

# Developing data-driven, strategic partnerships to support transfer student success

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VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

# A tale of two universities

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# Virginia Commonwealth University

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Urban: Richmond, Virginia.

Public research: \$270 million in sponsored research.

Enrollment: 32,000 students; 24,000 undergraduates.

Percentage of undergraduate students who are underrepresented population (URP) students = 63%.

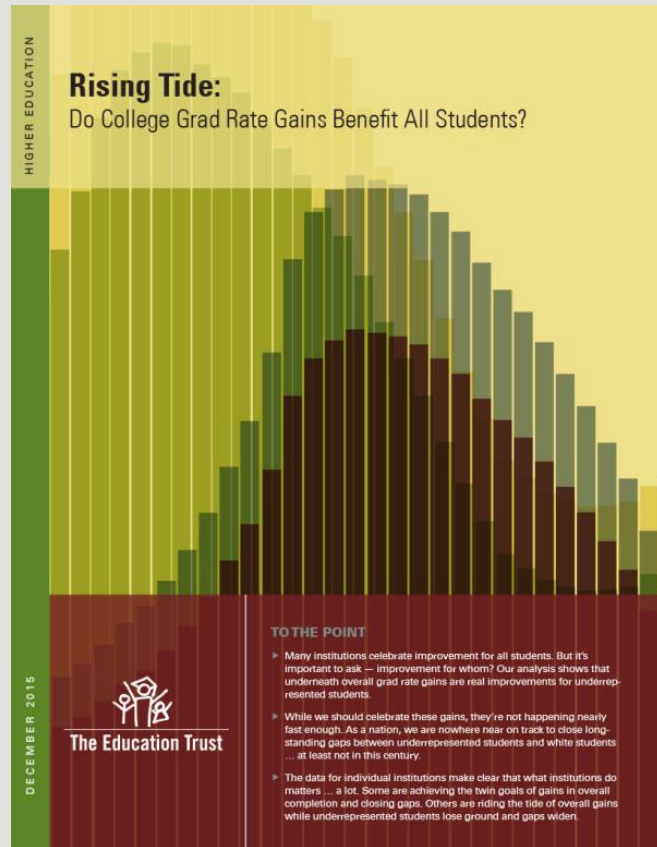
Definition of **URP** (*State Council for Higher Education in Virginia*):

- Non-white US citizen and permanent residents
- Students receiving Pell grants at any time during the last five-years
- Non-traditional students (age 25 or older at entry)
- Students from Virginia localities in the lowest quintile of associate and baccalaureate attainment rates

(Source: [http://research.schev.edu/enrollment/E50\\_report.asp](http://research.schev.edu/enrollment/E50_report.asp))

# VCU recognized in 2015:

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VCU identified as 1 of 26 institutions that are achieving the twin goals of increasing overall graduation rates while closing gaps through intentional efforts to help underrepresented students arrive, transition, and thrive in college.

# VCU's community college transfer student population:

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- ❑ Virginia has 23 public community colleges and 1 public two-year college.
- ❑ 2,181 community college students transferred to VCU in 2014-15.
  - 44% were students of color.
  - 38% were eligible to receive a Pell grant.
  - 42% were awarded an associate degree prior to transfer.

(SOURCE: <http://research.schev.edu/feedback/transfer/TR02.asp>)

# Total Public Two-Year Institutions

## Students Transferring to VCU in the Fall and Spring of the Designated Year

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	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	Percent Increase
New Transfer (All)	1,326	1,581	1,647	1,723	1,939	1,903	1,913	2,181	+64%
New Transfer with Pell	309	369	498	614	735	731	748	838	+171%
New Transfer (students of color)	427	465	495	606	726	699	769	949	+122%
AA/AS Awarded Prior to Transfer	399	526	586	622	763	774	803	924	+132%

SOURCE: <http://research.schev.edu/feedback/transfer/TR02.asp>



# Two recent reports on transfer students from community colleges

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*Tracking Transfer: New Measures of Institutional and State Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students Attain Bachelor's Degrees.* Davis Jenkins & John Fink. Community College Research Center (2016).

*The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges.* Joshua Wyner, KC Deane, Davis Jenkins & John Fink. Community College Research Center (2016).

