

# Transition to College: 2000

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Student Affairs Assessment

#### Report Goal

The main goal of this study is to identify factors that aid and impede students' successful transition to college. The questionnaire contained a series of questions to assess respondents' attitudes toward their first quarter attendance at Ohio State. Students were asked about the level of helpfulness of programs designed to ease the transition to college (including Summer Orientation, Welcome Week and Family Weekend), their concerns about attending Ohio State, their experiences with negative incidents on or around campus, and their self-evaluation of how they are doing with personal and academic-related competencies. Students who did not return to Ohio State for winter quarter were also asked about their reasons for not returning to Ohio State and what their future plans were. By learning more about the experiences of OSU students and their transition to college, we can better inform our practice. We are also able to examine how various subgroups may experience Ohio State as first-year students including differences based on residence, gender, ethnicity/race, and grade point average.

#### Context

With retention literature telling us that the first year of college is crucial to college success, it is important that we know more about our first year students, their transition to college, and the reasons why they stay or leave (Upcraft, Gardner, et al., 1990). As students enter college, they are faced with many changes: a new environment, new challenges, new roles, and more. They often leave the familiar surroundings and their support system when they enter college. This survey looked at students' first-quarter experience and their **transition to college**. Transition refers to the process of adjusting to college socially and academically. It is the process of acclimating to the new environment and learning to live independently. It includes meeting people and making new friends, learning about campus and the available resources, establishing academic and career goals, and understanding what it means to be part of the Ohio State community.

Furthermore, freshmen success has been defined as developing academic and intellectual competence, establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, developing an identity, deciding on a career and life-style, maintaining personal health and wellness, and developing an integrated philosophy of life. Factors that contribute to success include establishing close friendships (especially in the first month), participating in orientation, living in the residence halls, belonging to student organizations, involvement in social and cultural activities, using facilities, and using academic support services (Upcraft, Gardner et al., 1990). An important part of making the transition to college is "getting connected." Getting connected refers to the process of identifying oneself as a member of the OSU community, getting involved with campus life, and meeting fellow students as well as faculty and staff members. To feel connected is to feel a part of the university.

## Data Source

The Student Transition survey was conducted by the OSU College of Social and Behavioral Sciences' Center for Survey Research for the OSU Division of Student Affairs. Student Affairs drafted the instrument and conducted all analyses. This phone survey used a sample of students who were randomly selected from a database of all new first-quarter students at the Columbus campus as of fall quarter, 1999.

A total of 1,249 students were randomly selected for this survey. In many cases, viable telephone numbers were called upwards of 10 times to try to reach a respondent at a time that was convenient for her or him to be interviewed. Of these, 1,188 were presumed to reach a household with an eligible respondent. From these households, interviews were completed in 58% of the cases. Among those households in which an interviewer actually spoke with the eligible respondent, interviews were completed in 91% of the cases. Of the 689 completed interviews, 102 were students who did not return to Ohio State for winter quarter and 587 were students who returned to OSU. In addition to including students who did not return to OSU for winter quarter, students of color (African American, Asian American, and Hispanic/Latino students) were over-sampled in order to make comparisons across race.

## Overall Findings

### Non-Returning Students

**Non-returning students appear to be different from students who remain at Ohio State and are generally less satisfied with their experience at Ohio State.**

- Non-returning students are slightly more likely to be older than returning students are.
- They tend to enroll and/or complete less credit hours and earn slightly lower grades than returning students.
- They are less likely to be from Ohio, and when they are from Ohio, they are more likely to live at home.
- In addition, non-returning students are more likely to work, and they are more likely to work off-campus and to work full-time than returning students are.
- Non-returning students are significantly less satisfied with their experience at Ohio State, less connected to the OSU community, and less likely to enroll at Ohio State if they had to do it over again than returning students are. Also, for non-returning students, OSU is significantly less likely to meet their expectations than for returning students.

**Non-returning students have a more difficult time transitioning to college than returning students do.**

- Non-returning students report having a significantly more difficult time with their transition to college than returning students report.
- Non-returning students rate Summer Orientation as being significantly less helpful for their transition to college than returning students, and, although the differences are not significant, also rate Welcome Week as less helpful in comparison to returning students.
- In contrast, for those students who attend Family Weekend, non-returning students rate it as slightly more helpful for their transition to college than returning students.
- Non-returning students are most likely to find a family member most helpful in their transition to college, followed by a friend or fellow student.
- For students who do not return to Ohio State, their top concerns before arriving at Ohio State were finding their way around campus (16.6%), getting good grades (12.8%), being away from home (12.7%), being prepared for college classes (10.8%), and financial concerns (10.8%). After one quarter at OSU, their primary concern (24.3%) is getting good grades.

**Overall, non-returning students rate themselves as being less successful in most areas of personal competency and in all areas of academic-related competency.**

- Non-returning students rate themselves as doing significantly less well being on their own, managing their emotions, making new friends, getting to know others of different backgrounds, developing spiritually, managing their finances, making important decisions, and making responsible choices regarding alcohol use than returning students do.
- Moreover, they rate themselves as being slightly less successful at making responsible choices regarding sexual behavior and regarding drug use than returning students.
- In addition, non-returning students rate themselves as being significantly less successful at getting satisfactory grades, at managing their time, at establishing academic and career goals, at learning their way around campus, and at using campus resources.

