

Fall 2023 BCSSE Transfer Student Report

CSUSM Kickstart Survey

Report prepared by the Office of Institutional Planning & Analysis

Survey Background

In Fall of 2023, California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) distributed a first-year experience survey through the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis (IP&A) to new first-time freshman and newly admitted transfer students. Responses for the “Kickstart Survey” were collected from August 28th-September 11th, 2023. The Kickstart Survey is a rebranded name for [The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement \(BCSSE\)](#), a survey instrument that is designed to evaluate the first-year experience with academic and co-curricular programs.

Outreach efforts for this survey include social media marketing, U-hour tabling and targeted emails or flyers to stakeholders. All survey respondents who completed the survey were entered into an opportunity drawing for exclusive Voices of CSUSM swag.

The goal of administering the survey was to understand the experiences of new first-time freshman and newly transferred students prior to arriving at CSUSM as well as expectations for participating in educationally purposeful activities during the coming college year. The data collected can be paired with the end of semester data such as the [National Survey of Student Engagement \(NSSE\)](#) to give in-depth insight on first-year and newly transferred students’ engagement on the CSUSM campus. CSUSM will be administering a NSSE survey during the Spring 2024 semester.

As there is a need for more data regarding transfer students at CSUSM, this report is intended to focus on qualitative survey responses to provide in-depth insight into the transfer experience. Kickstart Survey data may also be used to identify potential barriers or opportunities for intervention. This report is important as CSUSM looks to better understand transfer students’ needs and consider services, specific spaces, and programs to better support them.

Transfer students had a response rate of 11.3% (number of surveyed transfer students N= 1758). While the qualitative information has been pulled directly from the survey results, IP&A recommends that comments should not be used to make statements about the entire student experience.

A number of the open-ended questions were created in partnership with various areas on campus. Questions that are part of the BCSSE survey will be notated as such.

The Transfer Student

The transfer student community is a diverse group of students from different backgrounds. For example, many transfer students are also nontraditional students or adult learners. Literature defines nontraditional students as individuals 25 years old or older who have already entered the job market full-time and have delayed their enrollment in higher education or is returning to higher education after a significant amount of time away (Rothes et al. 2022). The needs of these students will likely be different when compared to the needs of first-year freshmen. Included transfer students in the Kickstart Survey administration may provide a better understanding of a transfer students' enrollment process and expectations for CSUSM.

Enrollment Process

Questions about enrollment and the student experience were asked in the Kickstart Survey including the open-ended question: "*What aspects of the admission and enrollment process worked particularly well for you?*" (N=87).

This open-ended question was asked if students indicated that they had a positive enrollment experience.

- "The enrollment for my program was easier than I expected. They offer a lot of resources so their students can succeed in all their classes and off- campus."
- "All of the aspects of applying and enrolling went smoothly although I did have some issues with the adding classes part. Once I did a little research, I was able to do it without a problem."
- "I think that the app and website were pretty seamless, and I love how all the important information is easy to access."
- "From the start everything was simple to understand, and straightforward in regard to seeking information."

Throughout the open-ended comments transfer students reflected on the aspects of admission and enrollment process that worked well for them. One of the more frequent elements of the process that transfer students appreciated was the campus communication efforts. Students relayed that the process was structured and straightforward due to the outreach and reminders from the university.

- "I think everything was pretty straightforward they also made sure to let me know when things were due so that I won't forget to submit them."
- "Some aspects of the admissions that worked well for me were the constant reminders and the videos that showcased how to complete admission and enrollment. That was what helped me figure out if I was doing something correctly."

- “Everything went smoothly and has been the easiest to reach out to and actually talk to a person regarding my questions than any other university.”
- “The process to fill out information was easy. Along with the emails with a detailed list of what was required.”
- “A lot of reaching out from faculty to transfer students made it easy to find answers.”

Providing reminders, lists and tutorials regarding the application process supports students as they navigate a new learning environment as well as provides structure. Comments also included student orientation as an aid in the enrollment process once they physically arrive to campus. Participants enjoyed exploring the campus with a guide and learning about the different programs or resources available to them on campus.

- “Once admitted, the orientations were helpful and informative. Talking with faculty in person has been a better experience than I had over the phone and via video chat...”
- “I would say going to orientation and walking around campus made me more familiar with the campus.”
- “A lot of communication. The orientation was very informative.”
“Once I got over the anxiety-inducing, long process of trying to figure out how to transfer, knowing I was set and enrolled was very nice, and all the orientations AFTERWARDS were nice.”
- “The orientation was extremely helpful, and the academic advisors were easy to reach out to.”
- “... All the offered programs and such during and after Orientation.”

Institution Reputation

Transfer students were given an opportunity to reflect when asked the question “*In your opinion, what is CSUSM most known for in the community?*” (N=97). Understanding students’ impressions of CSUSM gives insight into what university characteristics may be important to prospective transfer students.

Inclusivity and Diversity

A high-level theme that emerged was diversity and inclusivity. This theme was mentioned as something highly appreciated and is mentioned by transfer students throughout the comments. This specific question was not part of the original BCSSE instrument, but this is one that was included for CSUSM’s Enrollment team to understand the student perspective on CSUSM’s reputation.

