



NASPA CONFERENCES ON

# STUDENT SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

# Transitions & Tensions

Navigating the Unknown as Transfer Students

# Our Team



**Caitlin Ng, M.A.**  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Education



**Yasmine Dominguez-Whitehead, Ph.D.**  
Transitions Director



**Malaphone Phommasa, Ph.D.**  
Assistant Dean,  
Academic Success  
Initiatives



**Tate Universe**  
Undergraduate  
Student  
Psychological &  
Brain Sciences

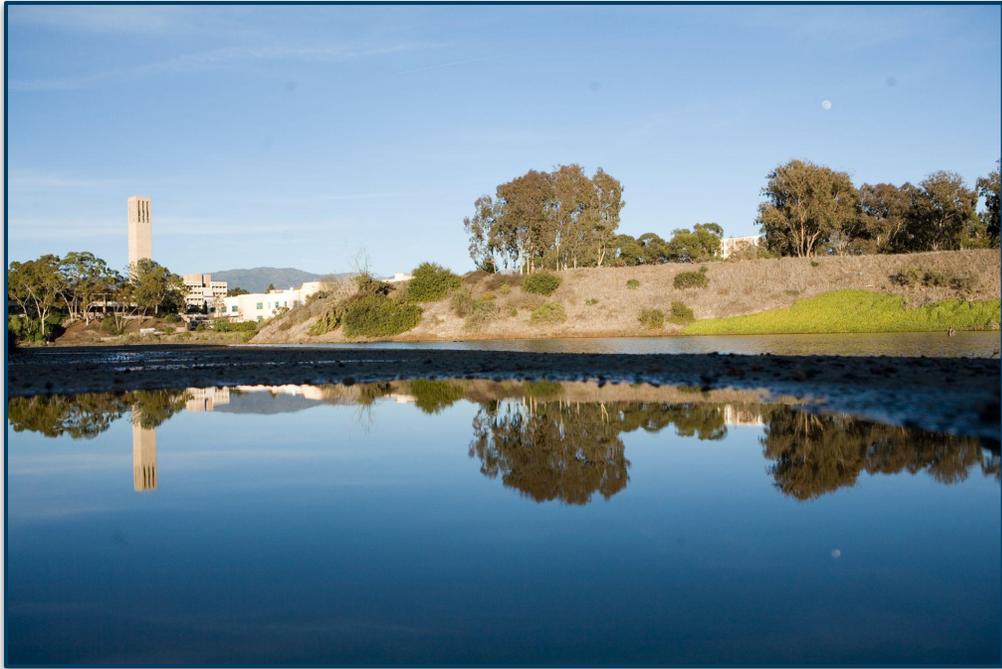


**Vanessa Woods, Ph.D.**  
Associate  
Teaching Professor  
Psychological &  
Brain Sciences



# Land Acknowledgement

## UC SANTA BARBARA



Before we commence we wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this place and all land upon which the University is located, and pay respect to the Chumash Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, and the culture of this area, which has become a place of learning for people from all over the world.

# Research Context

- University by the Sea: Large, public, research-intensive university
  - >23,000 undergraduate students
- 2016: System-wide directive to admit 1 transfer student for every 2 incoming freshmen = rapid increase in number of transfer students
  - After 2016, transfer students consistently comprise  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the undergraduate student population



# Why Conduct a Transfer Climate Study?

- Capture diverse experiences of transfer students
- Lift up student voices to the campus community and expand research on transfer students
- Build narrative to combat deficit framing of transfer students
- Understand structural challenges that impact transfer student experiences



# Conceptual Framework

- Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005)
- Counterspaces (Solórzano et al., 2000)
- Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2001)
- Transfer Receptive Culture (Herrera et al., 2020)



# Methods

- Recruitment began Spring Quarter 2024
- Survey administered via Qualtrics
- **570 survey responses**
  - 233 students provided their email in order to be contacted about focus group participation
  - Purposive sampling to select 30 participants that represented a range of class levels, identities, majors, and experiences for our focus groups
- 10 **focus groups** of two to four students, for a total of **23 students**, were conducted via Zoom in May 2024