**Non-returning students are most likely going to transfer to another school and provide a variety of reasons for not returning to OSU.**

- Close to 75% of non-returning students plan to transfer to another school; over 25% plan to work; and over 18% intend to return to OSU at some point.
- Most students (almost 90%) who do not return to OSU make that decision after the first three weeks of classes.
- Students are most likely to cite financial reasons (25.5%) and academic difficulty (12.7%) among their reasons for not returning to Ohio State. Other reasons given include not being comfortable at OSU, emotional concerns, lack of academic or career direction, the size of the school, the distance from home, academic reasons, housing-related issues, personal reasons, and a lack of institutional fit.

## Returning Students

**Overall, returning students are satisfied with their OSU experience, have a relatively smooth transition to college, and find University programs helpful for their transition to college.**

- Returning students report being satisfied with their experience at OSU, being somewhat connected to the OSU community, and being likely to enroll at OSU again if they had to do it all over again. Also, they report that OSU has at least met their expectations if not exceeded them.
- In general, returning students (over 69%) report having either a very smooth or somewhat smooth transition to college.
- They also find Summer Orientation and Welcome Week as being somewhat helpful for their transition to college. For those who attend Family Weekend, they find it less helpful for their transition to college than the other programs.
- Returning students are most likely to find a friend or fellow student as being most helpful in their transition to college followed by a family member.

**Returning students have a variety of concerns regarding college before attending OSU. Overall, these concerns diminish after one quarter of college.**

- For returning students, their primary concerns before arriving at Ohio State are getting good grades (15.2%), being prepared for college classes (14.3%), finding their way around campus (13.1%), making friends (11.1%), and being away from home (10.2%).
- Other concerns students cite before arriving at OSU include the size of the school, academic and faculty concerns, and campus-life related concerns.
- Overall, returning students' concerns are minimized after completing a quarter at the University. They are less concerned about finding their way around campus, making friends, being away from home, getting along with roommates, and fitting in. Two areas that returning students mention more frequently after being on campus are getting good grades and financial concerns.
- In addition, after one quarter of enrollment, students mention concerns regarding academic-related issues including getting into the degree granting unit of their preference, choosing a major, getting into classes, as well as the quality of instruction and the quality of academic advising. They also mention personal concerns, campus life-related concerns, and issues related to the size of the institution.

**Returning students tend to rate themselves as doing well on most personal and academic-related competencies.**

- With the exception of managing their finances and developing spiritually, returning students rate themselves as doing between “very well” and good” in areas of personal competency including being on their own, managing their emotions, making new friends, making important decisions, making responsible choices regarding drug and alcohol use, and others. When rating their success at

managing their finances and developing spiritually, returning students score slightly lower, or between “good” and “okay.”

- With regard to academic-related competencies, returning students seem to struggle more than they do with personal competencies. They rate themselves as being the least successful at managing their time followed by getting satisfactory grades, using campus resources, and establishing academic and career goals. For all these areas students score between “good” and “okay.” However, they rate themselves higher on learning their way around campus.

#### Differences Based on GPA

**Overall, GPA does not seem to influence how students feel about OSU, how they evaluate their transition to college, or how they rate themselves on personal and academic competencies. If anything, students with lower GPA’s report being more successful and satisfied with their college experience.**

- There are no noticeable differences by GPA when students are asked about their overall satisfaction and their connection to the OSU community as well as if OSU has met their expectations. However, students with a 3.0 or better are significantly less likely to report that they would enroll at Ohio State again if they had to do it over again than students with lower GPA’s do.
- Generally, there are few differences based on GPA and how students rate the smoothness of their transition to college and the helpfulness of Summer Orientation and Welcome Week. Students with less than a 2.0 seem to have a slightly more difficult transition to college and appear to find Welcome Week more helpful than students with higher GPA’s. And, students with between a 2.0 and a 2.9 find Summer Orientation significantly more helping for their transition to college than students with less than a 2.0 do.
- There are no significant differences based on GPA and students’ ratings of their personal competencies.
- Interestingly, students with lower GPA’s did not rate themselves significantly lower with regard to their success at getting satisfactory grades, managing their time, or establishing academic or career goals. In fact, students with less than a 2.0 rate themselves slightly better at managing their time and at establishing academic and career goals than students with higher GPA’s do.
- Moreover, students with less than a 2.0 and students with between a 2.0 and a 2.9 rate themselves as doing significantly better at learning their way around campus than students with a 3.0 or better and noticeably higher at using campus resources.