# The model: Data-driven, strategic partnerships

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## Understand the context

Identify transfer partners

Share data

Create transfer pathways

Coordinate advising operations



# Understand the context

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***“(A) confluence of demographic, economic, and political forces is increasingly bringing community colleges and four-year colleges together to improve transfer outcomes.”***

*The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges (2016)*

*Discussion: What are those  
demographic, economic,  
and political forces?*

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# The “Completion Agenda”

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***“By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.”***  
(President Obama, 2009)

***“Complete College America is a national nonprofit with a single mission: to work with states to significantly increase the number of Americans with quality career certificates or college degrees and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.”***

***“Virginia’s Community Colleges are embarking on a new six-year strategic plan to triple the number of credentials that our students earn by the year 2021.”***

The Lumina Foundation’s goal is ***“to increase the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates, and other credentials to 60% by the year 2025”***

***“By 2030, more Virginians will graduate with high quality credentials without excessive debt. The Commonwealth, through its public and private colleges and universities, will award 1.5 million degrees and workforce credentials, improve student success, and increase by 30 percent Virginia’s share of research expenditures.”***  
(The Virginia Plan for Higher Education)

# The role of community colleges

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□ In fall 2014, 39% (6.7 million) of all undergraduate students were enrolled at two-year institutions. By 2025, enrollment at two-year institutions is projected to increase to 8.2 million students.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), IPEDS Spring 2001 through Spring 2015, Fall Enrollment component; and Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Projection Model, 1980 through 2025.

□ In the 2013-14 academic year, 46 percent of students who completed a degree at a four-year institution were enrolled at a two-year institution at some point in the previous 10 years. Over one-fifth of these students were enrolled in two-year institutions for just a single term. Nearly half of them were enrolled for five or more terms.

SOURCE: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Snapshot Report, Contribution of Two-Year Institutions to Four-Year Completions.

□ 42% of VCU's graduates in 2015-16 were admitted to VCU as transfer students.

SOURCE: VCU Division of Strategic Enrollment Management.

# The opportunity:

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- ❑ Students who enroll in community colleges are more likely to be low-income, the first in their families to go to college, and members of underrepresented racial or ethnic groups. For example, 73.5% of students enrolled at Virginia community colleges were students from under-represented populations. SOURCE: [http://research.schev.edu/enrollment/E50\\_report.asp](http://research.schev.edu/enrollment/E50_report.asp)
- ❑ For most community college students, community college is a stepping stone to earning a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution. According to a recent report of the National Center for Education Statistics, 81% of first-time beginning community college students in 2003-04 said that their ultimate goal was a bachelor's degree or higher. SOURCE: *Community College Student Outcomes: 1994–2009*, Web Tables, U.S. Department of Education, November, 2011, NCES 2012-253, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012253.pdf>.

# The opportunity:

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***“Strengthening transfer pathways between community colleges and regional comprehensive universities is a strategy with great potential to increase postsecondary attainment by large numbers of low-income students while minimizing the cost to students and taxpayers.”***

*The Business Case for Regional Public Universities to Strengthen Community College Transfer Pathways (with Guidance on Leading the Process).* By Davis Jenkins, Alison Kadlec, James Votruba. Washington,DC: HCM Strategists. (2014)

# The problem:

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Most community college students do not transfer. Nor do they complete a credential or degree.



## SIX-YEAR DEGREE ATTAINMENT: Percentage of first-time beginning community college students who attained a bachelor's degree, associate's degree, or certificate as their highest attainment within 6 years: 2003–09

	Percent of students
<b>Entered with intent to complete a degree at a four-year institution</b>	<b>81.40%</b>
<b>Attained a certificate</b>	
All	8.50%
White	9.20%
Black/African-American	9.60%
Hispanic/Latino	6.00%
Received a Pell Grant when first enrolled	9.30%
<b>Attained an associate's degree</b>	
All	14.40%
White	16.20%
Black/African-American	10.30%
Hispanic/Latino	11.70%
Received a Pell Grant when first enrolled	15.20%
<b>Attained a bachelor's degree</b>	
<b>All</b>	<b>11.60%</b>
White	13.30%
Black/African-American	6.20%
Hispanic/Latino	8.20%
Received a Pell Grant when first enrolled	8.10%

SOURCE: *Community College Student Outcomes: 1994–2009*, Web Tables, U.S. Department of Education, November, 2011, NCES 2012-253, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012253.pdf>.

