Cornell University
ILR School

Cornell University ILR School
DigitalCommons@ILR

Cornell Higher Education Research Institute (CHERI)

Centers, Institutes, Programs

4-4-2003

Tracking Community College Transfers Using National Student Clearinghouse Data

Richard M. Romano
Broome Community College/SUNY

Martin Wisniewski
Cayuga Community College/SUNY

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cheri

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Centers, Institutes, Programs at DigitalCommons@ILR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Cornell Higher Education Research Institute (CHERI) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@ILR. For more information, please contact jdd10@cornell.edu.

Tracking Community College Transfers Using National Student Clearinghouse Data

Abstract
[Excerpt] One of the central roles for the community college is to provide a low cost, accessible education for students working toward a bachelor's degree. Their success in fulfilling this mission is a subject of some debate. Vital to this debate, however, is the ability to accurately measure the rate of transfer from 2-year to 4-year colleges. The current study uses a relatively new national database from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) that will assist in this process.

The current study shows how colleges can track almost all of their own students who transfer into both public and private college and across state lines using the NSC database. While the data has its own limitations, it is an improvement over existing methods for tracking transfers from 2-year to 4-year colleges in the U.S. When it is linked to state and institutional data, it can provide a powerful tool for understanding the nature of the transfer process. For purposes of illustration, the transfer records of two upstate New York community colleges are examined using such a linked database

Keywords
transfer students, community college, National Student Clearinghouse, institutional data

Comments
Suggested Citation
Romano, R. M. and Wisniewski, M. (2003) *Tracking community college transfers using national student clearinghouse data* (CHERI Working Paper #36). Retrieved [insert date], from Cornell University, ILR School site: http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cheri/16/

Required Publisher Statement
Published by the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute, Cornell University.

This article is available at DigitalCommons@ILR: http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cheri/16

Draft 3/23/03
Comments Invited

Tracking Community College Transfers Using National Student Clearinghouse Data

by

Richard M. Romano- Director of Institute for Community College Research, Broome Community College/State University of New York
&
Martin Wisniewski- Associate Dean of Technology, Cayuga Community College/State University of New York

Paper presented at the 45 annual conference of the Council for the Study of Community Colleges – Dallas, TX, April 4-5, 2003

Please send comments to:

Richard Romano
Broome Community College
PO Box 1017
Binghamton, NY 13902

or

Email: romano_r@sunybroome.edu

Tracking Community College Transfers
Using National Student Clearinghouse Data

Richard M. Romano and Martin Wisniewski

One of the central roles for the community college is to provide a low cost, accessible education for students working toward a bachelor's degree. Their success in fulfilling this mission is a subject of some debate. (See Dougherty, 1994 and Pascarella, 1999 for a review of this issue.) Vital to this debate, however, is the ability to accurately measure the rate of transfer from 2-year to 4-year colleges. The current study uses a relatively new national database from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) that will assist in this process.

Transfer may be viewed from the perspective of a single college, a single state or the national as a whole. Much of the research on the transfer question comes from single institution studies. These studies often rely on student surveys or, occasionally, on the records of selected 4-year transfer institutions. (As examples, see Conklin, 1995; Glass & Bunn, 1998; Broome, 2000.) The surveys used in these studies usually have low response rates and are not based on actual registration data at the transfer institution. As such, they do not provide a very reliable record of transfer and rarely track more than a handful of students moving across state borders. Nevertheless, these studies do provide some insight, albeit incomplete, into institutional performance and are often incorporated into campus-based program assessment and accreditation reports. Clearly, it is important for individual colleges to have an accurate measure of their transfer record over time.

Results improve greatly when public institutions do statewide studies of transfers. Wellman (2002, p.15) reports that 33 states now do reports on transfer rates using actual registration data stored in a central data bank, which covers the entire system of public higher education. (Windham, 1999; New Mexico, 1999; New York, 2000 are typical examples.) These reports are largely descriptive but occasionally scholars use them to do a more powerful analysis of community college transfers. (See Ehrenberg & Smith, 2002, for a recent example done for New York State.) The shortcoming of these statewide databases is that they often provide very limited demographic and enrollment information on students from individual campuses and can only track students within the public university system of a given state. Again, transfers to private colleges and to those located outside the state escape measurement.

From a national policy perspective, however, both institution and state specific studies are of less value than studies that track students longitudinally on a national level. Studies done using U.S. Department of Education data sets, such as the High School and Beyond, have "much to say about the impact of transfer and multiple institution attendance on academic achievement" (Kozeracki, 2001, p. 63). Moving beyond the institution and the state level is critical because students in U.S. post-secondary institutions are increasingly mobile. A recent study by the National Center for Education Statistics reported that of the students who started "their postsecondary education in the academic year 1989-90, … 45 percent had enrolled as undergraduates at more than one institution by 1994" (McCormick, 1997, p. 3). According to Clifford Adelman, a senior research analyst at the Department this number is probably up to 60 percent by now with 40 percent of those crossing state lines (Adelman, 1999, vii-viii, and personal correspondence with authors

2/19/02). If we use the numbers provided by Adelman we can say that, on average, approximately 24% of any recent fall cohort of students would transfer to an out-of-state college. This high degree of student mobility makes it imperative that transfer behavior be tracked on a national level, not only for 4-year but also for 2-year colleges. However, as valuable as the existing national databases from the National Center for Education Statistics are, they are based on a small sample of students in the U.S. and do not allow a single college to track its own transfers throughout the system of higher education.