## Differences Based on Race

### **Evidence suggests that students of color experience Ohio State differently than Caucasian students as demonstrated in students' overall impressions of OSU and in their transition to college.**

- African American students are significantly less satisfied with their experience at OSU than Caucasian, Asian American, and Hispanic/Latino students are. They also are significantly less likely to report that Ohio State has met their expectations than the other three groups.
- Both African American and Asian American students are significantly less connected to the OSU community than Caucasian students are.
- Lastly, African American students are significantly less likely to enroll at OSU again if they had to do it over again than Caucasian, Asian American, and Hispanic/Latino students are. Furthermore, Asian American students are significantly less likely to re-enroll than Hispanic/Latino students are.
- African American and Hispanic/Latino students report having a significantly more difficult transition to college than Asian American and Caucasian students do.
- However, students of color also report that Summer Orientation and Welcome Week activities are more helpful for their transition to college than Caucasian students report. Hispanic/Latino students find Orientation significantly more helpful than Caucasian students, and Hispanic/Latino and Asian American students report that Welcome Week is significantly more helpful than Caucasian students.

### **Differences by race/ethnicity also exist in how students rate themselves on personal and academic-related competencies.**

- African American and Asian American students rate themselves as doing significantly worse at being on their own than Caucasian students do.
- Hispanic/Latino students rate themselves as doing significantly worse at managing their emotions and managing their finances than Caucasian students do.
- Hispanic/Latino students also rate themselves as being significantly less successful developing spiritually than both Caucasian and Asian American students.
- Caucasian students report being significantly less successful at making responsible choices regarding alcohol use than both African American and Asian American students. Hispanic/Latino students are significantly less success in this area than African American students, who report doing the best of the four groups at making responsible choices regarding alcohol use.
- Among the personal competencies, there are no significant differences by race with regard to how students' rate themselves at making new friendships, at getting to know others of different backgrounds, at making important decisions, and at making responsible choices regarding sexual behavior and drug use.
- Turning to the academic-related competencies, African American students report being significantly less successful at getting satisfactory grades and at managing their time than Caucasian students do.

- While there are no significant differences by race in how students rate themselves on establishing academic and career goals and on learning their way around campus, African American students rate themselves the highest on establishing academic and career goals, and Asian Americans, on learning their way around campus.

#### Differences Based on Gender and Residence

**Overall, there are few differences in students' overall impressions of Ohio State and in their transition to college based on gender and residence, with the following exceptions:**

- Off-campus students are significantly less satisfied with their experience at OSU and significantly less connected to the OSU community than on-campus students are.
- Off-campus students are less likely to attend Welcome Week activities, and those who do attend find them significantly less helpful than on-campus students.
- Women report that Orientation is significantly more helpful for their transition to college than men report.

**With regard to personal competencies, there are differences based on gender and residence. No significant differences exist between men and women and between on-campus and off-campus students when examining academic-related competencies.**

- Off-campus students rate themselves as doing significantly worse at being on their own and at making new friends than on-campus students. They rated themselves as doing noticeable worse at getting to know others of different backgrounds
- Off-campus students appear to do better at managing their emotions, developing spiritually, managing their finances, making important decisions, and making responsible choices regarding alcohol use and sexual behavior.
- Women rate themselves as doing significantly worse at being on their own and managing their emotions than men do. Moreover, they also rate themselves worse at making responsible choices regarding alcohol use, sexual behavior, and drug use.

#### Obstacles

**In their first quarter at Ohio State, a small but significant percentage of students experience a variety of obstacles to a successful transition. These obstacles include being victims of discrimination and crime.**

- Of all students, 6% report experiencing ethnic/racial discrimination, 1.3% sexual discrimination, and 1.2% discrimination based on sexual orientation during their first quarter at OSU. These percentages are higher for non-returning students with 6.9% reporting racial discrimination, 2.0% sex discrimination, and 4.9% discrimination based on sexual orientation.

- Similarly, 5.1% of all students report being a victim of a crime, approximately 5% receiving threats of physical violence, 3.6% being victims of physical violence, and 1.7% being sexually assaulted. Non-returning students also report higher rates of these incidents in the areas of receiving threats of physical violence and being victims of actual physical violence.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

The Transition to College survey reveals a number of interesting findings. Coupled with the findings from the program reports for Summer Orientation, Welcome Week, and Family Weekend, which cover these programs in greater depth, the findings can be used to improve students' transition to college. The knowledge gained from the survey can inform University policy and practice.

Overall, the study finds that Ohio State is serving returning students well. Generally, as a group, they are making a successful transition to college. However, evidence suggests that non-returning students experience Ohio State very differently than students who stay at the University and that students of color, especially African American students experience Ohio State differently than Caucasian students. Non-returning students are generally less satisfied with all aspects of their college experience and rate themselves as doing more poorly at most areas of personal and academic-related competencies than returning students. African American students, in particular, are significantly less satisfied with OSU than other racial/ethnic groups. Moreover, students of color find formal programs such as Orientation and Welcome Week to be more helpful for their transition to college. Evidence also suggests that there are some differences between on- and off-campus students and between men and women in their transition to college. In addition, some differences exist in how students respond to questions based on their GPA. Lastly, the study also shows that some first-quarter students do encounter discrimination and are victims of crime. Such incidents serve as obstacles for making a successful transition to Ohio State.

## REFERENCES

Upcraft, M. L. & Gardner, J. N. (1990). The freshmen year experience. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Upcraft, M. L. (Ed.) (1984). Orienting students to college. New Directions for Student Services. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.