

8 Tips for Transferring Colleges

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One third of all college students transfer colleges during their four year college career. If you or your child is hoping to transfer, here are 8 things you need to know:

1. The transfer admission hurdle is slightly more difficult. The acceptance rate for transfer students (64 percent), according to NACAC, is slightly lower than the acceptance rate of first-year students (69 percent).

When evaluating transfer applicants, the biggest admission factor by far is a student's grades at their current college. More than 90 percent of colleges that participated in the NACAC survey said the overall postsecondary grade point average was "considerably important."

2. Transfer students can qualify for merit aid. Seventy-seven percent of colleges reported that they provide merit scholarships to transfer students. Eighty-one percent of small colleges, which have less than 3,000 students, report that they award merit scholarships to transfer students. In comparison, 66 percent of medium-sized schools and 67 percent of large schools offer merit awards.

3. Not all schools have room for transfer students. Small colleges, which have very few undergrads leaving, can have few available spots for transfer students. For instance, Amherst College admitted just 24 transfer students out of 421 applicants for the fall term. Georgetown University, a much larger institution, admitted 364 transfer students out of 1,616 who applied.

State universities are often more equipped to accept large numbers of transfer applicants. UCLA, for instance, recently accepted 5,505 transfer students out of a pool of 18,986 transfer applicants.

4. Standardized tests scores aren't as important. The SAT and ACT, according to the NACAC survey, are less important for transfer students than high school seniors.

In fact, the more time you've spent in college, the less other institutions care about your SAT or ACT scores, according to Deborah Shames, an independent college counselor in northern New Jersey and a transfer admissions advisor for Kaplan Education Foundation.

"If a student is transferring after one semester in college or a year, schools usually want the SAT and high school GPA, but the further away from high school, the less schools rely on them," Shames says.

5. Check out what a college wants from transfer students. Before applying to a school, find out what the institution is looking for in transfer applicants. You can get a good idea by looking at a school's Common Data Set. The Common Data Set is a document that four-year schools across the country complete that contains lots of information on such topics as admission criteria, freshman academic profile, campus safety and transfer admissions. You can often find a college's Common Data Set by Googling that term and the name of the institution.

The College Board also provides this same transfer information. When looking at the profile of any four-year school on College Board, click on "Admission" hyperlink and you'll find the transfer statistics.

6. Make sure your credits transfer. You don't want to lose credits when you move to another school. During the admission process, talk to a college's transfer credit evaluator to get a sense of what credits would transfer.

7. Look for transfer-friendly schools. One way to access that intangible is to ask if the college has a transfer coordinator. Also does the school have a transfer orientation or other transfer programs? Does the school have housing for transfer students? Ideally, you'd like to talk to transfer students about their experience at a school.

8. Focus on the positive when explaining your desire to transfer. College applications will typically ask a student why they want to transfer. Shames warns that students should avoid saying anything negative about their current school. Instead focus on positive reasons for the change and offer specifics on why you want to transfer to a specific college.