Easing Critical Transitions in UW Transfer Students’ Academic Career

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Research

Primary Question

How do transfer students experience their transition to UW and into their major?

Findings

Key Finding

The type of information and social network support transfer students receive in their first quarter at UW has a significant impact on whether they persevere and graduate.

Factors influencing transfer transition:
"Good" experience
Perceived community/isolation
Feel connected and engaged with UW community

Institutional knowledge
Some knowledge about UW, strong capacity to find needed resources and answers

Differences between CCs and UW
Proactively prepared for differences between community college and UW

Multiple touchpoints
Early and repeat interactions with general and department advisers, faculty, staff, peers, online resources

Getting into Major
Planned transfer early; aware of requirements for applying to major; prepared with back-up plan

"Poor" experience
Feel isolated, unsupported in transfer transition

Lack of knowledge about UW, including timelines, milestones, resources, academic expectations, etc.

Overwhelmed and unprepared for differences between community college and UW

Limited interactions with a few members of campus community

Private, peer-to-peer online forum for new and previous transfers

Design

Targeted brainstorm

How might we increase transfer students’ experience of community and access to informal knowledge?

Proposed solution:

Year 1 results

Transfers used the forum as we hoped, to exchange information and share experiences

Pattern of use suggests need for forum community is tied to transition support

Need sustained marketing in multiple channels, beginning before orientation

Mobile Yammer app improved participation, but community desired more features from platform

Transfers used the forum most in the weeks leading up to and during their first months at UW.

Team members included:

- Educational Psychologist
- Data scientist
- Human-centered Designer

UW-IT’s Academic Experience Design & Delivery unit supports student success by using a user-centered design methodology to identify unmet needs and offer technology solutions to meet those needs.

Our process included iterative rounds of data collection and assessment through interviews, surveys, focus groups, prototype testing, and piloting our solution.

We had an interdisciplinary team that allowed us to conduct both qualitative and quantitative analysis and form a rich understanding of how transfer students experience their transition.

See more information on the project from the UW Transfer Community website.