

Transfer Students: A Student Outcome/Institutional Outcome Assessment Model

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With the continuing increases in the cost of higher education, more students are beginning their college careers at community colleges. Because of student learning outcome assessment criteria required by most accreditation bodies, it will become a “best practice” to assess the learning outcomes possessed by transfer students. One of the means for accomplishing this is to “validate their knowledge by success in higher level courses. The purpose of this paper is to present a process model for tracking and monitoring transfer student performance. A by-product of this process is the ability to give feedback to the transfer institution regarding the performance of their students relative to other transfer institutions.

INTRODUCTION

As the cost of higher education continues to escalate, relative to the cost of living, more students are choosing to begin their academic careers at community colleges. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has published numerous articles over the last several years on both the increasing costs and change in demographic trends. We strongly suspect that the state of Pennsylvania is a trend-setter in this area because of the relatively high cost of public higher education in the state. This has mixed effects for both the two-year and four-year schools. Certainly the enrollment at two-year schools has increased while admission to four-year schools is somewhat flat. However, more of the cost of developmental education, particularly reading, writing, and math are being transferred to or born by two-year schools.

While the list of both positive and negative outcomes of these changes may be lengthy the over-arching important questions are:

1. How are the schools “working together” to smooth the transition process?

2. Are there any negative academic consequences accruing to students as a result of this trend?

In addressing the first question, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) has had the foresight to negotiate “articulation agreements” with the community colleges and other “feeder” institutions in Pennsylvania and Maryland. These agreements have resulted in the creation of PDF files that counselors, students, and advisors can access to ensure the equivalencies of courses between institutions.

Equivalences in course content and description is important but assurances of knowledge and skills is a more essential issue because many of the courses taken at the “feeder” schools are prerequisites to courses taken later at the four year institution. This is particularly evident in “transfer” business programs where the necessary basis of knowledge and skills gained in “lower division” freshman and sophomore courses are essential for success in the “upper division” junior and senior courses.

This issue raises numerous questions but two are of overriding importance:

1. Are transfer students who have equivalent “lower division” courses bringing with them equivalent knowledge and skills to the four year institution?
2. Are students from different transfer institutions performing at different levels and, if so, shouldn’t their institutions be aware of this?

Therefore, the purpose of this project is to attempt to develop a very basic model in order to collect general information and academic performance on students that are transferring into the John L. Grove College of Business at Shippensburg University. Our intent is to demonstrate that their academic performance at Shippensburg is sufficient to insure the graduation; to compare transfer institutions on their students’ performance; and to provide feedback to our major “feeder” schools on their students’ overall academic performance.

Additionally, as the size of their transfer population increases, as suggested in several articles in *Chronicle of Higher Education*, we will be able to demonstrate to all accrediting agencies that we do, in fact, monitor the learning and performance of our transfer students.

Data Collection and Analysis:

Our intent was to create a simple descriptive model as opposed to an analytically complex model. As such, we describe: (overall & by institution)

- average transfer student GPA
- average transfer student Shippensburg GPA
- average # of incoming credits
- average # of Shippensburg credit attempted to date

This data was compiled for the four major “feeder” institutions: Burks County Community College, Harrisburg Area Community College, Montgomery County Community College, Hagerstown Community College and Penn State branch campuses.

TABLE 1

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA				
	2003	2004	2005	2006
BCCC	2.45	3.15	2.67	2.32
HACC	3.09	2.70	3.27	3.18
MCCC	3.26	3.37	2.81	2.81
HCC	3.27	3.07	3.23	3.29
PSBC	2.64	3.07	2.28	2.94

Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA				
	2003	2004	2005	2006
BCCC	2.72	2.95	2.30	n/a
HACC	2.96	2.83	2.46	1.60
MCCC	2.74	3.43	2.83	n/a
HCC	2.66	2.68	2.85	3.05
PSBC	2.43	2.93	2.49	3.28

Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date				
	2003	2004	2005	2006
BCCC	60	40	29	n/a
HACC	56	45	29	13
MCCC	74	49	26	n/a
HC	46	39	24	2
PSBC	34	47	35	6

Average # of Incoming Credits				
	2003	2004	2005	2006
BCCC	59	41	55	72
HACC	54	39	46	51
MCCC	47	50	61	37
HCC	35	60	43	55
PSBC	29	23	46	32