The current study shows how colleges can track almost all of their own students who transfer into both public and private college and across state lines using the NSC database. While the data has its own limitations, it is an improvement over existing methods for tracking transfers from 2-year to 4-year colleges in the U.S. When it is linked to state and institutional data, it can provide a powerful tool for understanding the nature of the transfer process. For purposes of illustration, the transfer records of two upstate New York community colleges are examined using such a linked database.

What do we know about transfer rates?

Simply defined, a transfer rate can be stated as the percentage of students who start at the community college and transfer to 4-year colleges. But in calculating such a rate the numbers that scholars use in the numerator and the denominator vary greatly and therefore affect the comparability of their findings. No national consensus on the definition of a community college transfer student exists, although the one proposed by Arthur Cohen at UCLA has gained some recognition. Working with money from the U.S. Department of Education and the Ford Foundation, Cohen mounted a national effort to produce a uniform measure of the transfer rate (Cohen, 1991). According to Cohen, a

transfer rate can be most validly calculated by including in it only those students who are beginning their postsecondary studies in a community college and who stay there long enough to complete at least four courses (12 credits). More specifically, the transfer rate can be defined as:

> all students entering the two-year college in a given year who have no prior college experience and who complete at least twelve college credit units [we will refer to this group as the Cohen cohort], divided into the number of that group who take one or more classes at a university within four years (Cohen, 1991, p. 3).

Ideally, Cohen's definition would measure all of the transfers in the cohort to any college in the country. But since, until recently, no national database existed which would allow a single college to track its own students, Cohen's definition has only been used for public institutions within a state. For all practical purposes, the denominator in his definition becomes "the number of that group who take one or more classes at an in-state public university within four years" (Cohen, 1996, p. 26). Again, students transferring to private colleges and to colleges across state borders are missed.

In a recent review of the transfer literature, Palmer reports that, according to Cohen's in-state definition, the transfer rate of the community colleges in a thirteen state sample averaged "22% for first-time students entering community colleges in 1990…[although] the …statewide transfer rates ranged from 11% to 40%" (Palmer, 2000, p.10). Using a similar definition of a transfer student and a national data base, Adelman found that 26%

of those who started at the community college and accumulated at least 10 credits had transferred to a 4-year institution and that their bachelor's degree completion rate was over 70% (Adelman, 1999. viii). In summary, studies show that when we start with students who began at the community college and accumulated about a semesters worth of credits, we get a transfer rate of somewhere in the mid-20% range.

However, looking beyond the definition of transfer proposed by Cohen, one can imagine a large range of alternate possibilities. From the 2-year college perspective, a liberal definition of transfer might count any student who had ever taken a single credit course and moved on to a 4-year college as a transfer. Or, using a more restrictive definition, one could count only community college graduates of a given year as possible transfers. Alternatively, colleges might calculate a transfer rate based only on those students who indicated that transfer was their intention when they entered the community college. In fact many community colleges seem to prefer restricting the transfer data to the latter category, because a large number of students nationally do not enter the 2-year college with the intention of transferring. As Palmer reports, one study for the state of Illinois showed a 22% transfer rate for all students but a 34% rate for students enrolled in transfer programs who declared upon entry that they intended to transfer (Palmer, 2000, p.11). In another study using a national sample of community college entrants, of those who indicated an intention to complete a bachelor's degree or higher, 36% had transferred to a 4-year college within five years (Bradburn and Hurst 2001). (On the importance of intentions to transfer, also see Leigh and Gill, 2002.)

Just as there is a wide range of definitions of a transfer student from the perspective of the sending institution, an equally wide range of possibilities exists from the perspective

of the receiving institutions. One common measure found in statewide studies is simply to count any student who comes in with community college credit as a transfer student. According to Cohen, statewide studies show that "30 to 60 percent of people obtaining a baccalaureate degree from public universities have some community college courses on their record" (Cohen, 1996, p. 60). The fact is that, with undergraduate student mobility increasing in the U.S. (Kane, 1999, p. 77) many researchers do not even like talking about the transfer process as linear, that is going directly from a 2-year college to a 4-year college. Rather, they talk about the "swirl" of students in higher education as they move in and out of a variety of institutions before receiving a degree (Adelman, 1999; Palmer, 2000; Townsend, 2000).

Thus, we find that we have almost as many definitions of transfer as we have studies of the process. In fact, the definition used by any particular study is most likely dictated by the data available, and since that varies widely, so does the definition used by the researcher. This study is no exception to that rule. Our database has limitations and they dictate how we define a transfer student. However, we experiment with a variety of definitions, using several cohorts, as a means of exploring the range of research options when local and state data is merged with that from the Clearinghouse.

