NISTS 2024 | CONTENT THEMES

At NISTS, we believe it takes all of us working together, beyond silos, to effectively support transfer students' diverse identities, contributions, needs, and pathways. All conference sessions must align with at least one of the following broad content themes, which intentionally blur traditional boundaries between functional areas and across community colleges, universities, and blended institutional types. Sample topics for each theme are provided for quick reference.

Enhancing Access, Affordability, and Wellness

The transfer pathway includes numerous barriers to enrollment and goal completion that often disproportionately impact students from historically underrepresented and under-supported groups. Presentations in this category examine strategies that promote transparency, remove obstacles, and ensure equitable access to educational opportunities. Sessions cover a range of topics that address the multifaceted aspects of student well-being, such as scholarships and financial aid, housing and food security, childcare support, mental health, open educational resources, and policies that may impede student progress.

Sample Topics:

- Defining transfer success beyond retention and graduation rates
- Enacting an equity-minded approach to transfer communications, programs, policies, and practices
- Examining and challenging bias, deficit thinking, exclusionary policies, limited/inadequately allocated resources, etc.
- Increasing transfer students' access to essential resources, such as financial aid/scholarships and on-campus housing
- Partnering with community organizations to provide resources like food pantries, emergency housing assistance, affordable childcare options, and other life supports critical to student success
- Using disaggregated data (including student narratives) to inform transfer policies, programs, and practices
- Using journey mapping (or similar methods) to identify potential transfer barriers

Fostering Inclusion, Engagement, and Community

Transfer students have a wealth of knowledge and experiences, and they deserve purposeful and tailored support as they navigate the transition between institutions. These sessions concentrate on helping students feel valued, welcomed, and connected as they acclimate to their new campus environment, build meaningful relationships, and discover ways to engage in high-value personal, social, and academic activities. Of particular interest are presentations that explain how these programs and supports foster a genuine sense of acceptance within the broader campus community and contribute to student persistence, retention, and completion.

Sample Topics:

- Best practices for engaging transfer students in co-curricular activities, leadership opportunities, or high-impact practices, such as internships, learning communities, service learning, and undergraduate research
- Celebrating National Transfer Student Week
- Creating a transfer-friendly classroom climate
- Debating the use of "transfer student" to identify/label today's mobile learners
- Developing a credit-bearing class that prepares transfer students for upper-division courses/research

- Enhancing individualized or peer-to-peer transfer supports (e.g., case management, coaching, mentoring, or ambassador programs)
- Launching or running a transfer center at a community college or university
- Programming ideas to motivate, empower, and support today's transfer students
- Supporting transfer students with limited staff and financial resources

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Leading and Advocating for Change

To create an inclusive and equitable transfer culture, transfer success must be valued and prioritized throughout the entire institution/system. These sessions explore how both grassroots and appointed leaders can leverage their knowledge and influence to garner buy-in with key stakeholders and may also address infrastructure/policy changes related to financial and physical resources, partnerships, personnel, professional development, or technology. Of particular interest are tips and tools for using data and narratives to engage campus colleagues, raise awareness and empathy, and build coalitions for moving transfer initiatives forward.

Sample Topics:

- Convening a transfer success advisory council/committee
- Crafting an elevator pitch that explains why transfer and credit mobility are important issues
- Creative ways to recognize outstanding transfer champions
- Demonstrating the financial benefits of enrolling and retaining transfer students
- Empowering transfer students to have a voice and influence in institutional conversations
- Helping colleagues (faculty, staff, or administrators) understand and value transfer student needs, identities, pathways, and challenges
- Incorporating a vision for transfer success in campus/department planning efforts
- Preparing and sharing transfer data with campus administrators and partners
- (Re)allocating resources to better support transfer (e.g., staff responsibilities, budgets, space, etc.)
- Scaling proven transfer programs and initiatives at small colleges

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Maximizing Credits and Streamlining Pathways

Complicated credit policies and unclear academic plans too often delay transfer students' progress and persistence, causing excess credit accumulation, multiple major changes, and lost personal momentum. Presentations in this category discuss challenges associated with credit transferability and applicability and offer suggestions for improving communication, collaboration, and records management. Relevant topics include alternative credits, articulation agreements, the credit evaluation/appeals process, curriculum alignment, degree maps, guided pathways, and reverse transfer.

Sample Topics:

- Conducting local, regional, or state-level curriculum alignment meetings
- Creating transfer pathways that work for more than one major
- Determining the effectiveness of articulation agreements
- Engaging faculty across institutions in curriculum alignment and degree mapping
- Enhancing transparency and fairness in the transfer credit review/appeals process
- Evaluating and awarding various forms of academic credit, such as prior learning assessment and competency-based credits
- Examining state/system-level policies that facilitate and prioritize transfer

- Mapping curricular complexity to improve course availability/scheduling
- Navigating tough credit equivalency conversations with students or faculty administrators
- Strengthening lines of communication between sending and receiving institutions (e.g., identifying shared goals, updating and maintaining agreements/pathways, scheduling regular reviews, sharing data, etc.)

Optimizing the Matriculation Process

As they contemplate and initiate transfer, students rely on timely, accurate, and clear information from a wide range of campus constituents, including academic departments, admissions, advising, financial aid, orientation, registrar, and even residence life. These sessions spotlight trends and issues related to transfer planning, recruitment, enrollment, or onboarding and amplify the policies, practices, and resources that can propel students from their initial point of interest through the first semester of attendance at their new institution.

Sample Topics:

- Best practices for transfer student marketing, outreach, and relationship-building
- Creating a cohesive network of transfer resources and support between departments and academic units
- Delivering effective and engaging transfer orientation sessions
- Involving faculty and academic departments in transfer advising and onboarding initiatives (e.g., tailored welcome messages or bridge programs)
- Leveraging technology to help students understand requirements and visualize their academic progress
- Linking transfer and career advising supports
- Revising transfer planning guides and requirements so that they're easy to find and understand
- Simplifying the transfer application process
- Tailoring admissions and enrollment communications to better-fit transfer needs and expectations
- Working through/around admission to capacity-constrained majors

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Supporting Diverse and Special Populations

Transfer offers students with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and identities the opportunity to pursue higher education, while simultaneously bringing rich diversity to our campuses. Presentations in this category discuss these new majority learners in more detail and highlight programs and supports tailored to facilitate a smooth and equitable transfer experience. Relevant populations include, but are not limited to: people of color, first-generation, low-income, adults, parent/caregivers, LGBTQ+, military-affiliated, online-only, part-time, formerly incarcerated, neurodivergent, those with a disability, and students who have experienced trauma.

Sample Topics:

- Addressing the unique needs and challenges of hybrid or online-only transfer students
- Connecting early college and dual enrollment students to the transfer pipeline
- Discussing what it means to support transfer in challenging political contexts
- Engaging transfer students in 'the middle' (i.e., GPA, involvement, etc.)
- Example programs and initiatives for any new majority learner population
- Exploring the impact of transfer students' intersecting identities