FIGURE 1

BCCC PROFILES

2003

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA	2.45
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA	2.72
Average # of Incoming Credits	59
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date	60
Major Breakdown	Students Percentage
Finance	1 100%

2004

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA	3.15
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA	2.95
Average # of Incoming Credits	41
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date	40
Major Breakdown	Students Percentage
Business - Admin./Gen. Mgt	4 100%

2005

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA	2.67
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA	2.30
Average # of Incoming Credits	55
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date	29
Major Breakdown	Students Percentage
Business - Admin./Gen. Mgt	1 33%
Finance	1 33%
Supply Chain	1 33%

2006

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA	2.32
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA	n/a
Average # of Incoming Credits	72
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date	n/a
Major Breakdown	Students Percentage
Business - Admin./Gen. Mgt	1 100%

HACC PROFILES

2003

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		3.09
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		2.96
Average # of Incoming Credits		54
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		56
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Accounting	5	29%
Business - Admin./Gen. Mgt	5	29%
Finance	1	6%
HR Mgt.	1	6%
Marketing	2	12%
MIS	3	18%

2004

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		2.70
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		2.83
Average # of Incoming Credits		39
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		45
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Accounting	4	13%
Business - Admin/Gen. Mgt.	14	45%
Economics	2	6%
Finance	1	3%
HR Mgt.	3	10%
Info. Tech. Business	2	6%
Marketing	4	13%
Supply Chain	1	3%

2005

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		3.27
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		2.46
Average # of Incoming Credits		46
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		29
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Accounting	5	25%
Business - Admin/Gen. Mgt.	5	25%
Finance	3	15%
Info. Tech. Business	3	15%
Marketing	3	15%

Supply Chain	1	5%
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2006

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		3.18
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		1.60
Average # of Incoming Credits		51
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		13
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Accounting	7	30%
Business - Admin/Gen. Mgt.	7	30%
Info. Tech. Business	2	9%
Marketing	5	22%
MIS	1	4%
Supply Chain	1	4%

MCCC PROFILES

2003

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		3.26
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		2.74
Average # of Incoming Credits		47
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		74
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Accounting	1	25%
Business Admin.	1	25%
HR Mgt.	1	25%
Marketing	1	25%

2004

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		3.37
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		3.43
Average # of Incoming Credits		50
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		49
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Business - Admin/Gen. Mgt.		
Mgt.	2	67%
HR Mgt.	1	33%

2005

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		2.81
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		2.83
Average # of Incoming Credits		61
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		26
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Business Admin.	2	100%

2006

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		2.81
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		n/a
Average # of Incoming Credits		37
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		n/a
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Business - Admin/Gen.		
Mgt	1	50%
Finance	1	50%

HCC PROFILES**2003**

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		3.27
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		2.66
Average # of Incoming Credits		35
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		46
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Accounting	4	44%
Business - Admin./Gen. Mgt	1	11%
Info. Tech. Business	2	22%
MIS	2	22%

2004

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		3.07
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		2.68
Average # of Incoming Credits		60
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		39
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Accounting	2	18%
Business - Admin/Gen. Mgt.	2	18%

Finance	1	9%
HR Mgt.	1	9%
Info. Tech. Business	1	9%
Marketing	2	18%
MIS	1	9%
Supply Chain	1	9%

2005

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		3.23
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		2.85
Average # of Incoming Credits		43
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		24
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Accounting	2	22%
Business - Admin./Gen. Mgt	3	33%
HR Mgt.	1	11%
Marketing	3	33%

2006

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		3.29
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		3.05
Average # of Incoming Credits		55
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		2
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Accounting	1	9%
Business - Admin/Gen. Mgt.	2	18%
Finance	3	27%
HR Mgt.	1	9%
Marketing	4	36%

PSBC PROFILES

2003

Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		2.64
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		2.43
Average # of Incoming Credits		29
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		34
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Accounting	1	13%
Business - Admin./Gen. Mgt	4	50%
Info. Tech. Business	2	25%
Marketing	1	13%

