

# THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA TRANSFER STUDENT REPORT, 2011

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**The University of North Carolina General Administration**

***August 2012***

# Transfer Activities between University of North Carolina and Other Institutions

## 2011

### Executive Summary

Over the last several decades, there has been a dramatic change in the number of transfer students matriculating at North Carolina's public four-year institutions. These students come from North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), from NC private institutions, from other UNC institutions, and from outside of the state. As a result, we simply cannot meet the need for more North Carolinians, having the post-secondary credentials necessary to drive the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, without a clearer understanding of the policies and programs that best facilitate transfer student success. The following report begins with what UNC currently knows: the volume and distribution of UNC transfer students, their demographics, where transfer students originate and to which institutions they go, their intended majors, and what their graduation rate is, especially in comparison to UNC students who begin and end their educational careers at the same institution. This report, the first in a series, is intended to ensure that UNC's efforts to improve the educational outcomes for transfer students are focused and evidence-based.

### Key Findings

#### **Transfers make up a large portion of the UNC student body.**

- The UNC fall 2011 undergraduate student body consisted of nearly 46,300 transfer students. About 26.5% of all undergraduates enrolled system-wide entered a UNC institution at some point as a transfer student.
- The number of undergraduate transfer students entering UNC each fall increased by 6% from fall 2007 to fall 2011.

**The majority of transfer students are between the ages of 18 and 24. Like UNC's undergraduate students, most are white and female, however a larger portion of transfer students are Pell recipients.**

**The majority of transfers now come to UNC campuses from North Carolina community colleges, and transfers from those colleges represent the fastest growing segment of the transfer population.**

- On average nearly 1,300 distinct institutions send students to UNC. However, 69 of them account for nearly 70% of all transfer students matriculating at UNC.
- Of the 2011 fall entering undergraduate transfer population, 52% transferred from the NCCCS.

#### **Transfer students graduate at lower rates compared to UNC native juniors.**

- For the 2007 cohort, transfer students entering UNC at the junior level or above had an overall four-year graduation rate of 64% compared to 88% of UNC native juniors.
- Of all transfers in the 2007 cohort, NCCCS transfers with an AA/AS degree had the highest four-year graduation rate, 74%.

**Transfer students who declare a major upon entry have higher four-year graduation rates than students who do not initially declare a major, yet 30% of transfer students enroll with no declared major.**

- Of the transfer students who entered at the junior level or above in 2005-2007 cohorts, those who declared a major upon entry had a four-year graduation rate of 65%, compared to 58% of those who did not declare a major.
- Of transfer students in the 2009-2011 cohorts, 30% declared no major. For those who declared a major, the most prevalent were Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services (16%), Health Professions (12%) and Education (12%).
- Of transfer students in the 2005-2007 cohorts, 14% changed majors at least once by fall 2011. The disciplines with the highest attrition were Natural Resources and Conservation, Mathematics and Statistics, and Physical Sciences, 28%, 24%, and 21% respectively.

**Partnerships between UNC campuses and sending institutions may increase graduation rates of transfer students.**

## Definition of Terms

The terms used in this report might not be exactly the same as those used in other documents. Therefore, the following definitions are only for the purpose of this report:

- **Transfer students:** an undergraduate student entering a UNC institution for the first time but known to have previously attended a postsecondary institution at undergraduate level.
- **NCCCS transfers:** transfer students who last attended one of the 58 community colleges in North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) before entering a UNC institution.
- **NCCCS transfers with AA/AS:** NCCCS transfers who were awarded with associate's degrees including Associate in Arts (AA) and Associate in Science (AS) before entering a UNC institution.
- **NCCCS transfers with other associate's:** NCCCS transfers who were awarded with an associate's degree other than AA and AS including Associate in Applied Science (AAS), Associate in Fine Arts (AFA), and Associate in General Education (AGE) before entering a UNC institution. These associate's degrees are not part of the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) developed and implemented between the NCCCS and the University of North Carolina (UNC).
- **NCCCS transfers with 30 or more transfer hours:** NCCCS transfers who do not have an associate's degree, but have 30 or more transferable hours when entering a UNC institution.
- **UNC-to-UNC transfers:** transfer students who last attended one of the 16 UNC institutions before entering another UNC institution.
- **NC private transfers:** transfer students who last attended one of the North Carolina private institutions before entering a UNC institution.
- **Out-of-state transfers:** transfer students who last attended an institution outside of North Carolina before entering a UNC institution.
- **Class level:** upon admission, class level is evaluated and decided by UNC institutions based on transfer students course work, credit hours, GPA, and their selected fields.
- **UNC native juniors:** students enrolled as first-time undergraduates at UNC and start their junior level at UNC.

