

## **Transitions Dimension Report**

California State University-San Marcos

*Foundations Institutions facilitate appropriate student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with institutional mission.* Beginning with recruitment and admissions and continuing through the first year, institutions communicate clear curricular and co-curricular expectations and provide appropriate support for educational success. They are forthright about their responsibilities to students as well as students' responsibilities to themselves and the institution. They create and maintain curricular alignments with secondary schools and linkages with secondary school personnel, families, and other sources of support, as appropriate.

### Committee Leaders:

- Darren Bush, Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management Services
- Mark Baldwin, Dean, College of Education

### Committee Members:

- Mary Atkins, Computer Competency Requirement Coordinator, Instructional and Information Technology Services
- Pam Bell, Academic Advisor, Undergraduate Advising Services
- Jennie Goldman, Coordinator of New Student Programs, Student Life and Leadership
- Sharon Hamill, Department Chair/Professor, Psychology, College of Arts and Sciences
- Silverio Haro, Academic Advisor, Undergraduate Advising Services
- Marietta Kimball, Accounting Technician, Student Financial Services
- Suzanne Lingold, Assistant Dean, Extended Learning
- Lisa McLean, Manager, Human Resources and Equal Opportunity
- Gary Oddou, Professor, Management and Marketing, College of Business Administration
- Michele Ojeda, Scholarship Coordinator, Financial Aid and Scholarships
- Todd Snedden, Athletics Coordinator, Athletics

The Transitions Committee focused on student transitions as they move from their high school experience through their first year at the University. Throughout the committee process, considerable conversation among members dealt with aspects of the Foundations of Excellence guideline definitions of "communication of clear curricula and co-curricular expectations", "responsibilities to students as well as students' responsibilities", and "linkages" with external partners. In addition, the concept of "lived experience" played a central role in how committee members approached their tasks and drew their conclusions. Overall, the committee determined students have access to a number of excellent resources and available information that is helpful for them to move smoothly through their first-year experience. In addition, the committee identified several important gaps in current practice that must be addressed as the campus works to improve the transition of students from high school to a positive experience at the University. Below, a summary of each sub-committee's findings is followed by the Transitions Committee's Recommended Action Items.

### **Communications to Students**

Examination of our campus website, our admission materials and our campus tour suggests students receive a very thorough exposure to numerous aspects of becoming a university student. The committee determined each of the areas reviewed (website, admission materials, and campus tour) tended to concentrate on factual information, academic expectations of college students, availability of financial resources, and a strong orientation to the campus and services offered, rather than insights into what it is like to be a first-year student. The primary gap in this area was information provided to students on the "lived experience" during the first year was very limited.

Suggestions from this sub-committee include developing a highly visible link on the website in the Prospective Students area that will lead the student to previous first-year student statements regarding challenges they faced during their first year, what students would do differently if they started again and suggestions on how to increase chances for success. Additionally, since the first-year student demographics have differences, for example those living at home with parents compared to those living on-campus, each group should be able to find comments from those with similar situations. Another idea was that it would be beneficial to include in admissions materials a presentation focused on a first-year student as the target audience, similar to the one currently used in the "Stand Out" brochure, which provides a "Week in the Life" day-by-day highlights of experiences of a senior student. Finally, concerning campus tours, the committee suggested carving out time during the information session for a current first-year student to talk to incoming students about their initial experiences.

The campus employs a number of varied strategies to communicate its mission to students. For example: the website lists the mission, vision and values; the campus' Annual Preview Day incorporates the mission during presentations to students; Student Life and Leadership present a video during orientation that highlights the five strategic priorities focused on the mission; and, both the CSUSM catalog and Student Planners include the campus mission. While improvements can always be made, for the most part first-year students are exposed regularly to the mission of the campus.