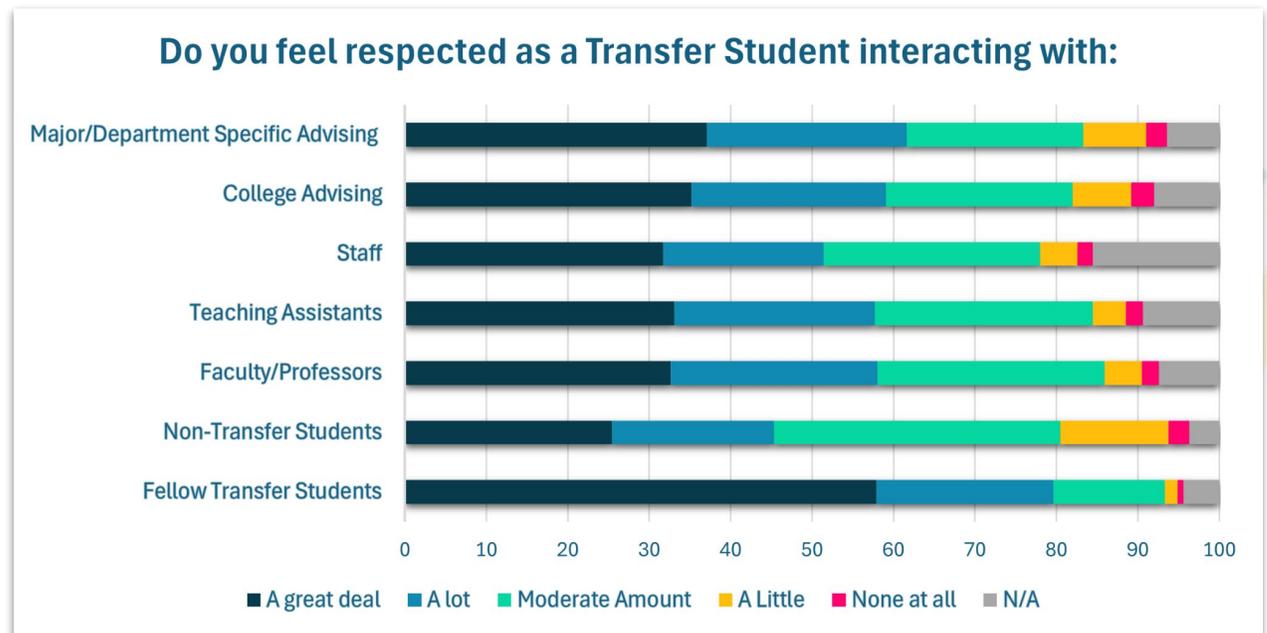
# Transfer Student Context

- **Survey (N=570) participants:**
  - 39% first-generation college students
  - 45% self identified as low income, working class, or lower middle class
  - 30% underrepresented minorities
  - 87% live on or near campus
- **Focus Groups (N=23) participants:**
  - 39% first-generation college students
  - 10% non-traditional students
  - 33% underrepresented minorities

| Obligations Outside of Academic Work  | Reported |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Work                                  | 51%      |
| Taking Care of Other Household Duties | 40%      |
| Student Organizations                 | 29%      |
| Assisting Other Family Members        | 22%      |
| Contributing to Family's Finances     | 15%      |
| Internship                            | 14%      |
| Research                              | 9%       |
| Caring for Child/Children             | 3%       |