# Transfers to UNC Institutions, 2010-11

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## Introduction

### National Trends

Undergraduate students' enrollment patterns have changed over the past two decades; an increasing number of students attend multiple institutions before completing their undergraduate studies. According to the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES, 2012), one third (33.1%) of students who started their postsecondary education in fall of 2006 had attended more than one institution by summer of 2011. A majority (59 percent) of the 1999-2000 bachelor's degree recipients attended more than one institution during the course of their undergraduate education. Of those who initially enrolled in four-year institutions, 47 percent attended more than one institution at some point with or without formally transferring. Thus, it is a common practice for students to attend more than one institution over the course of their undergraduate years (NCES, 2012).

According to the National Student Clearinghouse February 2012 report on *Transfer and Mobility in Postsecondary Institutions*, two-year public institutions were the most frequent transfer destination for students starting at nearly all types of institutions, even four-year institutions. Roughly half of all students who transferred from a four-year public institution made a reverse-transfer by moving to a two-year public institution. The single exception was for students who started at public two-year institutions and, even there, 38 percent of those who transferred simply moved to another two-year public. Still, 41 percent of students who started at a two year public transferred to a four-year public institution.

### North Carolina – Setting the Context

As we will document below, the number of students in North Carolina attending more than one institution during their undergraduate tenure has been increasing. For that reason, UNC is actively

collaborating with NCCCS and other partners to create policies and student support services that will maximize a seamless educational experience and student success. In many ways the State Board of NCCCS and the UNC Board of Governors were ahead of the curve when, in 1997, they adopted the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA). Since that time, 102,467 students have transferred to UNC from North Carolina community colleges and, of these, 49,616 subsequently completed a four-year degree. Despite its continuing success, the CAA is now 15 years old and both the curriculum and the types of students who now transfer have changed. Thus in May 2012 UNC and NCCCS jointly convened a group to begin the process of revising the CAA. In addition, in June 2012 UNC-GA partnered with NCCCS in the submission of a grant proposal to the Kresge Foundation for a project designed to provide the AA or AS degree to eligible transfer students en-route to a UNC baccalaureate. UNC is collaborating with both NCCCS and NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) on a Lumina-funded project, designed to align high school common core standards with readiness for credit-bearing courses in English and mathematics.

In order to support the work of each of these important initiatives, we are developing a robust research agenda. In addition to the work that will be completed by our own institutional research team, UNC GA has engaged the North Carolina Higher Education Research Consortium (NC-HERC) to focus on key indicators of successful transfer from NCCCS to UNC. Subsequent analyses will explore such questions as: Do transfers' GPA, specific courses completed at a NC community college, number of transfer hours, completion of the core 44 or earned AA or AS, initial academic program of study, financial need or other data allow for predicting transfer success?

## Enrollment Trends

The majority of transfers now come to UNC campuses from North Carolina community colleges, and transfers from those colleges represent the fastest growing segment of the transfer population. The data in Table 1 indicate that undergraduate transfer students increased 6% from fall 2007 to fall 2011.