The same positive conclusion was drawn on efforts to detail college costs and financial aid to students during their first and subsequent years at the university. There are multiple opportunities for students and their families to become acquainted with this information. These include: Preview Day presentations and resources; admissions materials, particularly the "Enrollment Procedure Checklist" that includes a separate section on Financial Aid and Scholarship; website resources; and, regular communications from the Cashiers Office concerning payment deadlines, reminders and late notices.

Another strength identified in this area is that of out-of-class engagement. New and prospective students begin receiving information on the importance of such activities early in the recruitment process. Admission counselors address out-of-class engagement during high school presentations; Orientation and Preview Day both focus on the value of engagement; and, the student planner includes additional information.

Two aspects of communication to students, academic expectations and entry requirements for specific academic majors, were deemed gaps during the committee's analysis. It was unclear whether the institution's academic expectations have ever been clearly defined or if such a document exists. While some campus expectations are very clear, such as writing and computer competency requirements, course syllabi, and the road map for first year students, the lack of an overarching definition makes it difficult to provide clear university-wide academic expectations to students. The same general conclusion can be drawn about the level of information concerning entry into specific academic majors; there is a lack of consistency across the campus. For example, both the Nursing program and the College of Business Administration were identified as providing students this information during orientation sessions but the same could not be concluded for most other academic majors. Recommendations for this area are included in the Academic Advising section of this report.

### **Communications to Others**

The Transition Committee also examined the degree to which our campus communicates with local secondary school personnel, the families of our first-year students, and additional support networks.

Sub-committee findings in this area are on the whole very positive. The campus has developed an approach that includes multiple venues for meeting with the targeted groups and a range of strategies to communicate with external partners. These include: considerable resources devoted to providing information to secondary personnel to assist their own students in the transition to the university: Financial Aid Nights provided to regional high schools addressing financial aid and scholarships; CAMP presentations to high school counselors; annual conferences held on campus for various community groups (MEChA, AVID, Adelante Mujer and Migrant education); and, the CSU system's efforts to develop the Early Assessment Program.

Communication strategies with the two other designated groups in this area are good but perhaps not as developed as those with secondary personnel. There are three main strategies for

communicating with parents: a Parent Orientation for Families offered by Student Life and Leadership; the African American Faculty and Staff Association welcome program; and the University Village's newsletter to parents of those students living in the UVA. While there are numerous on-campus networks that provide information to students, such as Disabled Student Services, Student Health and Counseling Services, Associated Students, Inc., and other groups, there are also numerous efforts to reach external organizations primarily to support students through scholarship opportunities. Organizations such as the San Diego Kiwanis, Emmanuel Faith Church, the San Diego Foundation, American Association of University Women and many others provide continuous support to our students. Without their assistance, many students would not be able to attend a university.

Suggestions to improve work in this area include: adding additional financial aid staff; developing online training accessible to high school counselors; developing a first-year parent newsletter for all students; involving more faculty in connections with first-year students; and enlisting the aid of University Advancement to target external groups for financial contributions to the campus.

### **Establishing Connections**

The Transition Committee examined the quality of the connections our first-year students make with faculty, other first-year students, upper-level students and our various academic support services.

Similar to previous areas reviewed, connections with first-year students vary widely based on the identified group itself. Tenure-line faculty involvement with first year students is extremely limited. For example, very few tenure-line faculty teaching first year courses and they do not participate in advising in the first-year orientation. There was a concern among committee members that first-year students may believe part-time instructors are in fact tenure-line faculty based on their infrequent interaction with the later group. A similar conclusion was drawn on connecting with upper level students due to limited involvement as well. Although there are programs involving both upper and first-year students, the committee found a lack of intentional programs to initiate connections.

The evidence gathered suggested connections with the other two groups in this category, first-year students and academic support services, indicates the campus has a much stronger approach. First-year students are provided multiple opportunities through orientation, General Education courses and a range of campus activities including the Student Life and Leadership Survival Series, and Welcome Week programs to become connected with each other. Another area of strength is the work of Academic Support Services. Adequate information seems to be available, especially for GEL students. The Orientation Planner gives information about various academic support services. GEL students are encouraged to visit the Math Center and the Writing Center. The Student Technology Help Desk allows students to pick up their account information (login and passwords) either on Orientation day or the first week of classes and is an early introduction to the place to come with technology questions and concerns. The New Student Programs

website is very informative while the CSUSM web site also gives adequate information about academic support services.