National Student Clearinghouse Data

The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) was created in 1993 as a means to confirm the enrollment status of financial aid recipients. The electronic registry now includes 2700 colleges and universities and claims to cover 91% of U.S. college enrollments. Membership in the Clearinghouse is open to any post-secondary institution that participates in the Federal Title IV program (financial aid). Most recently the

Clearinghouse database has been expanded to include information on credentials and is used for degree and enrollment verification for third party requesters, such as employers, health insurers, or background screening firms. Participating colleges provide the Clearinghouse with regular updates on student enrollments for almost all students, not just those on financial aid. <www.studentclearinghouse.org>

Although not designed for the purpose of tracking transfer students, we have found that the Clearinghouse is a useful and accurate way of following students as they move from one institution to another. Its major limitation is that, at the present time, the information available in the core database can only be used to verify a student's enrollment and little else. However, the Clearinghouse is in the process of collecting information on degrees received. Once completed this will be helpful in verifying whether community college transfers actually get a bachelor's degree. At the present time however, only 210 U.S. colleges in our data sample provided degree information. Fortunately, the State University of New York (SUNY) database does provide degree information on transfer students within the system. We have linked the Clearinghouse file with those of SUNY to provide a more complete picture of bachelor's degrees awarded but this still leaves out most of the privates and the out-of-state transfers. That means that a query on degrees received will understate the actual number received by our transfer students. Due to these limitations, we have not analyzed the data on degrees awarded in this study. The limited amount of information we have for the SUNY system is given in Table 5. However, the number of colleges reporting this information to the Clearinghouse is increasing very rapidly and at some point in the near future this will be a valuable tool for verifying degrees received.

SUNY, Broome and Cayuga Community College

Higher education in New York is more heavily privatized than it is in most other states. Private 4-year colleges enroll about 36% of all undergraduates in the state, with public 4-year colleges enrolling 32% and community colleges 29%. The state has two community college systems - one serving New York City (CUNY) and the other (SUNY) serving the rest of the state (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2000).

The State University of New York (SUNY) system advertises itself as the largest integrated public university system in the U.S., with 64 campuses (of which 30 are community colleges) and 370,000 students (of which 200,000 are at the community colleges). The system has a central administration located in Albany, NY, with a University Board and Chancellor who control educational policy and procedures. After examining the data collection in several states, one researcher reported that SUNY had an excellent database showing students who transferred from 2-year to 4-year colleges both with and without an associate degree (Wellman, 2002, p. 30).

Broome Community College (BCC) is a two-year unit within the SUNY system, located in Binghamton, NY, about 200 miles from New York City. The college has one campus with approximately 4100 full-time and 2400 part-time credit students (4800 FTE's in fall 2002). At BCC, 86% of the student population is white and, of the 865 degrees awarded in the year 2000, 53% of them were AAS degrees. The AAS is supposedly designed as a non-transfer degree. The remaining 47% were AA, and AS degrees, which are advertised as transfer degrees.

Binghamton University, another unit of the SUNY system with a full menu of graduate programs, is located in the same city as BCC. It is consistently ranked by *U.S. New & World Report* and similar rating services as the most selective within the SUNY system and one of the best buys in the nation. Two other 4-year units of the SUNY system (SUNY-Cortland and SUNY-Oneonta) are located within 50 miles of BCC and have less selective admission standards. As might be expected, Binghamton, Cortland and Oneonta are the major transfer colleges used by BCC students. The closest private college is Cornell University, an ivy league college located 50 miles away. Since Binghamton is on the southern border of the state, only 5 miles from Pennsylvania (PA), the public and private colleges in PA recruit both high school and community college transfers quite heavily.

Cayuga Community College (CCC) is a two-year unit within the SUNY system located in the middle of the state. The college has its main campus in Auburn, N.Y. with an extension site 30 miles away. At CCC, 95% of the student population is white and of the 403 degrees awarded in the year 2000, 44% were AAS degrees and 56% were AA or AS degrees. For the fall 2002, the college had 1775 full-time and 1313 part-time credit students with an FTE count of 2134.This is about half the size of BCC, although at CCC, part-time students make up a greater percentage of enrollments than they do at BCC. Under normal circumstances, we would expect that the higher percentage of part-time students would reduce the transfer rate for any given cohort, other things being equal.

The main campus is just 25 miles from the city of Syracuse, the home of two good-size private colleges. One is a locally popular catholic university and the other is Syracuse University, one of the major private institutions in the state. Syracuse University is a

high-profile university with nationally ranked sports teams, supposedly a major attraction for young students including transfers from Cayuga CC. Two of the SUNY 4-year colleges, SUNY-Cortland and SUNY-Oswego are within 50 miles of CCC, and, as might be expected these are the major transfer colleges for CCC students. Another, larger, SUNY community college is within 20 miles of the main campus and two others are within 35 miles. The closest state border, Pennsylvania, is about 100 miles away. By reason of its location, other things being equal, we would expect CCC to have a higher transfer rate to private colleges than BCC does, but a lower out-of-state transfer rate.