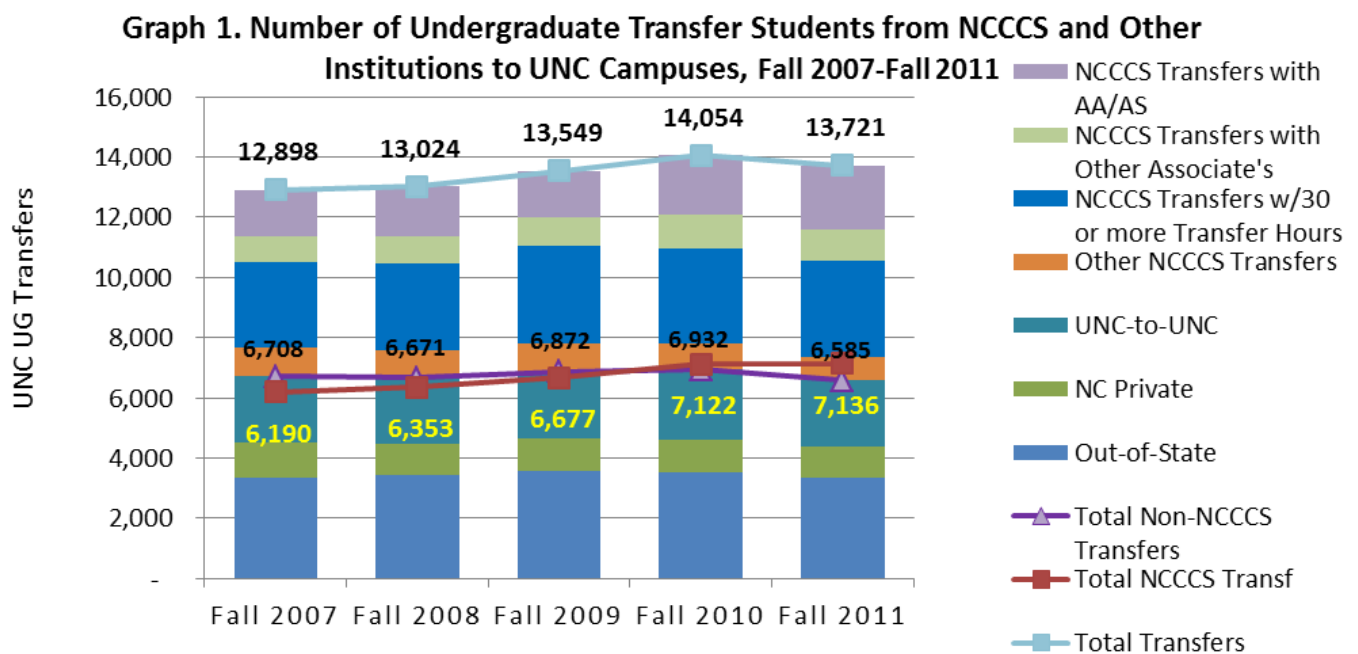
Furthermore, Enrollment of NCCCS transfers increased 15%, from 6,190 in fall 2007 to 7,136 in fall

2011, driven by significant increases in NCCCS transfers with an AA/AS degree. In fall 2011, the majority (52%) of transfer students were from NCCCS. During this same period, non-NCCCS transfers enrolling in UNC decreased 2% from 6,708 in fall 2007 to 6,585 in fall 2011, largely driven by the decline in transfers from North Carolina private institutions. Graph 1 illustrates enrollment patterns over the last five years.

**Table 1. Number of Undergraduate Transfer Students from NCCCS and Other Institutions to UNC Campuses, Fall 2007 - Fall 2011**

	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	% Change from '07 to '11
NCCCS Transfers with AA/AS	1,516	1,653	1,548	1,988	2,139	41%
NCCCS Transfers with Other Associate's	891	926	932	1,115	1,025	15%
NCCCS Transfers w/30 or more Transfer Hours	2,805	2,861	3,272	3,122	3,190	14%
Other NCCCS Transfers	978	913	925	897	782	-20%
<b>Total NCCCS Transfers</b>	<b>6,190</b>	<b>6,353</b>	<b>6,677</b>	<b>7,122</b>	<b>7,136</b>	<b>15%</b>
UNC-to-UNC	2,192	2,188	2,198	2,338	2,182	0%
NC Private	1,181	1,065	1,079	1,062	1,047	-11%
Out-of-State	3,335	3,418	3,595	3,532	3,356	1%
<b>Total Non-NCCCS Transfers</b>	<b>6,708</b>	<b>6,671</b>	<b>6,872</b>	<b>6,932</b>	<b>6,585</b>	<b>-2%</b>
<b>Total Transfers</b>	<b>12,898</b>	<b>13,024</b>	<b>13,549</b>	<b>14,054</b>	<b>13,721</b>	<b>6%</b>