Suggestions to improve efforts in this area include: increasing the number of tenure-line faculty involvement with students during their first year; targeting the interactions between first-year and upper level students more intentionally; increasing opportunities for students who do not live on campus to involve themselves with one another; requiring all first-year students to enroll in GEL; and, developing a culture on campus where all members of the University believe the First Year Experience is a shared responsibility.

### **Academic Advising**

The sub-committee found that one of the major initial advising sessions is conducted during the Orientation Program for first-year students. However, this approach was determined to be limited because of the range and format of information provided during the orientation. Students participate in a variety of sessions on student life, financial and physical wellness, and how to get involved in school. Forty minutes of orientation time is spent on data collection (CIRP survey) and 1 ½ hours is allowed for lunch. The Academic Advising session occurs at the end of the day for 2 ½ hours when students may have already reached a point of information overload. Additionally, at no time were the faculty involved providing information on the majors. Whereas college advisors are certainly able to discuss the GE requirements and some preparation for the major, advising on the majors, typically handled by tenure-line faculty, does not occur during the orientations. Consequently, during their first-year, students are not exposed to faculty who are best able to answer questions regarding their majors.

Findings on preparation for the second year present a different pattern of results depending on who was asked about the quality of advising. The majority of advisors rated this area as very strong, students rated advising significantly lower and faculty and staff rated it even lower. This may be the by-product of the different roles each plays in advising. First-year students do have access to academic advisors from the college but do not have interaction with tenure-line faculty in the majors. Given that many students are concerned about the major, rather than GE, these data may reflect this concern. Data are also supported by the fact that most first-year courses are taught by lecturers and teaching assistants and these two groups do not typically advise students. The one exception to the findings is with first-year students who enroll in GEL where much more information on course selection, majors and careers is provided. These students have a qualitatively different experience than students who do not enroll in GE. Evidence also suggests GEL students are much more likely to be retained.

## Sources of Evidence

CSUSM Website: <http://www.csusm.edu/admissions.htm>

Printed Admissions Material

First-Year Student Campus Tour

[www.csusm.edu/sll](http://www.csusm.edu/sll)

[www.csumentor.com](http://www.csumentor.com)

[www.csusm.edu/mission\\_statement030700.htm](http://www.csusm.edu/mission_statement030700.htm)

Preview Day Schedule

Admissions and Recruitment Office Tour Guide

[www.csusm.edu/admissions](http://www.csusm.edu/admissions)

Orientation-Interest Sessions (College Life: More than Books and Myspace)

Welcome Week

Student Planner

Advising Presentations

[www.csusm.edu/finaid](http://www.csusm.edu/finaid)

[www.csusm.edu/sfs](http://www.csusm.edu/sfs)

MEChA Conference Program

Financial Aid Night High School Presentation Statistics

"Grapevine Parent Newsletter"

[www.csusm.edu/sll/orientation/firstyearstudentchecklist.shtml](http://www.csusm.edu/sll/orientation/firstyearstudentchecklist.shtml)

<http://www.csusm.edu/shcs/NEWSHCS/counseling.html>

[www.csusm.edu/admissions](http://www.csusm.edu/admissions)

[www.csusm.edu/CLASS](http://www.csusm.edu/CLASS)

[www.csusm.edu/SSS\\_EOP](http://www.csusm.edu/SSS_EOP)

[www.csusm.edu/admissions/outreach-service](http://www.csusm.edu/admissions/outreach-service)

[www.csusm.edu/SSS\\_EOP/learningcommunity](http://www.csusm.edu/SSS_EOP/learningcommunity)

[www.csusm.edu/math\\_lab](http://www.csusm.edu/math_lab)