Another noticeable difference between BCC and CCC is that CCC has a smaller number of degree programs, particularly in technical and occupational areas. For instance, BCC has 13 health science (AAS) programs as opposed to just one (nursing) at CCC. If degrees awarded are used as a proxy for program enrollment, then, with a greater emphasis on transfer programs, AA or AS degrees, CCC should have a higher overall transfer rate than does BCC, other things being equal. Also, with a more limited choice of programs and a much larger community college located within 20 miles of the main campus, we might expect CCC to have a higher transfer rate to 2-year colleges than does BCC.

Data sets used in this study

This study utilizes information from three sources--- the student information systems of BCC and CCC, the SUNY central database and the NSC database.

Colleges wishing to track the transfer records of their students send a local extract file to the NSC that contains, at minimum, the student's name and date of birth. In order to comply with FERPA regulations, the NSC does not use student social security numbers

to match student records but only the name and birth date. The NSC claims that its method is highly accurate. In addition to the student's full name and birth date, the local extract file used for this study contained fields for: students social security number; date for twelve semesters that the student might have been enrolled at the community college; whether the initial enrollment was as a first-time or transfer student; whether the student was an educational opportunity (EOP) or remedial admit; a curriculum program code; degrees awarded and year; field of degree; ethnicity; gender; and credits completed at the community college

Data from the NSC was then linked with that obtained from the SUNY system. SUNY data provides more information on each student than NSC. It includes data such as degrees received and grade point averages for each transfer student at each campus within the system for every semester enrolled. But, the SUNY Student Data File (SDF) only captures student registrations at a census date that is at the end of the third week of classes. Students withdrawing prior to the census date are not included in the data set nor are students registering after the SDF file is submitted by each college. The clearinghouse system is designed to capture all registrants for financial aid purposes. The NSC files are submitted three times each semester, at the beginning, middle and end of the semester. This provides for a more complete enrollment record than a census date based system. However, the clearinghouse system is not without its drawbacks. Institutions and students submitting data to the clearinghouse may request to have their records blocked from the view of other institutions doing enrollment follow up studies. Records may be blocked for other reasons as well. The runs done for this study show that 5% of the records were blocked for both Cayuga and Broome. The NSC data tells us where the student

transferred and why the record was blocked but does not include that students' file in the data set. This will cause the transfer rates in this study be underestimated by least that much for each college.

The analysis below uses the combined data sets just described. While the focus is on two community colleges within the SUNY system, comparisons with all of the 30 community colleges within the system are included where appropriate. The only other study we are aware of using the NSC data is for a single college in Maryland (Boughan 2001).

Data Analysis

From the discussion above and our survey of the literature, several research questions have emerged. They are:

- Just how powerful is the NSC system as a tool for tracking community college transfers?
- Are community college students as mobile as the undergraduates reported on in earlier studies done by the U.S. Department of Education (Adelman, et al.)?
- What are the transfer rates to private and out-of-state colleges?
- Does location seem to affect transfer to out-of-state and /or private colleges?
- Does program mix seem to affect transfer rates?
- What are the transfer rates of the Cohen cohort once private and out-of-state colleges are counted?
- Are graduates more likely to transfer than non-graduates?
- Do students in non-transfer programs (AAS) transfer at the same rate as students in designated transfer programs (AA, AS)?

We begin to address the first question in Table 1. Here we have presented the most inclusive numbers on transfers to be found in this study and have separated them into those found by the SUNY tracking system and those found by the NSC tracking system.

Table 1

Tracking Transfers with SUNY and NSC systems -- New students (first-time and transfer) in fall semester for selected years-- Broome and Cayuga CC, status as of Spring 2001.

Year	Number of BCC Students	SUNY Tracking BCC	SUNY plus NSC/BCC	Tran. Rate %	Number of CCC students	SUNY Tracking CCC	SUNY plus NSC/CCC	Tran. Rate %
1996	1527	281	566	37.1	1087	237	496	45.6
1997	1616	302	572	35.4	1042	255	537	51.5
1998	1737	275	558	32.1	1147	254	531	46.3
1999	1718	217	512	29.8	1154	219	488	42.3
2000	1637	121	373	22.8	1028	98	261	25.4

In Table 1 the cohort used was all new students who entered both BCC and CCC in the fall semester of the selected years. New students include first-time and transfer students enrolled in credit courses. Continuing students are not included because they would have entered in an earlier year and would be included in another cohort. The total number of students includes both males and females who entered either full time or part time.

The data for both BCC and CCC indicates that use of the NSC system more than doubles the number of transfers that are found by using the SUNY transfer tracking system. The high numbers of transfers found by the NSC system does not indicate that students are transferring out of the SUNY system or to private colleges. In fact, many of students located by the NSC system are transfers within SUNY that were not captured by the SUNY tracking system for the reasons noted above. Thus, because the NSC system contains different parameters than the SUNY system, it provides a double check on the

number of students transferring without duplicating any of the counts. As a result we can conclude that the NSC system is a powerful tool for tracking community college transfers.

