

# ACTION RESEARCH BRIEF

## WTCS Transfer Student Patterns



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### National transfer student patterns

Nationally, 33% of community college students transfer to a four-year institution (Jenkins & Fink 2016, Fig. 1). Of these students, less than half (42%) complete a bachelor’s degree within six years (Jenkins & Fink 2016, Fig. 1). Students who transfer with an associate’s degree or credential graduate at a higher rate (48%) than students who transfer without a degree (35% completion rate, Shapiro et al. 2013), yet this effect varies across the United States (Jenkins & Fink 2016). In addition, an estimated 45%-55% percent of students who transfer to a four-year institution end up switching and transferring to more than two post-secondary institutions (i.e., “swirling”, Shapiro et al. 2015, Meza et al. 2018).

Furthermore, bachelor’s degree attainment rates among community college transfer students varies by the characteristics of the four-year institution. Graduation rates vary from 42% to 31% to just 8% for community

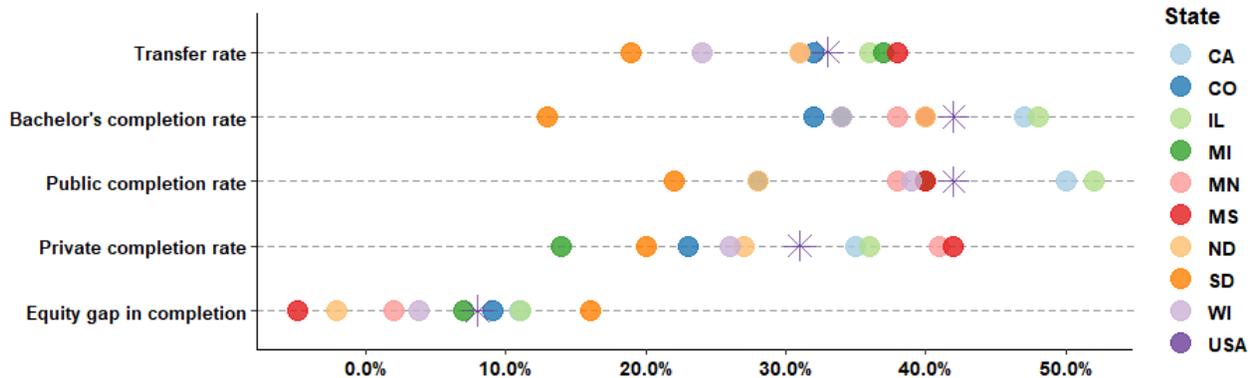


Figure 1. Transfer student measures summarized across a subset of states (circles, see legend for color coding) and national rates (purple asterisks). (Top) Transfer rate is the percent of students who transferred from a two-year college to a four-year college (based on a 2007 student cohort with National Student Clearinghouse data). Bachelor’s completion rate is the graduation rate (within six years) for these transfer students. This information is then broken out by the type of four-year college: public or private institutions (e.g., ‘Public completion rate’). (Bottom) Equity gap in completion shows the difference in bachelor’s completion rates for transfer students with higher vs. lower incomes (as assigned from census tract information). Figure adapted from Jenkins & Fink 2016.