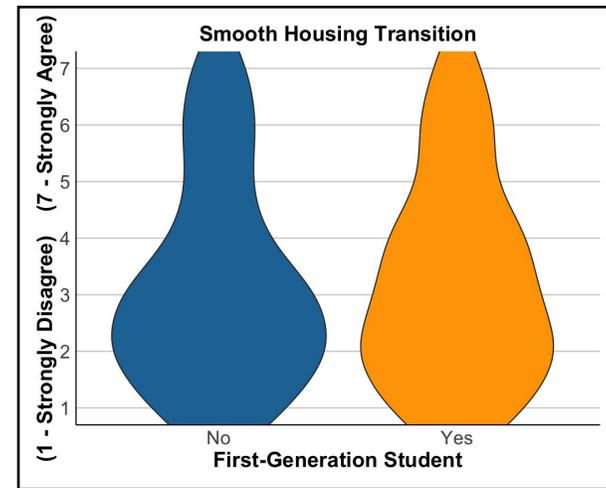
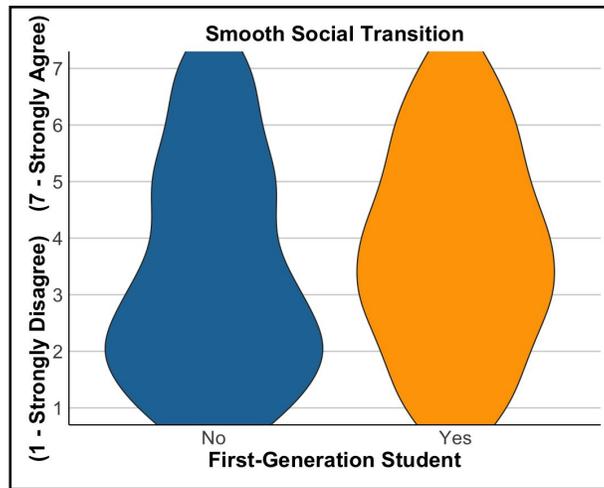
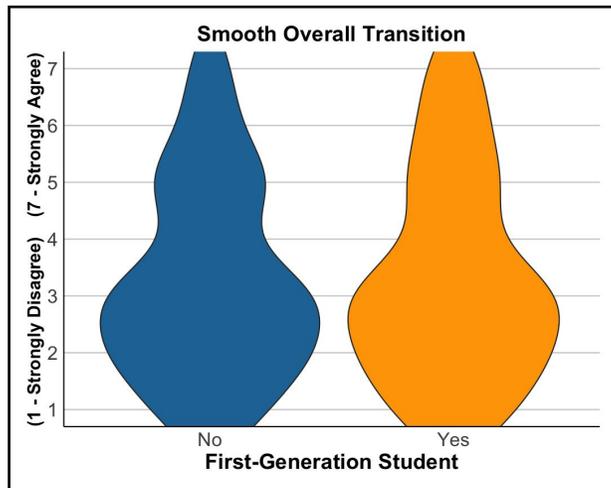
# Findings: Overall Positive Experiences

- 75% percent of continuing-generation students & 64% of first-generation students said they had a place at University by the Sea that felt like home
- 78% of transfers reported University by the Sea was welcoming to transfers and also agreed that their major was welcoming for transfer students



# Findings: Transition to the Research University

- 89% of students reported coming from a semester system, and **they reported it was relatively difficult to transition to the quarter system** – 72% reported it was extremely/moderately/slightly difficult
- The majority of students indicated it took 1-2 quarters to adjust to University by the Sea (78%)



*“I think the hardest part was socially adapting to living on my own, not being around anyone I know. Trying to make friends [was] probably the hardest part.”*

# Findings: Engagement in High Impact Practices

- 90% of students reported **not** volunteering/working at a research lab on-campus
- **Less than 12% are serving as a research assistant or completing an independent research project or gaining internship experiences**
- Less than 8% are studying abroad



Organization Involvement



Gaining Internship Experience



Study Abroad



Mentorship Programs



Being a Research Assistant



Student Organization Leadership



Developing Independent Research



■ Perceptions that Opportunity was Available (% yes)  
■ Transfer Student Reported Engagement (% yes)

# Findings: Engagement in High Impact Practices



## Building Connections and Mentorship

- Only 26% of transfers reported that if they needed a letter of recommendation, they would have someone to ask
- **70-78% reported they had not received mentorship from Professors, Teaching Assistants, or Staff**



