

## Bridge to Success: Developing Library Services for Transfer Students

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Appalachian State University (ASU) is a public, comprehensive, Master's level institution located in rural North Carolina, with a 2016-17-student enrollment of 18,295 (Appalachian State University Fast Facts). Reflecting national trends, ASU has experienced growth in transfer student enrollment over the past decade. Between 2006 and 2016, transfer enrollment increased from 768 to 1596 students and this figure is expected to increase. The majority enroll as sophomores and come to the University from community colleges (Fall 2016 Transfer Student Talking Points). The impact of this transfer student enrollment is important for several reasons. At ASU, 33.2% of the 2015-16 graduation class began as transfers (Fall 2016 Transfer Student Talking Points). Nationwide, 49% of students who graduated from four-year institutions in 2015-16 had been enrolled at a two-year institution during the previous ten years. About half of these students earned their bachelor's degree within three years of enrollment at a two-year institution (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center Snapshot Report, Spring 2017). In addition, the success of transfer students impacts other measures of institutional accountability such as retention, time to degree completion, grade point average (GPA), and job placement (Bailey, 2006).

The University libraries at ASU are recognized as contributing to the success of our transfer student population. Our library outreach to this group of students began with a realization that we needed to learn more about this increasing population, understand their needs, and collaborate with other units serving them. This awareness did not occur quickly and is still being developed. We are beginning to see that partnerships with campus units are having an impact on our work with this important population.

### Factors That Contribute To Transfer Student Success

There are a number of factors influencing transfer student success at receiving four-year institutions. Among these are GPA upon transfer (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Luo, Williams, & Vieweg, 2007; Zhai & Newcomb, 2000), the desire to attain a higher degree (Wang, 2009; Zhai & Newcomb, 2000), the number of credit hours that transfer (Luo, et al., 2007), and transfer preparedness in the form of counseling, advice from faculty and staff, and an understanding of the academic requirements for upper level college courses (Berger & Malaney, 2003). However, none of these factors ensures a seamless adjustment to a four-year environment. Transfer students need to feel that they fit at their new college or university. They must integrate into the academic life of the institution, establish positive relationships with

faculty members, and find a place in collegiate social activities to ensure success at their new school (Wang & Wharton, 2010). Their level of social and academic integration into a four-year environment plays a major role in their persistence (D'Amico, Dika, Elling, Algozzine, & Ginn, 2014; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986). Receiving institutions can facilitate the transfer process through well-crafted articulation agreements and academic advising. However, other institutional initiatives must be provided to enhance the success of these students (Miller, 2013).

Tinto and Pusser (2006) have studied the institutional initiatives that affect native student persistence and result in degree completion. Their research indicates that student retention, and ultimately graduation rates, are influenced by five factors. These include a commitment to student success on the part of the four-year institution; evidence of academic, social, and financial support for students; and the provision of programs that facilitated academic and social involvement in classes and campus activities. In addition, institutions that help students understand institutional expectations and that provide frequent feedback on academic performance tend to retain higher numbers of students. Finally, these researchers have noted that coordinated, integrated efforts developed across college units had the greatest impact on student success.

This study, and similar research, has helped administrators at four-year institutions understand the importance of designing transition programs with community colleges that facilitate the transfer admissions process. In addition, work has begun across admissions, student affairs, transfer center offices, academic departments, and other campus units to create resources that support and contribute to the retention of transfer students (Archambault, 2016). One unit that has become involved in fostering transfer student success at ASU is the academic library.

### Library Support of Transfer Students

Research indicates that the use of library services and resources (Murray, Ireland, & Hackathorn, 2016; Soria, Fransen, & Nackerud, 2013; Stemmer & Mahan, 2016), student perceptions of the library as a safe, welcoming place, and the perceived friendliness of librarians has a direct impact on native student success (Grallo, Chalmers, & Baker, 2012; Zhong & Alexander, 2007). It is our belief that transfer students also benefit from library use and interactions with librarians. Moreover, information literacy instruction contributes to student persistence and helps to insure academic success (ACRL, 2016; Bowles-Terry, 2012; Wong & Cmor, 2011).

Staines' (1996) research shows that there are differences in the ways community college and four-year librarians teach information literacy skills. There is often no formalization of information literacy instruction across two and four-year institutions. Nor is there systematic communication between the librarians at these schools. Consequently, librarians at four-year institutions are unaware of the information literacy skills that transfer students have acquired or of instructional gaps that need to be filled. They may assume that transfer students have received some level of information literacy instruction, but this is not always true. Unfortunately, some transfer students have not received instruction that prepares them for upper level research and may not possess the ability to apply information literacy skills to their assignments (Phillips & Atwood, 2010). This can have an impact on their retention and success.