Source: CCD.PR008



### *Demographics of UNC Transfer Students*

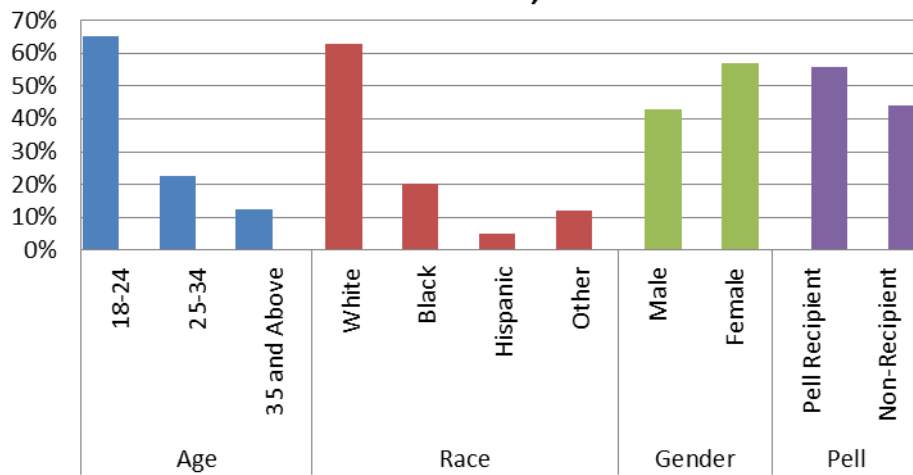
Graph 2 indicates that although a significant portion of UNC transfer students are 25 and above, the majority, 65%, are under the age of 24.

The racial ethnic composition of the transfer student population mirrors that of UNC total undergraduate student demographics, with the majority being white, followed by black and Hispanic.

Like the UNC undergraduate population, the majority of transfer students are female.

A larger proportion of transfer students were Pell recipients (56%) as compared to the percent of total UNC undergraduate recipients (37%).

**Graph 2. Demographics of UNC Undergraduate Transfer Students, Fall 2011**

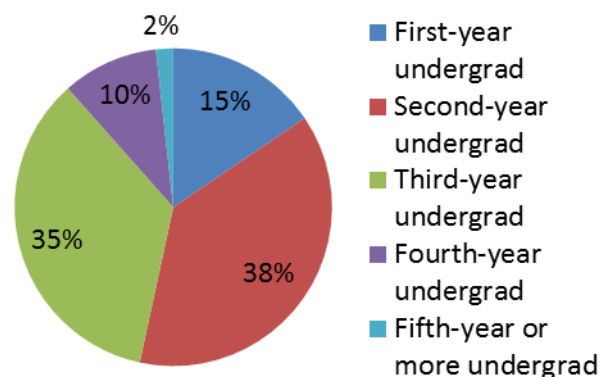


## Entering Class Level

Admission officers at each UNC institution review transfer applicant transcripts and on that basis admit students to different class levels: first-year, second-year, third-year, fourth-year or fifth-year or more. Graph 3 displays the relative proportion of fall 2011 entering transfer students. This composition has stayed relatively stable over the past several years.

Disaggregating the data by origin of transfer students, NCCCS, out-of-state, UNC, etc., yields little difference; the largest entry points are at the second- and third-year class level.

**Graph 3. Entering Class Level of All UNC UG Transfer Students, Fall 2011**



### HIGHLIGHTS:

- Transfer students are a growing population for the University, particularly transfers from North Carolina community colleges.
- Transfer students are older and have a higher proportion receiving Pell grants when compared to the UNC undergraduate student population. Though transfer students are older than the UNC undergraduate population, the majority are still between the ages of 18 and 24.
- Most transfers matriculate to UNC at either the second or third-year class level.

