- A structure like [Degree Maps](#) for all courses of study at all colleges that are publicly available would be a great start to helping advising.
- Provide customer service training for all frontline staff.
- Support more inter-collegiate collaboration, visits and professional development/training between advisors and faculty from community college and senior colleges. *(Explore, revive or try to implement a similar version of a past program where faculty members and/or advisors would spend 2 days on a two-year campus and 3 days on a four-year campus to try to streamline guidance across colleges).*

C. Research

- The role of technology:
  - Technology is supposed to make things easier, but many experience the opposite at CUNY. Why?
  - Specific suggestion: Flag transfer students to better address the unique supports they need and situations they may be faced with.
- Learning from other systems:
  - California recently legislated a system-wide model to ensure smooth credit transfer from two- to four-year colleges. Many attendees had the impression that this model has improved students' experiences. Could a similar the California model be applied to CUNY?
  - What do SUNY community college and senior college relationships look like? Can CUNY learn from SUNY?
- Supporting students:
  - Who is responsible for helping to foster self-advocacy beyond the first year and creating resiliency in students? What can we learn from students who are resilient?[1]
  - In high school, increasing numbers of students receive comprehensive supports helping them enroll in college. Once they get to college—especially four-year schools—they are expected to be much more independent. How can we provide more supports to students as they get to the college level or how "Could we give them more training wheels?"
  - Could high-intensity models (such as those seen at Guttman Community College or in ASAP) be scaled to senior colleges?

Next Steps

As mentioned at the Forum, Graduate NYC is currently conducting a qualitative research study that highlights transfer experiences at three CUNY senior colleges as compared to students who start off at these four-year colleges as freshman. We look forward to sharing our findings in the fall of 2016.

Graduate NYC has also designated **May** as its **Transfer Awareness Month.** Visit www.NYCCollegeLine.org throughout May to see special transfer-related content and keep us updated on what your organization is doing to support transfer students. And, keep following #SupportTransfer on Twitter for the latest news and information.

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[1] Some breakouts experienced disagreement over whether we should focus on making students more resilient to deal with system problems *or* just fix the faulty systems. The argument for needing a better, smarter system with tools that won't require hands-on rapport and personal connections which will require more full-time staff is valid as well as the thoughts on making students more resilient.