The apparent decline in the transfer rates, shown in table 1, from 1996 to 2000 may not be real. If we calculate a transfer rate as the percentage of all new students who transfer before or after graduation from the community college to any 2 or 4-year college in the U.S. then we would generally expect to find a higher transfer rate the further back in time we go. Thus, for the BCC fall 1996 cohort, 37.1% had transferred by the Spring 2001 semester but for the fall 2000 cohort only 22.8% had transferred. A similar pattern can be seen with the CCC data. With our fixed end date of spring 2001, using a cohort after 1997 will not give us very useful numbers, since the students who enter the community college will not have had enough time to graduate and/or transfer. For this reason the cohorts used for the rest of this study will be either 1996 or 1997.

Table 2 provides a more detailed breakdown of the students included in Table 1 for the fall 1997 entering cohort.

Table 2

Transfer Rates of New Students (first-time & transfer) for Selected Cohorts Fall 1997, BCC and CCC, as of Spring 2001

	Broome Community College			Cayuga Community College		
New Students	Cohort	Transfers	Percent	Cohort	Transfers	Percent
All students	1616	572	35.4	1042	537	51.5
Males	789	280	35.5	498	265	53.2
Females	827	293	35.4	544	272	50.0
Whites*	770	290	37.7	976	503	51.5
Blacks*	42	13	31.0	38	20	52.6
Hispanics*	13	4	30.8	13	7	53.8
Graduates	431	210	48.7	226	141	62.4
Non-Graduates	1185	362	30.6	816	396	48.5
12+ Credits	1442	523	36.3	558	298	53.4
Less than 12 Credits	174	49	28.2	484	239	49.4

*Includes only students who checked this ethnic category at admission. This information is optional and when students do not check a specific category they are counted as unknown. The ethnic breakdown of BCC students in this study is: White (770); Black/African American (42); Hispanic (13); Asian/ Pacific Islander (0); Native American Indian/Eskimo (30); Unknown (761) = 1616. Previous studies of the entire student population at BCC indicates that 86% are white while the local population is 95% white (Romano, 2001). Cayuga has a more accurate way of counting ethnic categories which reduces the unknowns significantly. For CCC the student population is 95% white; 2% black; 0.5% Hispanic; 2.0% other and only 0.5% unknown. BCC is has a somewhat more diverse student population than CCC.

For BCC the most notable thing about the percentages above is how similar they are with transfer rates in the mid-30% range for most groups. The two results that stand out are: first, more non-graduates (362) transfer than graduates (210), although the percentages of graduates who transfer is a lot higher (48.7% vs 30.6%); and second, those who stay at the community college for at least 12 credits are more likely to transfer.

For CCC the transfer rates of the cohorts are very consistent, around the 50% range. Like BCC, more students transfer without a degree than with one, although the transfer rate of the latter group is higher. Most notable by comparison, however, is the fact that that the CCC transfer rates are about 15% higher than those at BCC. We will attempt to explain why this might be so as we proceed.

Transfers from non-transfer programs

Some research has suggested that students graduating from non-transfer programs (AAS in this study) at the community college may be "transferring in equal or even greater numbers than students with the traditional transfer degrees" (Townsend, 2001, p. 66). As Table 3 shows, our study does not support this position for the community colleges in the SUNY system. Since the SUNY system uses the first-time, full-time student cohort for purposes of analysis, we have been forced to use it in Table 3 for comparative purposes. (See Dellow and Romano, 2002, for a critique of the appropriateness of this cohort for the community college.)

Table 3
Transfer Rates for Transfer Programs, Non-Transfer Programs, and Students without a Degree --First-time, full-time students initially enrolled in fall 1997, status as of fall 2001

State University of New York Community Colleges (cc's)	Total Number in Cohort & %Transfers		Transfer with AA/AS Degree	Transfer with AAS/AOS Degree +	Transfer w/o Degree
Average for SUNY cc's	28,460	29.8%	12.17%	3.51%	14.07%
College with highest rate	709	47.1%	14.50%	10.1%	22.4%
College with lowest rate*	2,914	16.0%	6.34%	2.0%	7.6%
BCC	1,015	31.6%	12.39%	3.2%	14.97%
CCC	386	41.2%	16.57%	5.2%	19.4%

*Data for highest and lowest college includes only the 24, out of 30 colleges, that had full transfer data available from both the SUNY and the NSC databases.
+ The Associate in Occupational Studies (AOS) degree does not require any general education courses and is offered by several SUNYcolleges but not by either BCC or CCC.

As the data above indicates, the transfer rate in the State University of New York community colleges is higher for graduates of the programs designed for transfer (AA/AS) than for graduates of the programs not designed for transfer (AAS/AOS). Although the rates vary widely at different colleges, all of the 24 colleges represented in

this table showed this same pattern. This does not mean that students do not transfer before they graduate. The data in Table 2 for both BCC and CCC is also typical of all the SUNY community colleges. It shows that, when you include part-time students in the cohort, more students transfer without a degree than with a degree.

Transfers to 4-year colleges

Since a major emphasis in this study is to focus on the transfer of students from 2 to 4-year colleges, it is important to subtract the 2-year transfers from the data found in Tables 1, 2 and 3. We can then begin to calculate the transfer rate of the Cohen cohort. The 1997 cohort of first-time students is used in Table 4 because that cohort will show us the transfers within a 4-year period, as the Cohen definition requires.