## Graduation and Progress Rates of Transfer Students

Since transfer students are a significant and growing part of the UNC student body, UNC tracks the four-year graduation rates of transfer students who enroll in a UNC institution at the junior level or above. This measure is comparable to the standard six-year graduation rate of new first-time undergraduates. Table 2 and Graph 4 show that the four-year graduation rate for the fall 2007 transfer cohort is 64%. Those students who transfer from NCCCS with

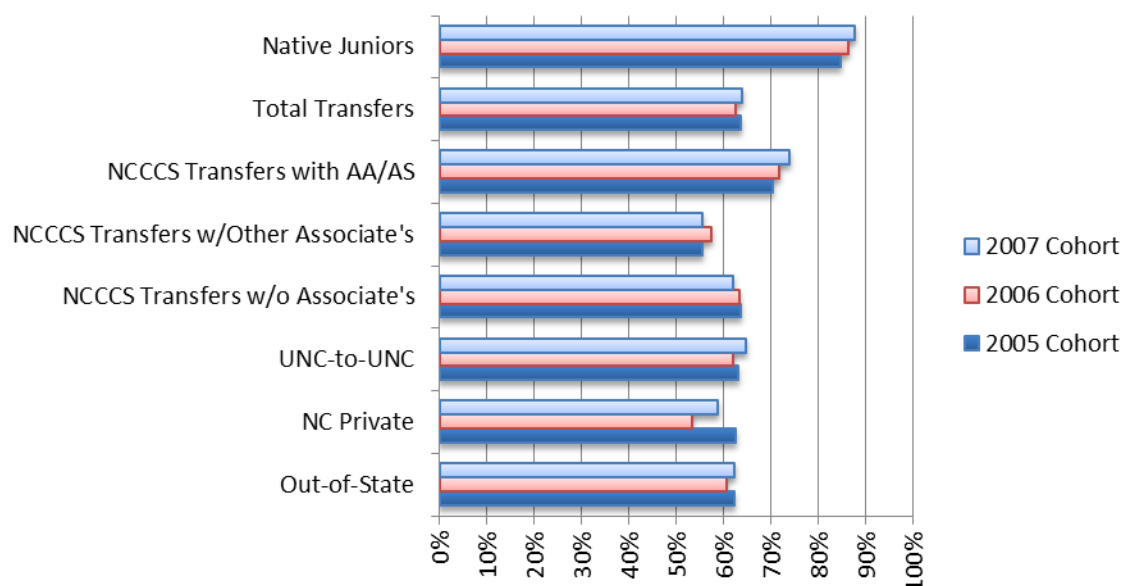
an AA/AS degree have the highest graduation rate of all transfer groups, 74%. NCCCS transfer students with other associate's degree have the lowest graduation rate of 56%. There is considerable difference when comparing graduation rates between transfer students and the UNC native junior population, 64% compared to 88%. Closing the 24 point gap will be an important goal for the University and North Carolina community colleges.

**Table 2. Four-Year Graduation Rates of Transfer Students who First Enrolled at the Junior Level or Above, 2005 Cohort - 2007 Cohort**

	2005 Cohort	2006 Cohort	2007 Cohort	% Change from '05 to '07
NCCCS Transfers with AA/AS	70%	72%	74%	5%
NCCCS Transfers with Other Associate's	55%	57%	56%	0%
NCCCS Transfers w/o Associate's	64%	63%	62%	-3%
<b>Total NCCCS Transfers</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>1%</b>
UNC-to-UNC	63%	62%	65%	2%
NC Private	63%	53%	59%	-6%
Out-of-State	62%	61%	62%	0%
<b>Total Non-NCCCS Transfers</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Total Transfers</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Native Juniors</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>3%</b>

Source: CCD.PR006B & CCD.PR009

**Graph 4. Four-Year Graduation Rates of Transfer Students who First Enrolled at the Junior Level or Above, 2005 Cohort - 2007 Cohort**