SIX-YEAR STUDENT OUTCOMES: Certificate or degree outcomes for: 1) all students in the cohort of students who enrolled in community colleges for the first time in Fall 2007; and 2) students from the Fall 2007 cohort who transferred to a four-year institution.

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Outcome	Fall 2007 Cohort	Transfer Students
Number of students	719,371	237,126 (= 33% of Fall 2007 cohort)
Earned a certificate or associate degree	32%	29%
<b>Earned a bachelor's degree</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>42%</b>

*SOURCE: Tracking Transfer: New Measures of Institutional and State Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students Attain Bachelor's Degrees. Davis Jenkins & John Fink. Community College Research Center (January, 2016)*

# The student perspective:

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*Indiana regional transfer study: The student experience of transfer pathways between Ivy Tech Community College and Indiana University.* A report from Public Agenda by Alison Kadlec and Iyoti Gupta (2014)

Summary report of over 50, 90-minute focus group conversations with a total of 333 transfer students in Indiana.

Identified 4 themes:

- 1) Completion
- 2) Pathways
- 3) Advising
- 4) Communication

# Theme 1: Completion

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Nearly every student said that a four-year degree is increasingly essential in today's economy. Most students also stated that an associate degree is an important intermediate step to the baccalaureate.

*“I think that a bachelor's degree now takes you as far as a high school diploma did 30 years ago. It is a necessity to have a college degree now because of the economy, the job market. If you want to make that extra money you have to continue even past the bachelor's degree.”*

*“An associate degree gets you in the door ... to where you can work up to a bachelor's degree to get something higher. It's kind of a ladder. You're kind of working your way, your steps, up the ladder.”*

# Theme 2: Pathways

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Most students told stories suggesting college is experienced as a maze, rather than a clear path, and many reported losing time and money because they took courses that did not transfer or that transferred only as electives.

*“I thought I did my homework on what would transfer, and then I get over [to the four year institution] and I’m sitting with the department chair, and she’s looking over the sheet that Ivy Tech gave me, pointing and saying, “You didn’t need to take that class or that class, and this class isn’t going to transfer.”*

*“Only 11 of the 25 courses I took transferred. And of the classes that transferred, not all of them transferred for my degree. I lost so much time and money.”*

# Theme 3: Advising

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Most students described frustrating and often unhelpful or even misleading experiences with the advisement system.

*“As far as scheduling classes ... when you schedule an appointment, it’s so quick that you really don’t have time to ask the different questions that you might have. If you send an email, sometimes it might be a day or two before you get a response.”*

*“They were just pushing students through. I had three different advisors in about two years, and I never knew where any of them were. Any time I went to go see them, they weren't on campus at the time ... They would just change it, and there would be no notification ... It was very, very, very confusing.”*

# Theme 4: Communication

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Most students reported dysfunctional channels of communication both within and, especially, between institutions; information is hard to find and often inadequate, incorrect, or conflicting. Awareness of dedicated information resources is low and utilization limited.

*“The [Indiana University]/Ivy Tech relationship is kind of like a three-legged race. They’re really bound together in a way that is undeniable, but they’re not in sync. It’s very difficult, I think, on both sides. A lot of people mentioned that they had experiences where somebody gave them inaccurate information. The student had to go do the research, but the research shows up in a couple different places. It’s different in all those places. It complicates the issue.”*



# The model: Data-driven, strategic partnerships

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Understand the context

## **Identify transfer partners**

Share data

Create transfer pathways

Coordinate advising operations

# Identify transfer partners

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***“To be effective, community colleges and four-year colleges must work independently and together to create clarity about the steps students should take to attain a bachelor’s degree and ensure that instruction and other programming support students through those steps.”***

*The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges (2016)*

*Discussion: What are the challenges to cooperation between two- and four-year institutions?*

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# Practical considerations include:

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- ❑ Statewide transfer policies are important but not sufficient for improving transfer and completion rates.
- ❑ Review enrollment data to identify potential transfer partners:
  - Headcount
  - Percentage of total transfer population from community college
- ❑ Consider regional and political factors.
- ❑ Schedule regular meetings to improve communication.