- “I guess for its inclusivity, it’s very inclusive to everyone no matter their sexuality, gender identity, race, preference, etc. I guess it’s what made me go to this school other than being my recommended by my counselor. I like it here and I feel safe.”
- “CSUSM is known for being inclusive and diverse. There is a place for everyone to feel comfortable.”

- “CSUSM is known for cultivating a welcoming environment along with a diverse student body.”
- “I think CSUSM is most known for Diversity in the community and provide care for students.”
- “I’ve only been here a few days, but CSUSM seems to be very highly academically regarded as well as very inclusive of all students.”
- “The diversity and inclusion. Propelling minority students forward.”

Commuter Needs

A second emerging topic is CSUSM’s commuter community and the university’s location being convenient or close to home for students.

- “CSUSM is a convenient campus for people who lives in North County of San Diego.”
- “The local University.”
- “It’s known as a good local school...”
- “CSUSM is most known for how easy it is to commute from home. It is also known for its diversity and the student events it offers for one to get involved.”
- “It is known for its great programs and how they want students to stay connected even though it has the reputation of being a commuter school, there are a lot of student activities and organizations to get involved.”

Campus Landmarks

The third most frequently mentioned aspect of CSUSM’s characteristics are the stairs which are considered landmarks by students as well as the San Marcos community.

- “It’s part of being an eco-friendly campus, stairs, and overall good vibe.”
- “CSUSM is most known for having a lot of stairs!”
- “Lots of walking and stairs.”

Expected Challenges

Participants were asked the BCSSE created survey question “*What do you expect will be most challenging at this institution?*” (N=129). Transfer students may have a different academic journey compared to first-time freshman as they already have experience attending a higher education institution.

Financial Challenges

Despite many respondents indicating financial aid rewards and resources offered at CSUSM were appreciated, there are still students who stated they either did not qualify for financial aid or did not receive enough financial aid to cover the cost of attendance. These respondents expressed that one of their perceived challenges in attending CSUSM has to do with affording attendance costs.

- "...Money will also play a big role as a challenging issue. Since the grant I get can only pay for 2 classes (I am very grateful) but it is a lot to pay for another 2 plus books, plus materials, plus parking, plus websites for my Spanish class."
- "Financial challenges while in school and fear of what to do with psych degree after graduation. And managing taking care of loved ones while working and going to school."
- "Figuring out how I will be able to afford college with my current situation."

Challenges with Time Management

Throughout the open-ended comments students also indicated they had to work while also attending CSUSM which may make time management challenging. Some transfer students shared that they have concerns about maintaining a healthy personal life while balancing their academic and non-academic responsibilities.

- "Time management. I will be working full-time and be a full-time student so I think the most challenging part will be managing my time between work and school."
- "Being able to better manage my time, making sure I'm staying on top of all my school courses while maintaining a full-time job."
- "Being able to work full time and be a full-time student. I'm very scared of my time management and how it'll affect my mental health."

Networking Challenges

Transfer student respondents discussed making connections on campus as a concern for them. There were various comments about establishing a network or community as a transfer student. Due to the range of responsibilities of respondents, these students may not be on campus as frequently in comparison to other students which may make establishing community challenging.

- "The most challenging will be trying to form connections as a transfer student and getting used to the difference in workload."
- "Finding my space that is supportive and encouraging of my success amongst peers."
- "Having time for extracurriculars like work will be a challenge considering my classes are all day long."
- "Making friends or living a student life and being able to afford things."

Academic Challenges

In the open-ended comments there were many mentions of the change in academic rigor between community-colleges or previous institutions and CSUSM. These respondents shared concerns about their higher division courses and maintaining of GPA as more rigorous in comparison to previous courses they have taken.

- "Statistics class and higher division classes revolving around research and hands-on investigation projects."
- "I expect the most challenging part of this institution is the classes and course work. This is because you are making sure we are getting the best knowledge that we as students can get."

- “I expect that the higher-level course work for the major I end up with will be the most challenging.”
- “I expect getting good grades would be the most challenging aspect.”
- “Adjusting to new curriculum and management of classes.”

Other Themes

Some respondents provided more insight into their personal lives. The transfer student community is diverse and includes students that may have other responsibilities outside of academics. There are also mentions of COVID-19 and the adjustment that respondents will be making upon returning to in-person classes, as well as students who have returned to higher education after a period away.

- “My personal life will be hard to balance, I have a young infant.”
- “Honestly the most difficult thing will be balancing my time because I am a single father.”
- “Getting into a rhythm. I've been away from a school setting for 12 years and am nervous that I can keep up with the pace.”
- “Adjusting back into in person school since I've been doing online classes for 4 years now due to covid and then community college I decided to do online so I had more time to work.”

Conclusion

This qualitative narrative focused on the open-ended questions and comments from transfer students in the Fall 2023 *Kickstart Survey* which inquired about the student perspective on the transfer student process. This report provides examples of prominent themes that have emerged from the comments.

This survey was administered with the goal of illuminating factors of the transfer student experience as they navigate their educational journey to CSUSM. Understanding the transfer student experience can initiate conversations that may benefit the transfer student community in the future.

Questions about the survey can be directed to Institutional Planning & Analysis at survey@csusm.edu.

References

Roths, Ana, Marina S. Lemos and Teresa Gonçalves. 2022. "The Influence of Students' Self-Determination and Personal Achievement Goals in Learning and Engagement: A Mediation Model for Traditional and Nontraditional Students." *Education Sciences* 12(6):369.