Table 4

Selected BCC & CCC Transfer Rates – First-time Cohort Entering Fall 1997, Status as of fall 2001

	BCC Transfer Rate (N = 1437)	BCC % Transfers (N = 520)	CCC Transfer Rate (N =436)	CCC % Transfers (N = 234)
All Transfers	36.2%	100%	53.7%	100%
To 2-year colleges	6.4%	17.5%	12.4%	23.1%
***To 4-year colleges**	30.0%	82.5%	40.8%	76.1%
In-state public	23.2%	77.4%	25.3%	50.0%
In-state private	2.0%	6.6%	9.6%	18.0%
Out-state public	3.3%	11.0%	2.3%	4.3%
Out-state private	1.7%	5.4%	2.1%	3.9%

*Cohen cohort - first-time (full and part-time) students who started in fall 1997 and completed 12 or more credits (at BCC n=1437; at CCC n=436) divided into the number of that group who take one or more classes at a 4-year college within four years (by fall 2001)

BCC Transfer Rates

As the table above shows, for BCC 17.5% of the transfers were to community colleges. While all of these transfers were non-graduates, this is still more than we would have

expected since the closest community college is 50 miles away and not an easy daily commute.

This table also shows the transfer rate of the Cohen cohort. The definition of a transfer rate, as proposed by Cohen and widely used by researchers, produces an average national transfer rate of somewhere in the mid-20% range for first-time students transferring to in-state public colleges within a four-year period. The BCC rate for this cohort is about the same as the national average, at 23.2% going to in-state public colleges. But, as pointed out previously, statewide studies do not count the in-state private or the out-of-state public and private transfers, and a true Cohen transfer rate cannot be calculated without including these figures. Using the NSC database, we find that 23% of the BCC transfers went to colleges in these three categories. By including private and out-of-state colleges we have raised the transfer rate of the Cohen cohort from the mid-20% range to about 30%. If the BCC experience can be generalized to the national average, then we have been underestimating the community college transfer rate by almost 25%.

From Table 4 we can also see that, of the BCC students transferring to 4-year colleges, only 12% went to private colleges, either in or out-of-state, and 16.4% went across state borders to either private or public colleges. Data from the U.S. Department of Education, previously cited, indicates that perhaps 40% of undergraduates transfer across state lines (Adelman, 1999). The students in this study are far less mobile.

For students in this study, the most popular state for transfer for the fall 1996-2000 cohorts was New York, which captured 84% of the BCC transfers. The second most popular state was Pennsylvania, with 213 (4.5%) of the transfers. The popularity of PA as a transfer site can probably be explained by the proximity of BCC to the PA border.

Students were either returning home (less than 2% of colleges enrollments are from PA) or were recruited away from New York by a nearby college. Beyond this, a small but interesting share of both the 2-year and the 4-year out-of-state transfers were to colleges in North Carolina. Of the students who transferred from BCC between 1996 and 2001, 1 ½ % went to colleges in that state. Most of them went to the Raleigh/Durham area where the largest IBM facility in the U.S. is located. At one time, IBM was the largest employer in the area surrounding BCC, and probably the migration to North Carolina is due to students following their parents. Due to corporate downsizing and relocations in the computer industry during the 1990's, the population of the BCC service area declined by about 5%, and the FTE count at the college went down from a high of 4,980 in 1992-93 to a low of 3,979 in 1997-98. It is clear from this data that most or all of the transfers to North Carolina colleges were not voluntary and therefore will not carry the same policy implications as other more voluntary transfers. This also indicates that any comparison of transfer rates between institutions must somehow consider the impact of significant changes in local labor market conditions in the period being studied.

The data for BCC has a few anomalies, none of which are considered to affect the results of this study by more than one percent in either direction. The most important of these are the presence of 100-150 international students who graduate and transfer at high rates but who are difficult to track because they do not have a social security or student ID number which is consistent from one institution to another. BCC also sends 200 students a year to study abroad and most of these are visiting students who accumulate a semester's worth of credit that they transfer back to their home campuses. The biases of these two groups almost offset each other and thus do not affect the results presented in

this study in any material way. The same cannot be said for the data anomalies found at CCC.

CCC Transfer Rates

From Table 4 we can see that the percentage of transfers from CCC going to community colleges was 23.1% vs. 17.5% for BCC. This is probably because of the more limited variety of programs at CCC and the close proximity of another community college to CCC. However, at the present time we have no way of testing this hypothesis beyond this logic.

Table 4 also shows that 26.2% of CCC's transfers go to private or out-of-state public colleges. This is slightly higher than the BCC rate, but if these results can be generalized to the nation, it indicates, again, that we have been underestimating the transfer rate by about 25%. Looking at this in more detail we find that the percentage of students leaving the state is higher at BCC (16.4%) than at CCC (8.2%). We speculate that the percentage of students at CCC who leave the state and go to either public (4.3%) or private (3.9%) colleges is due to CCC's location in the middle of the state. Most students transfer to colleges close to their home, and thus the transfers at CCC are even less mobile across state borders than those at BCC. As far as transfer to in-state private colleges, CCC has a higher percentage of its transfers going to these colleges (18%) than does BCC (6.6%). Again we speculate that this is due to the fact that more private colleges are within easy reach of CCC. These intuitive results lend support to previous research that shows that geography has a lot to do with the nature of college enrollments (Tinto 1985, Card 1995).