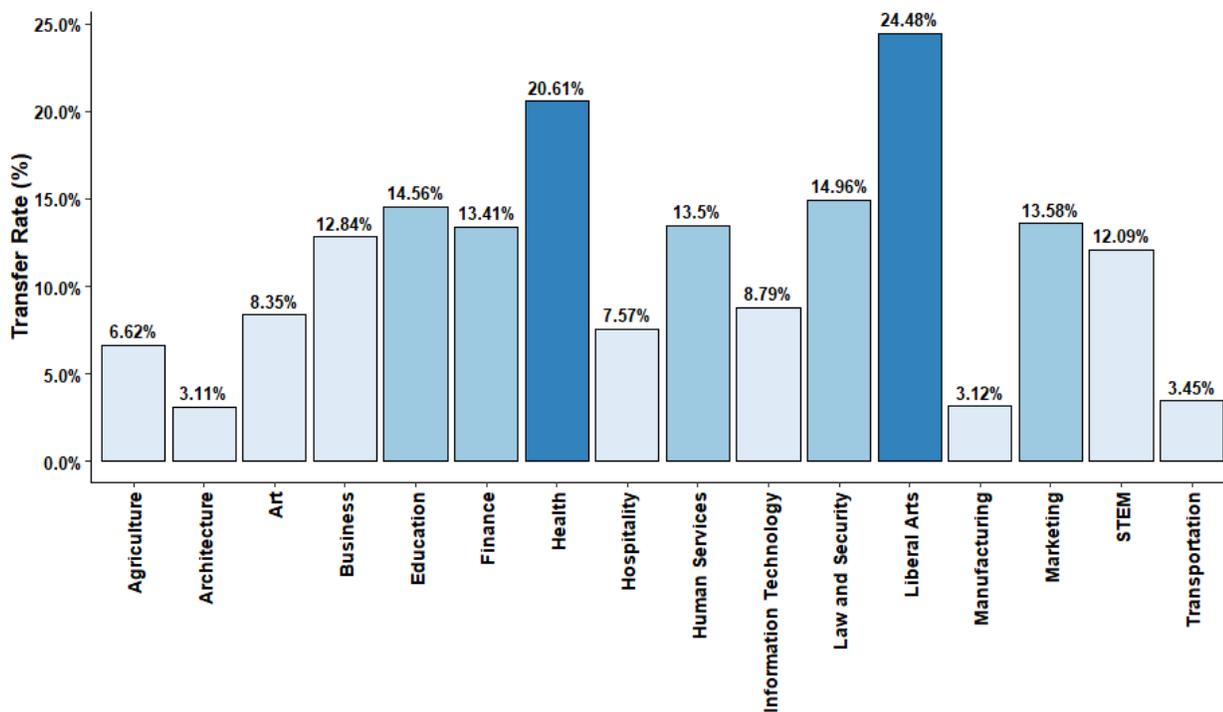


Figure 2. WTCS student (2014-17) transfer rate across career clusters. Color depicts relative transfer rates from light (lower than 15%) to medium (approximately 15%) to dark blue (higher than 15%).

college students who transfer to public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit four-year institutions, respectively (Jenkins & Fink 2016, Fig. 1). Community college transfer students graduate at higher rates at four-year colleges that are more selective (Jenkins & Fink 2016) and have a research focus with doctoral programs (Shapiro et al. 2013), perhaps due to increased student resources and services at these institutions.

In addition, student characteristics can also influence transfer outcomes. Wealthy students are more likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree than poorer transfer students, creating an equity gap in attainment (Jenkins & Fink 2016). Yet, this effect is not consistent across the United States, and some states (e.g., Mississippi and North Dakota) do not exhibit student equity gaps. This variation indicates that post-secondary institutions and policies can be modified to close attainment gaps in transfer student outcomes.

## WTCS transfer student patterns

Across the WTCS, roughly 15% of students transfer out of our colleges to another postsecondary institution (based on data from 2014-2017). Transfer students more often enroll in health and liberal arts programs (Fig. 2) and tend to be young adults (24-yrs-old or younger). Program graduates transfer at a higher rate (18.4%) than students who have not completed their degree (11.3%). Also, female students transfer at a higher rate (18.1%) than male students (11.3%). Of transfer students, 74% remain in Wisconsin, 67% attend a public college, and 55% attend a UWS institution.

### WTCS to UWS outcomes

WTCS students who transfer to a UWS institution primarily attend UW Milwaukee, UW Madison, and UW Oshkosh (43% of WTCS students who transfer to UWS). Students who transfer with a liberal arts associate's

degree are more likely to enter a UWS college as an upperclassmen (junior or senior) than liberal arts students who did not complete their WTCS degree (Fig. 3). Whereas, students in applied associate's degree programs are less likely to enroll as a UWS upperclassmen, even if they have completed their associate's degree (Fig. 3).

### WTCS to for-profit institutions

Roughly 5% of WTCS students transfer to a for-profit college. This estimate includes only for-profit colleges that have a campus in Wisconsin, including Bryant and Stratton Colleges, DeVry University Wisconsin, Globe Universities, and the University of Phoenix. Students who have self-disclosed an economic disadvantage transfer to for-profit colleges at a higher rate (7.3%) than students who are not economically disadvantaged (2.9%). In addition, students who transfer to for-profit college are more often African American or multiracial (Fig. 4), middle-aged (25- to 54-yr-old) and enrolled in hospitality and human services programs

This information is critically important, because national research indicates that students who transfer to for-profit colleges are unlikely to graduate (8% graduation rate, Jenkins & Fink 2016). Thus, these students who are already economically disadvantaged and enrolled in program areas with lower paying jobs (WTCS Graduate Outcomes Report 2018) will likely be burdened with student debt (Howarth and Lang 2018, Harris 2018) without finishing a degree.