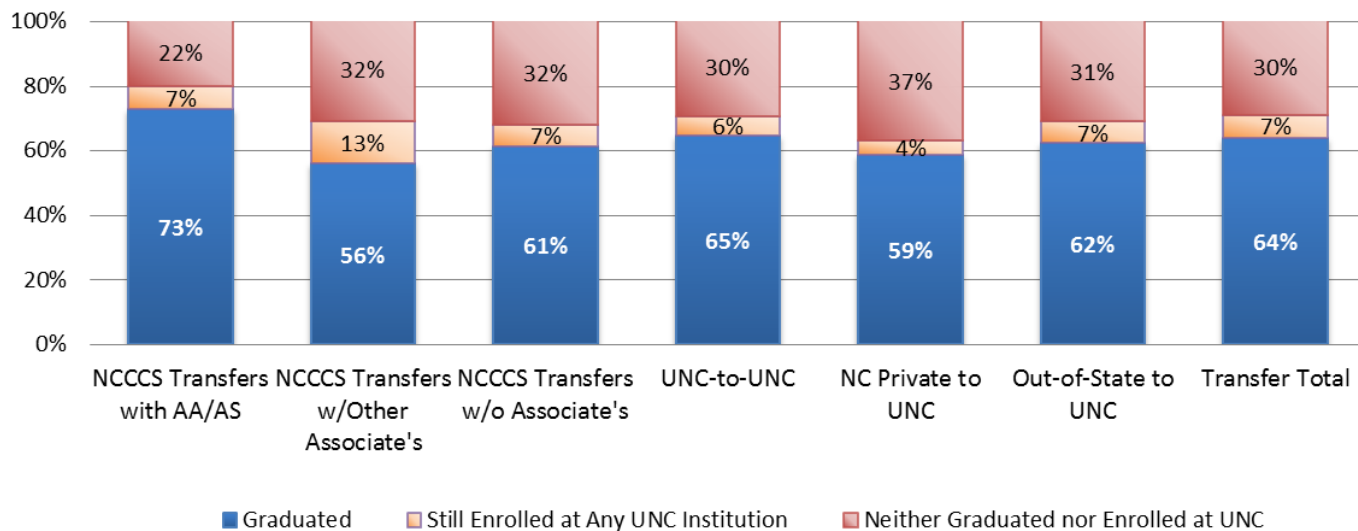


## Transfer Student Persistence Rates

Some transfer students from the 2007 cohort are still enrolled at UNC institutions. Graph 5 illustrates that on average an additional 7% of transfer

students remain enrolled and are taking more time to graduate.

**Graph 5. Four-Year Graduation and Progress Rates of Transfer Students Who First Enrolled at the Junior Level or Above, 2007 Cohort**



Source: CCD.PR006B

### HIGHLIGHTS:

- Transfer students have lower four-year graduation rates than UNC native juniors.
- Transfer students who have completed an AA/AS degree have higher graduation and persistence rates than those who do not have an AA/AS degree.

## Common Majors of Transfer Students

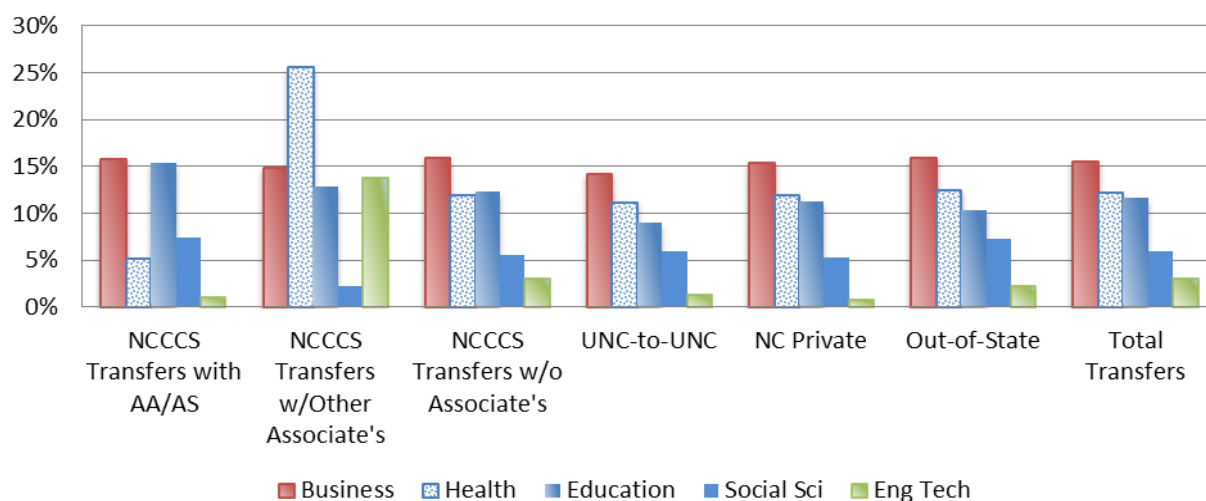
Research suggests that declaring a major early increases likelihood of timely graduation (Moore, Shulock & Sacramento, 2011). Although this is only one factor among many, it seems to be also true for the transfer students who enroll at a UNC institution. Among transfers in the 2005-2007 cohorts entering at the junior level or above, 74% declared a major and 26% did not declare a major. Those who declared a major upon entry had a 65% four-year graduation rate, while those who did not declare a major had a 58% four-year graduation rate.