## Professional Networks and Goals

- 12% of students reported having a job on campus; **however, if they had a job on campus, the majority (77%) reported the job made them feel like a part of the university community**
- 45% reported they did not agree that they have sufficient networking opportunities to find a career after graduation, and 25% reported that they have not expanded their social network
- 35% of transfer students expressed that they were interested in going to graduate school

*“It really just depended on me being in college more than a year or two before I felt comfortable approaching professors and TAs to ask to participate in their research or go to their office hours or feel a closer connection with them... my professors and my TAs were very welcoming when it came to research and other extracurricular opportunities.”*

# Findings: Cultural & Administrative Norms

- 63% of students reported that they needed to graduate in two years
- 20% reported that they did not want to stay more than two years, but might have to

*“Somebody might say, ‘Why not take a 3rd year?’ Well, I’m a first-gen college student who’s poor. I pay for everything myself. Financial aid only gets me so far...So I’m hoping I could finish at the end of this quarter, if not, this summer. But God forbid I have to be here for fall quarter again. I would not want to do that.”*

- 62% reported that it was stressful to think about their timeline



*“A lot of times...a class I’m wanting to take is not offered that quarter, so then you have to plan your future quarters, or, a class fills up really fast. That’s difficult just trying to build my schedule and ensure that I graduate on time...to do a full third year you have to kind of put in a petition, which kind of scared me.”*

# Focus Group Findings: Perceived Institutional Barriers

## Emerging Themes

- **Availability of Classes:** Limitations in class availability, struggle to plan in advance, prerequisite courses

*“I just need one class, and it's only offered in winter [quarter] and so since I didn't pass it the first time around last winter, I have to wait a whole year before I can finish up.”*

- **Academic Support for Transfer Students:** Additional academic support outside of class, limited tutoring options, limited office hours options

*“I was really shocked to find out like when I got here there's like zero tutoring for the upper division classes. It's all for ... Calculus 1, but I felt zero support for the classes that I needed the most help in, you know, from the tutoring resources.”*



# Focus Group Findings: Overcoming Challenges

## Emerging Theme

- **Transfer Specific Resources Make a Difference:** Campus resources that were specifically developed for transfer students or transfer-specific opportunities (i.e., transition courses for transfer students)



*"I think one space where it's really nice so I don't even have to mention that I'm a transfer student is the Transfer Student Center...It's a nice little space where we can just kinda have it to ourselves. It's nice not to have to explain that we're transfers..."*

*"[Summer Bridge Program] was like summer camp. It was awesome. Everybody who I met was a transfer. We all had mandatory transfer classes together. We're all neighbors...We would have fun social events like ice skating together all as transfers..."*

# Implications & Recommendations

- **Promote and sustain transfer-specific services and programming** (i.e., Transfer Student Centers, Educational Opportunity Programs, Transfer Summer Bridge Programs)
- Support transfer student participation in **High Impact Practices** by creating more opportunities for students. This requires financial support and graduation timeline flexibility
- **Inform Instructors and Teaching Assistants** about the transfer student experience
- **Utilize data to inform institutional practices** (i.e., produce a technical report for the campus community)



# Future Research

- Deep dive into graduation timelines/time-to-degree
- Explore financial factors and influences
- Understand impact of local and larger socio-political climate



# What About Your Institution?

- What similarities or differences do you see with transfer students on your campus? Do you see similar institutional barriers?
- We found that transfer specific resources were quite helpful for students – can you identify additional supports from your campus?
- What are some transfer student trends you have observed?



# Thank you!

**Yasmine Dominguez-Whitehead**  
ywhitehead@ucsb.edu

**Malaphone Phommasa**  
mphommasa@ucsb.edu

**Tate Universe**  
tateuniverse@ucsb.edu



*A very special thank you to the amazing transfer students participants who participated in our survey and focus groups*