

How can we help transfer students be successful here?

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Introduction

CBS believes that community and research opportunities are important for our students' success. This poster presents information about our New Academic Standing (NAS) transfer students, the programs we have instituted to support their success, and some aggregate data about our NAS students in these contexts.

Guiding questions

How can we best support our New Academic Standing (NAS) transfer students both in their transition here to the University of Minnesota and the College of Biological Sciences and how well are they faring (particularly in comparison to our New High School, NHS, cohorts)?

Institutional Context (departmental/unit details)

About 2300 students have declared majors in the College of Biological Sciences. Most of these are full-time CBS students, but some are in other Colleges as well. We accept about 450 new high school students every year, about 80-100 NAS students, and a varying number of Intercollege Transfer (ICT) and Interuniversity (IUT) students.

Conceptual framework (if applicable)

In CBS, we believe that having a community of learners is important for student success in their undergraduate career (both student retention and academic success) and having research experience is critical for their future success. We have put considerable focus on the freshman experience, including offering a 3-day experience at our Itasca Biological Station and Laboratories for all of our entering freshman in the summer before their freshman year. The success of this program has led us to explore ways we can also support our NAS students.

As a scientific field, we believe that experience in doing science is critical for every student in biology. It is only by doing science that the student will understand the importance and impact of science, the role of science in their careers and daily life, and the limitations of science. In addition, to be competitive for admissions to professional or graduate schools or for jobs, research experience is necessary. We had seen that our NHS students were successful in getting these research experiences but our NAS students were less successful.

Thus, we developed strategies to provide the NAS students with community and research experiences.

Discussion

Three years ago, we instituted a one-day pre-semester meeting, a semester long course, and a research experience opportunity to our NAS students to provide them with support. This poster provides information about the comparisons we have been making to assess the usefulness of these activities.

We have three prongs to our NAS transfer student programs. Note that we accept NAS students only in the Fall semester.

1. One day welcome program the week before classes begin. At this program, Nature of Research (NOR), we provide students with a chance to meet faculty, find out about student groups in biology, learn tools they will need (e.g., literature searching

- and bibliographic programs, the neuroscience of learning, University resources), and learn about University traditions (e.g., history of the U, sing the Rouser.)
2. A required, semester long course, Biol 3700, Nature of Science and Research, that provides the students a regular meeting with other transfer students while they learn about the research enterprise, visit research labs, and prepare themselves for research positions.
 3. Funding through the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) to provide transfer students to connect them with research mentors and provide some funding to get them started in research in the Spring semester.

Results

We have somewhat improved the NAS students response to “I feel that I belong at this campus” so that their responses are like those of NHS students.

The grade point average after one year is consistently lower than those of NHS students after one year, but given our different admissions requirements, that is not too surprising.

What we know is that the NAS students are more likely to be interested in research careers than NHS students, but that may be because they are being surveyed when they are older (usually junior standing, but a number also older than a traditional junior-age student.) They are also somewhat less likely to be interested in a career in medicine.

Coming in to CBS, only 11% of NAS students report having had research experience, but after the one semester Nature of Science and Research course and help to obtain research placements, 54% are engaged in research. An interesting 32% indicate that they are interested in doing research but do not have the time (their second semester here) to do so. We now have a research opportunities coordinator who will be able to follow up in their next semesters to help them get this experience.

The NAS student 4-year graduation rate is 66% compared to 71% for our NHS students (2008 cohorts.) However, a concerning statistic is that our NAS students should not need 4 years to graduate, as most come in as sophomores or juniors.

Conclusions

We think we have made some progress on helping our NAS students with community and research, but we have more work to do. In particular, we need to find out what is preventing them from graduating in less than 4 years so that we can remove obstacles or provide them with additional resources to reach a more timely graduation date. We also plan to review our transfer student admissions requirements to see if any adjustment is needed. Finally, we will continue to provide support to obtain research experiences.

Contact information

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