Regardless of class level, 70% of the transfers in the 2009-2011 cohorts declared a major upon entry, which is a 4% increase when compared to the 2005-2007 cohorts for which we have graduation rate data. The predominant programs of study for transfers in the 2009-2011 cohorts who declared a

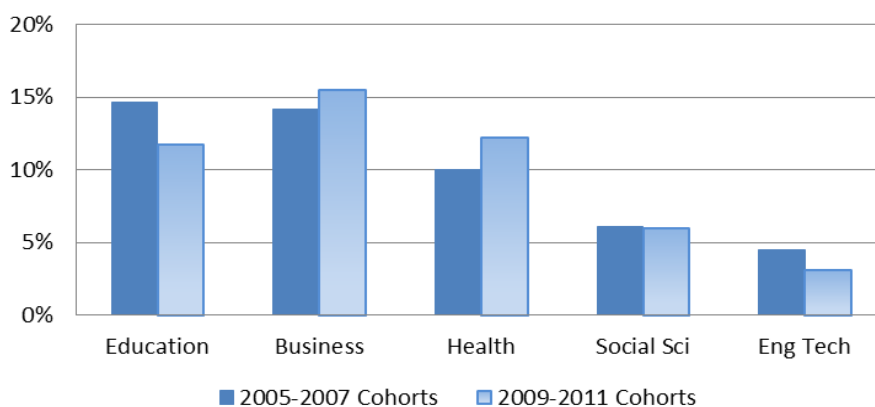
major were Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services (16%), Health Professions (12%), and Education (12%). Although the exact ranking varies, these programs are the top three majors for students transferring from almost all institutional types (Graph 6).

Student interests have shifted slightly over the past several years – away from Education and towards Business and Health related fields. Education remains among the top three declared majors but has seen a 3 point decline when compared to the most recent cohorts (Graph 7). These shifts are likely the result of economic conditions, which may suggest that students migrate to those disciplines seen as having the best employment rates and salaries.

**Graph 6. Top Declared Majors by UNC Transfer Students  
2009 Cohort - 2011 Cohort**



**Graph 7. Top Declared Majors by UNC Transfer Students  
2005-2007 Cohorts compared to 2009-2011 Cohorts**



## *Changing Majors*

Changing majors tends to delay graduation. For all transfer students in the 2005-2007 cohorts, 14% changed majors at least once by fall 2011. Those disciplines with the highest attrition rates were Natural Resources and Conservation, Mathematics and Statistics, and Physical Sciences, 28%, 24%, and 21% respectively. Similar results were found for NCCCS transfer students with an AA/AS degree. For the 2005-2007 cohorts, 17% of NCCCS transfers with an AA/AS degree changed majors at least once by fall 2011. Those disciplines with the highest attrition rates were Mathematics and Statistics, Family and Consumer Sciences/Human Sciences, and Physical Sciences, 33%, 32% and 27% respectively.

In sum, intended majors are widely distributed among transfer students; and, like students who begin their careers at UNC, many will change majors at least once after matriculating at one of our institutions. While we will continue to collaborate with NCCCS on efforts to better define transfer pathways for students interested in particular areas of study, two things are clear: (1) to be useful, transfer pathways will have to span multiple majors; and (2) these pathways alone will not be sufficient to ensure degree completion for the large numbers of transfer students who change majors or for whom the pathways do not apply.