Many university libraries offer formal information literacy programs within the first year that contribute to student retention. At ASU we offer a formal program of introductory information literacy instruction targeting students enrolled in their first year seminar requirement and also their first year writing courses. However, these programs may not offer the same level of instruction to their transfer population (Heinbach, 2016). At ASU we have found this to be the case. In 2014, librarians hosted a one-day workshop, "Information Literacy for Transfer Students," and invited librarians from ASU's top feeder schools, which included both community colleges and selected North Carolina four-year institutions. The workshop's goal was to share information about teaching information literacy skills to first and second year students. This experience helped ASU librarians create relationships with librarians at institutions where our transfer students begin their education, share approaches and strategies for teaching information literacy at our institution, and consider the idea of working together to develop transfer students' information literacy skills as they move between institutions.

Although the ASU library does not offer a formal instruction program for transfers, these students often receive intermediate information literacy instruction in second level required General Education courses. Depending on their major, transfers may receive advanced information literacy instruction in a required Senior Seminar Capstone course. In spite of these opportunities, librarians are concerned that transfer students may not have the basic skills to research effectively or understand the advantage of working with librarians.

Our librarians recognize that informal opportunities for instruction are also important to address the needs of our transfer population. Switzer (2008) has noted that one-on-one research consultations are helpful to transfer students. We have found this to be the case at ASU and offer individualized research assistance to transfer students at their point of need. This service is promoted in our instruction sessions, on our website, and in our LibGuides.

In addition to working within the University curriculum, librarians network with the Office of Advising and Orientation, participate regularly in transfer orientation events, and serve as Faculty Transfer Mentors. We have designed a LibGuide specifically for transfer students and market it as part of our regular interactions through the Office of Transfer Services. Finally, librarians support and participate in social events and services within the library and across campus to promote interaction among transfer students.

### **Strategies for Library/Campus Unit Collaboration**

Our experience working with transfers has shown us that they want services and resources tailored to their needs. In order to achieve this it is useful to collaborate across campus units that have information about these students. This collaboration helps librarians create a meaningful program of services. It also provides opportunities to explain the correlation between library use and student success to student services personnel and administrators. Our efforts to develop campus partnerships have been effective at ASU. These relationships were developed using the approach outlined below. We understand the need to take campus culture into account when establishing realistic goals and achievable outcomes for any initiatives that may be undertaken.

#### ***Educate Yourself About the Characteristics and Needs of Your Transfer Student Population***

Understanding the characteristics of your transfer student population is necessary in order to assess their need for library support. Examining data published by your Office of Institutional Research and reading journal articles that discuss transfer students will help to identify the characteristics of this population. In addition, talking to staff and faculty who work with these students on your campus and librarians at your institution's feeder schools will clarify what you glean from the literature.

#### ***Work within the Library***

Gaining support for new initiatives among library administrators and colleagues is critical. Share what you have learned about your transfer population. You may find that other librarians have interesting perspectives on service provision and information literacy instruction. Brainstorm ways that you can reach out to your transfer population.

#### ***Develop Relationships with Feeder School Librarians***

Identifying the information literacy skills that librarians at your feeder schools teach is critical. Do they understand the skills students need to succeed in upper level courses at your institution? How do their information literacy programs feed into or compliment yours? Communicate with these librarians to learn more about their instructional programs and use that information to enhance your instruction for transfers.

**Create Transfer Specific Library Resources such as LibGuides and Brochures, and Use Social Media**

Communicating directly with your transfer students as a specialized population is important. Our work with transfers indicates they respond better to targeted communication about resources and services that recognize their role as a non-traditional population. Using focused LibGuides (see Figure 1), brochures and social media outlets can assist librarians in engaging this population.

**Liaise with Campus Units Serving Transfer Students**

Establishing relationships with personnel in campus units that serve transfer students is a first step in identifying common goals. Personnel in these units are invested in transfer student success and will appreciate your interest and perspective. Building these relationships may lead to opportunities to participate in orientations, library instruction sessions, workshops, mentoring programs, and social events.

**Market Your Information Literacy Program to Campus Units**

Communicating with faculty about ways that your information literacy program can enhance their course assignments and their students’ success is a vital contribution that librarians can make. Talk about the instructional needs of

transfer students in their classes. Offer to create LibGuides, help develop assignments, and meet individually with students needing research assistance.