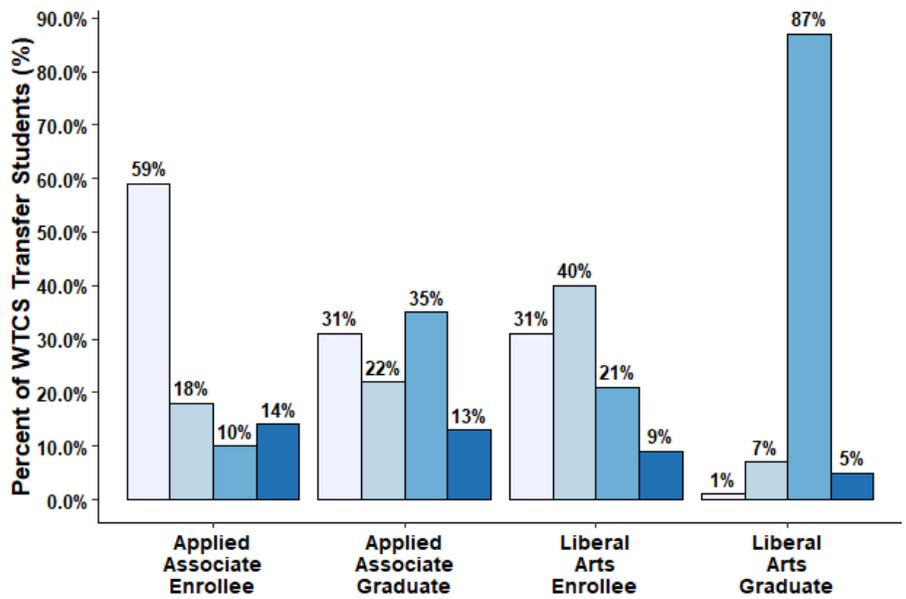


Figure 3. Percentage of WTCS students (1994-2015) who transfer to UWS by their entry level classification (off-white = Freshmen, light blue = Sophomore, medium blue = upperclassmen, dark blue = special) and their WTCS attainment (applied associate enrollee vs. graduate and liberal arts enrollee vs. graduate).

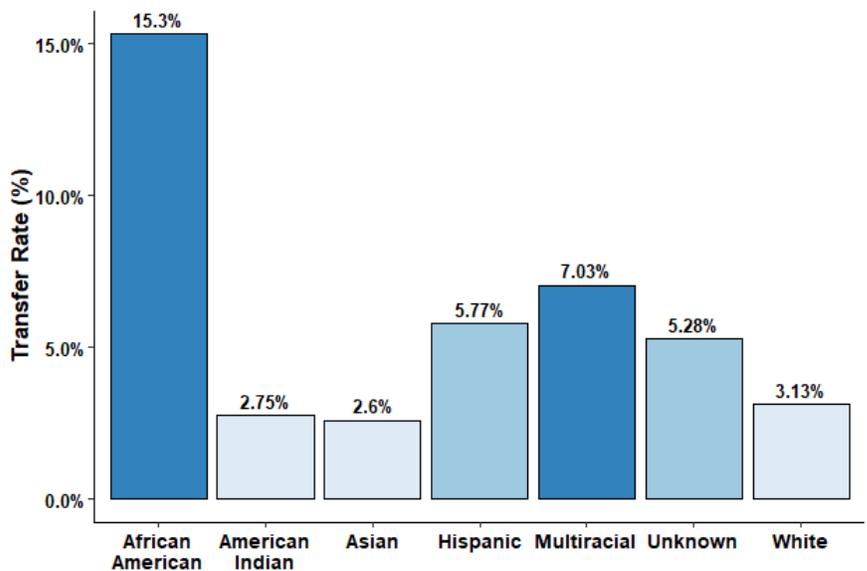


Figure 4. WTCS student (2014-17) transfer rate to for-profit colleges across student race/ethnicity groups. Color depicts relative transfer rates from light (lower than 5%) to medium (approximately 5%) to dark blue (higher than 5%).

## Transfer racial equity

While overall WTCS transfer rates do not exhibit large differences across student race/ethnicity groups (transfer rates vary moderately from 12.4% to 16.4%), differences do exist when focusing on students who transfer to a for-profit college (Fig. 4). These differences point to an underlying racial equity gap within our postsecondary systems that disadvantages transfer students of color and, in particular, African American and multiracial students. Racial equity gaps in student transfer patterns and degree attainment are common across the United States (Meza et al. 2018). Students of color who transfer to a four-year college are less likely to earn a bachelor's degree compared with white students (Meza et al. 2018). Thus, student equity should be at the forefront of developing and maintaining articulation agreements and transfer college partnerships.

## Guiding questions

- Were you surprised by any of the transfer information for our state or the WTCS? Why or why not?
- What do you believe is the greatest transfer opportunity or challenge for your college?
- How can we improve the success of our transfer students? How can we ensure that these measures help *all* students (race/ethnicity, program areas, students with disabilities, etc.)?

## Resources for more information

- [DATA USA](#) provides college profiles with easy to navigate IPEDS information on metrics, including enrollments, student diversity, fees and tuition, retention, graduation, etc.
- [UWS Accountability Dashboards](#) provide system- and college-wide information on student retention, graduation, and diversity.
- [WTCS Transfer Report](#) provides summary information on students who transfer in and out of the WTCS.
- [WTCS-UWS Transfer Reports](#) provides detailed information on students who transfer from the WTCS to UWS
- [Community College Research Initiatives](#) research on high-performing transfer partnerships

## References

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