<u>2004</u>		
Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		3.07
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		2.93
Average # of Incoming Credits		23
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		47
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Business - Admin./Gen. Mgt	6	67%
Finance	2	22%
Info. Tech. Business	1	11%
<u>2005</u>		
Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		2.28
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		2.49
Average # of Incoming Credits		46
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		35
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Business - Admin./Gen. Mgt	2	40%
Finance	2	40%
Marketing	1	20%
<u>2006</u>		
Average Incoming Transfer Student's GPA		2.94
Transfer Student's Shippensburg Cumulative GPA		3.28
Average # of Incoming Credits		32
Average # of Ship. Credits Attempted To Date		6
Major Breakdown	Students	Percentage
Business - Admin./Gen. Mgt	4	57%
Finance	2	29%
Marketing	1	14%

CHART 1

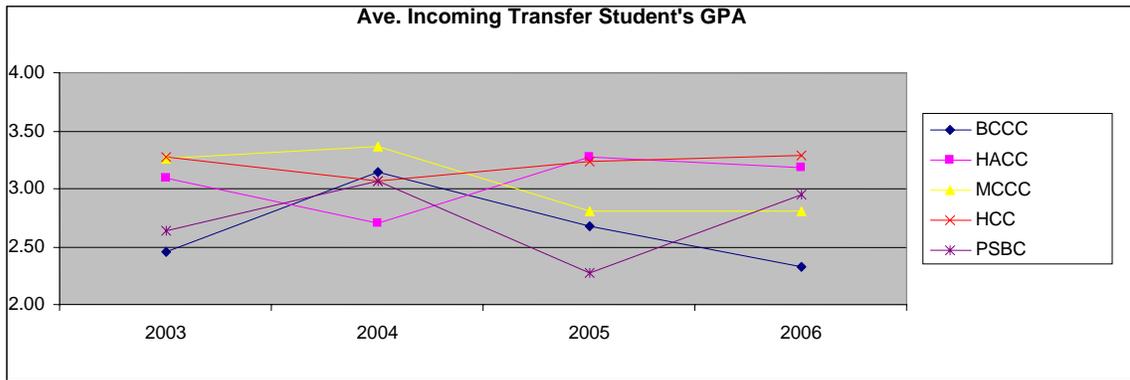


CHART 2

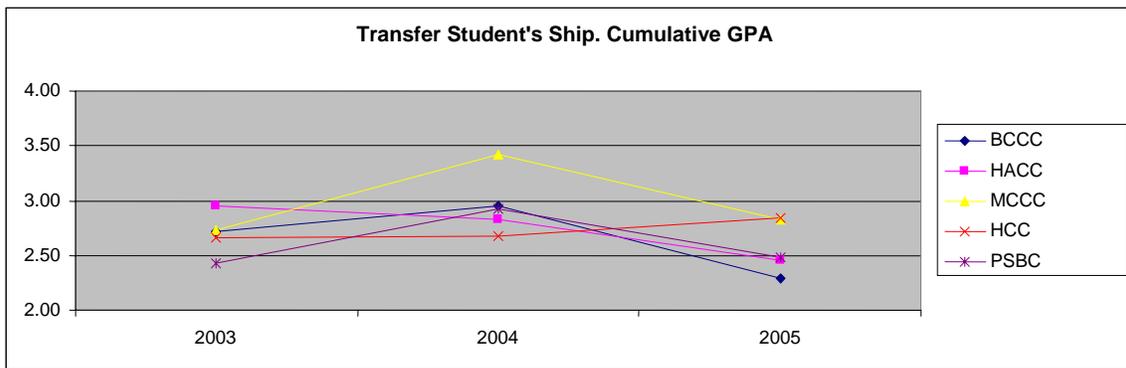


CHART 3

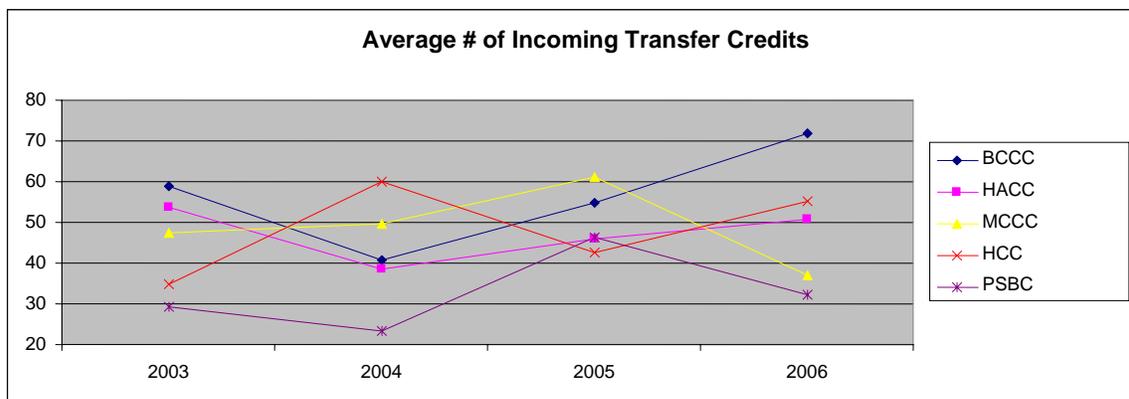
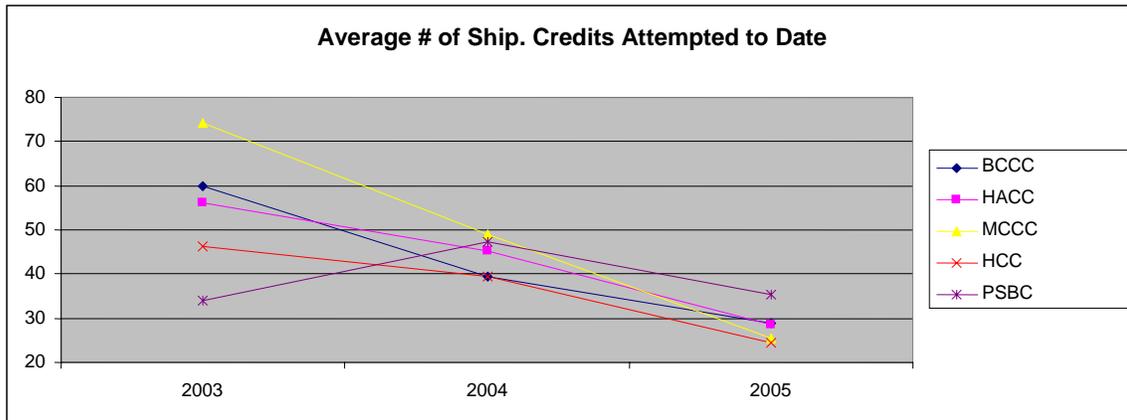


CHART 4



As can be gleaned from the following tables and charts:

1. Overall, transfer students can and do succeed academically suggesting that they do bring with them the requisite knowledge and skills for success in our business program.
2. While there is a downward trend in their GPA as they progress through “upper division” junior and senior-level courses, this is also true of all Shippensburg business students and is generally expected as the course difficulty level increases.
3. Overall there does not appear to be a practical difference among the “feeder schools” in terms of overall student performance at Shippensburg.

CONCLUSIONS

Our underlying motivation for this project as both faculty and administrators was the deep seeded belief that transfer students were struggling with “upper level” business course to the same degree that freshmen struggle with “lower division” courses.

The struggle is more related with their ability to adapt than with their academic preparation. We were concerned that our transfer students may be having difficulty adapting to a new academic culture because they were not prepared academically.

While we are relieved that our transfer students are bringing with them the requisite knowledge and skills for success in our program, we remain concerned about their initial transition to a four-year AACSB International accredited program. We have had enormous success with Foundations in Business course for entering freshmen that has significantly increased our retention rate. Perhaps a comparable course that improves the transition process for transfer students may also be workable.

We were pleasantly surprised that there appeared to be very little difference between “feeder schools” in our sample. Our “gut reaction” when initiating this project was that some “feeder schools” would certainly be better than others. This was not supported by the data.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, while this data analysis of transfer students in business is new to us, we certainly believe that with a few refinements (separating associate degree transfer students from others) this process will assist us in monitoring transfer students progress;

provide valuable data to our “feeder schools”; support our student outcome learning assessment process; and complement our AACSB International assessment plan, particularly as our transfer students population continues to grow.