# Virginia's primary regional partners

	Total transfers to public, 4-year institutions (2014-15)	George Mason University (Northern Virginia)		Old Dominion University (Southeastern Virginia)		VCU (Central Virginia)	
	Total Number	Number	Percentage of total	Number	Percentage of total	Number	Percentage of total
All VCCS	11,794	3,204	27%	2,436	21%	2,181	18%
John Tyler CC (Central Virginia)	590	11	2%	84	14%	332	56%
Reynolds CC (Central Virginia)	743	10	1%	74	10%	529	71%
Northern Virginia CC	4,774	2,957	62%	219	5%	605	13%
Tidewater CC (Southeastern Virginia)	1,823	48	3%	1,161	64%	138	8%

SOURCE: <http://research.schev.edu/feedback/transfer/TR02.asp>

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# Share data

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***“Two- and four-year institutions should regularly monitor their performance in serving transfer students using common metrics that track students all the way to bachelor’s completion.”***

*Tracking Transfer: New Measures of Institutional and State Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students Attain Bachelor’s Degrees (2016)*



*Discussion: what kind of data would be useful to your transfer partner?*

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# Enrollment data

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## □ Community colleges:

- Number of students in dual enrollment programs.
- Number of students in associate degree programs, especially A.S. in science and A.S. in engineering programs.

## □ Four-year institutions:

- Total number of transfer student admits from the community college enrolling at the institution.
- Number of transfer students with associate degrees from the community college.
- Number of transfer students from the community college enrolling in each degree program of the four-year institution.

# Why?

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- ❑ Enable projections of transfer enrollment at four-year institution.
- ❑ Identify potential high school recruits with college credit.
- ❑ Identify future program-specific articulation agreement.
- ❑ Evaluate the success of articulation agreements:
  - Did the agreement increase enrollment in the four-year degree program(s) associated with the agreement?
  - Did the agreement increase the number of community college students completing the associate degree?

# Academic performance data

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## ☐ Community colleges:

- Percentage of students in transfer degree programs earning 15 or more credits per semester.

## ☐ Four-year institutions:

- Percentage of transfer students from the community college transferring 0-29, 30-59, and 60 or more credits.
- Percentage of transfer students from the community college earning 15 or more credits per semester.
- Percentage of transfer students from the community college in good academic standing after first semester.
- D-F-W rate for transfer students from the community college in select upper-level courses.

# Why?

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- ❑ Establish base-line metrics for evaluating advising and marketing initiatives designed to increase the percentage of students taking 15 or more credits per semester.
- ❑ Identify students who may be eligible for “reverse transfer” initiatives.
- ❑ Evaluate the success of articulation agreements in preparing students for academic success at four-year institution.
- ❑ Initiate faculty conversations about curricular alignment between community college and four-year institutions.

# Qualitative data

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## ☐ Community college:

- Summary results of institutional surveys of students enrolled in transfer degree programs.

## ☐ Four-year institution:

- Summary results of institutional surveys of transfer students in comparison to results for “native” students.

## Examples:

- ☐ National Survey for Student Engagement.
- ☐ Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey.

# Why?

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- ❑ Establish baseline metrics for evaluating advising initiatives designed to prepare community college students for transferring to four-year institutions.
- ❑ Establish baseline metrics for advising initiatives designed to improve transfer student engagement and satisfaction with the four-year institution.
- ❑ Identify areas of concern among transfer students and develop initiatives in response.

# Retention and completion data

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## Four-year institutions:

- One-year retention rates of transfer students from the community college.
- Two-, three-, and four-year graduation rates of all transfer students from the community college (disaggregated by URP and non-URP status).
- Two-, three-, and four-year graduation rates of associate degree holders from the community college (disaggregated by URP and non-URP status).