The data anomalies are more significant for CCC than for BCC and may raise the transfer rates reported for CCC by as much as 5%. The major problem is the relatively large number of early admission high school students (400-500) who attend CCC on a part-time basis. These students are high achievers with probably a 90% college entrance rate. Some may even accumulate 12 or more credits before graduating from high school and will thus be qualified to be included in the Cohen cohort. Although they may never step foot on the CCC campus, and are not typical of the usual new student at CCC, they must be included in this study given our current measuring methodology. As first-time, part-time students they would be counted in the cohorts shown in Tables 1-4 and make up as much as 50% of the entering cohort. But when part-time students are excluded and first-time, full-time entering students are used as a cohort, as in Table 5, the differences between BCC and CCC narrow considerably.

Looking again at the Cohen cohort in Table 4, we find that CCC has a transfer rate of 40.8% while that of BCC is 30%. Some of this difference is due to a program mix at CCC that favors transfers and some of it is due to the high number high school students enrolled at CCC on a part-time basis. Other reasons for this disparity might be accounted for by different entering students' characteristics and/or educational goals. Finally there is always the possibility that CCC is doing a better job at promoting transfer opportunities than BCC. At the present time we have no way of analyzing what each of these factors may contribute to the differences between CCC and BCC.

Successful Educational Outcomes

Community colleges are often criticized for the small number of degrees they award. Within the State University of New York, counting the number of degrees awarded to

first-time, full-time students is part of the informal performance evaluation process. Gradually the SUNY system is moving away from the measurement of degrees to a more inclusive system of measuring successful educational outcomes. Looking at the transfer issue, this means that a transfer, with or without a degree, is counted as a success. Using the data available from this study, we calculate attrition as the percentage of an entering first-time, full-time cohort that has not graduated, or transferred, or is still enrolled, not just from their initial college but from any college. Table 5 below shows the results of this calculation for the 30 community colleges in the SUNY system and for the two colleges examined more closely in this study.

Table 5 **SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF FIRST-TIME FULL-TIME STUDENTS INITIALLY ENROLLED IN A SUNY ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAM IN FALL 1997, STATUS AS OF FALL 2001**

COLLEGE	COHORT ENTERED FALL 1997	NUMBER GRADUATING				WITHOUT A DEGREE				TOTAL SUCCESS EDUCAT. OUTCOMES	ATTRIT
		ASSOCIATE DEGREES		BACCALAUREATE			TRANSFERS				
		FROM INITIAL COLLEGE	FROM OTHER SUNY	WITH ASSOC. DEGREE	WITHOUT ASSOC. DEGREE	PERSIST AT INITIAL COLLEGE	TO SUNY STILL ENROLLED	TO SUNY NOT ENROLLED	TO NON-SUNY		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
ALL SUNY COMMUNITY COLLEGES	28,460 100.00%	8,769 30.81%	273 0.95%	619 2.17%	217 0.76%	1,602 5.62%	1,329 4.66%	1,198 4.20%	1,481 5.20%	14,907 52.37%	13,553 47.62%
BROOME CC	1,015 100.00%	308 30.34%	8 0.78%	24 2.36%	16 1.57%	69 6.79%	68 6.69%	38 3.74%	46 4.53%	555 54.67%	460 45.32%
CAYUGA CC	386 100.00%	124 32.12%	8 2.07%	10 2.59%	1 0.25%	16 4.14%	24 6.21%	36 9.32%	15 3.88%	224 58.03%	162 41.96%

Col. 11 = Col 3 + Col 4 + Col 6 + Col 7 + Col 8 + Col 9 + Col 10 + 2 students at BCC with certificates only. Col. 11 for all community colleges includes 38 certificates.

An important critique of Table 5 is that a successful educational outcome is defined only in terms of graduation, persistence or transfer. It does not consider the job placement of students who do not intend to transfer. Looking at the two colleges most closely examined in this study, Table 5 shows that when we use graduation, transfer or persistence as a measure of success, the differences between the two has narrowed to

about 3.3% in favor of CCC. However, since BCC has a program mix that is more oriented toward the workforce than CCC, it may be that once job placements for students with AAS degrees are considered, BCC would have a higher success rate than CCC.

Thus, a more inclusive measure of success than that shown in Table 5 would look at the labor market outcomes of students. This will be more difficult to measure because verifiable data is not available. However, one promising development is the linking of statewide student databases to the unemployment insurance records of the state. The unemployment insurance records contain the wage rates and incomes of all workers in the state and by using social security numbers to track community college students we will be able to calculate the payoff to vocational programs (as an example see Jacobson, LaLonde, Sullivan, 1997). Currently the states of Florida, Washington, Texas, and North Carolina have systems in place such as this (Sanchez & Laanan, 1998). At some point we will be able to combine these outcomes with those of the transfer records to get a more complete picture of successful educational outcomes at the community college.