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

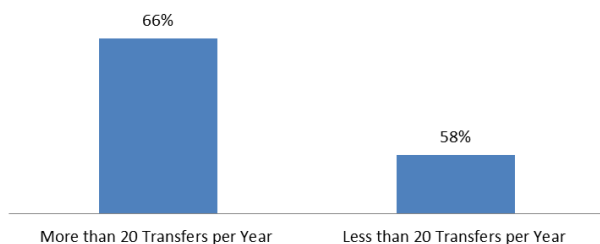
- Transfer students who enter junior level or above and declare a major have higher four-year graduation rates.
- About 30% of all transfer students enter without a declared major, and these students have a lower graduation rate than those transfer students who do declare a major.
- With the highest declared field of study at only 16% (Business), transfer pathways will need to span multiple majors.
- Of those students that declared a major in the 2005-2007 cohorts, 14% changed majors at least once. The highest attrition is in science-related fields.

## Partnerships

UNC transfer students from the 2005-2007 cohorts that enrolled at the junior level or above transferred credits from 1,370 distinct institutions. UNC data suggest that institutions transferring 20 or more students per year tend to have, on average, higher graduation rates.

Of the 1,370 distinct institutions only 56, or 4%, send on average 20 or more students to UNC institutions per year. Though these schools represent only 4% of all institutions, they comprise 69% of the total number of students transferring in the 2005-2007 cohorts. Further, these students have higher graduation rates, 66%, compared to 58% for those campuses that send less than 20 students on average per year (Graph 8).

Graph 8. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Sending Institutions Cohort Size for Transfer students Who First Enrolled at the Junior Level or Above, 2005 Cohort - 2007 Cohort



Though this is just one of many factors that may influence student success, it might suggest that institutions with higher volumes of transfer students focus on creating pathways through partnerships or

creating student services and programs to assist students in meeting their educational goals.

For example, for students entering at the junior level or above in the 2005-2007 cohorts, Cape Fear Community College transferred more students to UNC campuses than any other, an average of 249 students per year. Most of those students (an average of 203 per year) transferred to the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW). In contrast to UNCW's overall transfer student graduation rate of 72%, Cape Fear Community College's transfer students graduated from UNCW at a rate of 75%. As of 2007, UNCW had only two institutions that transfer more than 20 students on average per year, Cape Fear Community College and Coastal Carolina Community College. These two campuses represent 46% of the total number of transfer students who arrived at UNCW during 2005-2007 and were classified at the junior level or above. The average graduation rate for these two campuses is 74%; the graduation rate for the remaining 54% of transfers, who matriculated from 352 other institutions, was three points lower, at 71%.

As UNC looks to better understand the policies and programs in place that best facilitate transfer student success, partnerships may provide an area on which to focus.

### HIGHLIGHTS:

- UNC received transfer students from 1,370 distinct institutions in the 2005-2007 cohorts.
- Four percent (4%) of the sending institutions comprise 69% of the total number of students transferring to UNC.
- Partnerships between UNC campuses and sending institutions may increase graduation rates of transfer students.

## *Summary*

- Transfer students are an important and growing segment of UNC's undergraduate student body.
- Students from North Carolina community colleges make up the majority of UNC's transfer students. Updating and refining the articulation agreement between UNC and NCCCS is an important initiative.
- Transfer students graduate at much lower rates than UNC native juniors and those that do not declare a major have even lower graduation rates.
- Data suggests that furthering bilateral arrangements and improving partnerships between individual campuses may improve graduation rates.

## *Areas of Further Research*

- UNC is committed to the success of all students and will continue to search for ways to improve the retention and graduation rates of transfer students. Our future research agenda may include:
  - Compare attempted hours of transfer students to non-transfer students to determine if transfer students are taking excessive credits thereby prolonging their time to degree.
  - Analyze course sequencing at the community college to determine if specific sequencing leads to higher graduation rates when students transfer to UNC.
  - Collect and analyze data regarding "reverse" transfers, or UNC students that transfer to NCCCS.
  - Understand feeder patterns and graduation rates among the UNC institutions.