# Why?

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***“While there were some exceptions, in general, transfer students from lower income backgrounds had worse outcomes than did higher income students. Both institutions and states should work to narrow these gaps in achievement. To do this, they need to begin by making use of data that better enable outcomes to be disaggregated for lower and higher income students.”***

*Tracking Transfer: New Measures of Institutional and State Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students Attain Bachelor's Degrees (2016)*

# The model: Data-driven, strategic partnerships

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## **Create transfer pathways**

Coordinate advising operations

*Discussion: what are the advantages and disadvantages of transfer articulation agreements?*

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# Create transfer pathways

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***“Successful partners have developed major specific pathways, or “transfer program maps,” that clearly map the course sequences, prerequisites, and extracurricular activities that transfer students need to successfully transfer to the four-year partner and earn a bachelor’s degree ... Through the process of developing and using transfer program maps, institutional partners have nurtured a shared understanding among faculty and staff at each institution about instructional content and expectations and how to guide students successfully through the transfer process.”***

*The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges (2016)*

# The collaborative process

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1. Use enrollment data to identify popular transfer pathways.
2. Identify the associate degree program that best aligns with the first two years of the bachelor's degree program.
3. Connect advisors and faculty of both institutions to create programmatic transfer pathways (e.g., formal articulation agreements and/or advising transfer program maps).
4. Establish a review process for updating and improving transfers pathways as curricula evolve.

# Elements of effective transfer pathways

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1. Course sequences that outline what general education and major requirements can be fulfilled through the associate degree program.
2. Recommended minimum grades in prerequisite milestone courses needed for the major.
3. Deadlines and requirements for admission to the four-year institution.
4. Relevant extra-curricular recommendations.
5. Links with career pathways.
6. Contact information for representatives at both the community college and four-year institution.

# Examples:

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- ❑ Transfer pathways to Arizona State University (<https://transfer.asu.edu/>).
- ❑ Career paths and transfer from Broward College (<http://www.broward.edu/academics/programs/Pages/default.aspx>).
- ❑ Major maps at Florida International University (<https://mymajor.fiu.edu/>).
- ❑ Transfer pathways to Virginia Commonwealth University (<http://www.transfer.vcu.edu/vccs/what-courses-should-i-take.html>).

# Future developments

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## ❑ Interstate Passport Initiative (<http://www.wiche.edu/passport/home>):

*“The Interstate Passport is a learning outcomes-based framework for transfer with the goals of improving graduation rates, shortening time to degree, and saving students’ money. The new transfer framework focuses on lower-division general education, the common denominator among most institutions—concentrating on it as a whole, not on individual courses—and allows for a cross-border “match” of outcomes-integrated general education for block transfer.”*

## ❑ Degree Qualifications Profile (<https://www.aacu.org/qc/dqp>):

*“Transfer articulation systems are riddled with complexity, mystify whatever was intended by degree requirements and, often, impede student progress. Potentially, the DQP framework creates a new and more educationally productive context for facilitating both transfer and deeper learning.”*



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## **Coordinate advising operations**

# Coordinate advising operations

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*“Four-year colleges should provide prospective students and their community college advisors with detailed information on the course requirements for students’ desired majors, students’ likelihood of admission based on their credentials and experiences, and costs of attendance and financial aid options. After students have transferred, four-year colleges should engage students in a robust onboarding process that involves frequent and regular meetings with their advisors.”*

*The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges (2016)*

# Recommendations for community colleges

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- ❑ Establish advising contacts at four-year institutions for appropriate referrals.
- ❑ Encourage students to select program of study and transfer destination as early as possible.
- ❑ Connect transfer students with admissions and/or advising contacts at transfer destination as early as possible.
- ❑ Emphasize importance of following the recommendations of the transfer pathway.
- ❑ Communicate insights to administrators and faculty developing and updating transfer pathways.

# Recommendations for four-year institutions

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- ☐ Schedule annual (or biannual) meetings with community college advisors.
- ☐ Centralize services for transfer students (to include transcript evaluations, advising for prospective transfer students, and transition services for admitted students).
- ☐ Meet with prospective students at the community college campus.
- ☐ Communicate importance of transfer pathways to prospective transfer students.
- ☐ Advocate for transfer students in the university.
- ☐ Provide transition programming services to new transfer students.
- ☐ Communicate insights to administrators and faculty developing and updating transfer pathways.

# VCU Transfer Center

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***“The Transfer Center is dedicated to providing information and support to transfer students, enhance their opportunities for strong academic preparation, ensure a smooth and seamless transition to VCU, and provide the resources necessary for successful progress toward graduation.”***

<http://www.transfer.vcu.edu/>

# Questions

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