Summary of Results

Looking back at the research questions listed earlier we have found the following:

- Use of the NSC data more than doubled the number of community college transfer students we were able to track in this study. By using this data we were able to show that current research has underestimated the transfer rate by as much as 25%. This raises the transfer rate of the Cohen cohort from the mid-20% range to about 30%. Considering the limitations of the NSC data, we might be able to add another 5% to that number.

- Community college students are probably less likely to cross state borders when they transfer than are students at 4-year colleges.
- Transfer rates to private colleges and out-of-state colleges are more likely when these colleges are close to home.
- Transfer rates from community college transfer programs are significantly higher than transfer rates from non-transfer programs.
- More students transfer without the associate degree than with the degree, but a greater percentage of graduates transfer than non-graduates.
- The location of transfer can be affected by local economic conditions.

While it is true that, due to the limitations of the NSC data, the results of this study are bound to underestimate the number of transfers, it is also true that future research on the community college transfer rate should not be done without using this data.

References

Adelman, C. (1999). *Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment.* Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

Boughan, Karl (2001). Closing the transfer data gap: using national student clearinghouse data in community college outcomes research. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College* 8(2): 107-116.

Conklin, Karen A. (1995). *Community College Students' Persistence and Goal Attainment: A 5-year Longitudinal Study.* ERIC Document Reproduction Service. No. JC 950 365.

Bradburn, E.M. and Hurst, D.G. (2001). *Community College Transfer Rates to 4-year Institutions Using Alternative Definitions of Transfer* (NCES 2001-197). http://nces.ed.gov

Broome Community College (2000). *Placement and Transfer Profile.*

Card, David. (1995). Using geographic variation in college proximity to estimate the returns to schooling. In L. Christofides, et al (ed.), *Aspects of Labour Market Behavior*: *Essays in Honor of John Vanderkamp*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Cohen, Arthur & Brawer, Florence B. (1996). *The American Community College*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cohen, Authur (1991). Deriving a valid transfer rate. In, Enid B. Jones (ed), *A Model for Deriving the Transfer Rate: Report of the Transfer Assembly Project.* Washington, DC: Community College Press.

Dellow, Donald A. & Romano, R.M. (2002). Measuring outcomes: is the first-time, full-time cohort appropriate for the community college? *Community College Review* 30 (2): 42-54,

Dougherty, Kevin J. (1994). *The Contradictory College*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Ehrenberg, Ronald G. & Smith, Christopher L. (2002). *Within State Transitions from 2-Year to 4-Year Public Institutions.* Working Paper 8792 (February). Washington DC: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Glass, J. Conrad and Bunn, Catherine E. (1998). Length of time required to graduate for community college students transferring to senior institutions. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 22 (3): 239-63.

Jacobson, Louis, LaLonde, R.L., Sullivan, D.G. (1997). The returns from community college schooling for displaced workers. *Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago Working Paper*, WP-97-16 (December).

Kane, Thomas J. (1999). *The Price of Admission: Rethinking How Americans Pay for College.* Washington, DC: Brookings

Kozeracki, Carol A. (2001). Studying transfer students: designs and methodological challenges. In F.S. Laanan (ed), *Transfer Students: Trends and Issues*. New Directions for Community Colleges, no. 114. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Leigh, Duane E. & Gill, Andrew M. Do community colleges really divert students from earning bachelor's degrees? *Economics of Education Review.* (forthcoming).

McCormick, A.C. (1997). *Transfer Behavior among Beginning Postsecondary Students: 1989-94.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Statistics.

National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2000). *Measuring up 2000: The state-by-state report card for higher education.* San Jose, California.

New Mexico. (1999). *Student Transfer between New Mexico's Postsecondary Institutions, Spring 1999.* ERIC Document Reproduction Service. No. JC 990 461.

New York (2000). *Application and Enrollment Patterns of Transfer Students, Fall 1999* (Institutional Research and Analysis, Report No. 6-00A. State University of New York.

Pascarella, Ernst T. (1999). New studies track community college effects on students. *Community College Journal* 69: 8-14.

Palmer, James C. (2000). What do we know about transfer? an overview, *Peer Review* 2(2): 8-11.

Romano, Richard M. (2001*).* Indicators of institutional effectiveness for Broome Community College*,* Institute for Community College Research, Binghamton, NY. Working Paper. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED455890)

Sanchez, J.R. and Laanan, F.S. (eds.) (1998). *Determining the economic benefit of attending community college.* New directions for community colleges, no. 104. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Tinto, Vincent (1985). College proximity and rates of college attendance. *American Educational Research Journal* 10: 273-99.

Townsend, Barbara K. (2000). Transfer students' institutional attendance patterns: a case study. *College and University Journal* 76 (1): 21-24.

Townsend, Barbara K. (2001). Blurring the lines: transforming terminal education to transfer education. In D. D. Bragg (ed.), *The New Vocationalism in Community Colleges.* New directions for community colleges, no. 115. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wellman, Jane W. (2002). State policy and community college—baccalaureate transfer. Washington, DC: The Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Windham, Patrica. (1999). Outcomes: a longitudinal look at the class of fall 1993. *Florida Community College System: Putting Minds to Work.* ERIC Document Reproduction Service. No. JC 000 340.