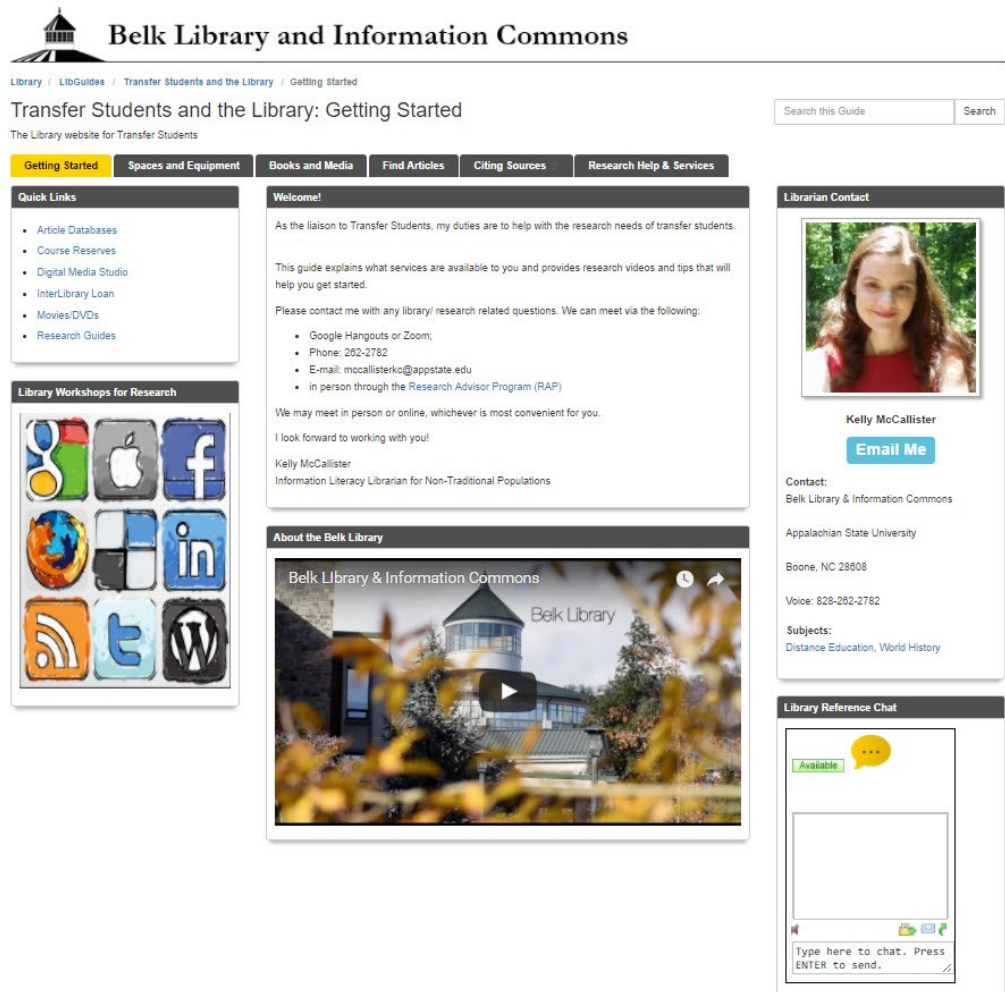
**Conclusion**

Librarians at ASU offer services designed for our transfer population because we believe that library use and information literacy instruction contribute to student persistence and success. An important part of our work is our collaborative teaching of information literacy skills with faculty in writing-intensive courses, learning communities, and capstone courses, and our program of individualized research assistance for transfer students. Librarians also serve as mentors and sponsor social events that promote interaction among transfer students. We work actively with our Office of Transfer Services to market our services and resources to this population, to solicit feedback on the need for new services, and to conduct research on library services for transfer students.

The fact that ASU librarians hold faculty status contributes to our success. We engage in faculty governance and serve on university-wide committees. Participation in these

*(Bridge to Success...continued on page 15)*

**Figure 1: LibGuide – Transfer Students and the Library**



(Bridge to Success...continued from page 12)

venues allows us to discuss the importance of information literacy instruction and library use. In addition, we have found that the relationships developed through committee work and faculty governance activities result in invitations to participate in workshops and conferences that typically do not involve librarians.

We recognize that we have more work to do to develop a comprehensive information literacy program for our transfer students, and know that we must evaluate our service provision to this population on a regular basis. We would like to make our outreach to transfer students intentional, deliberate, and purposeful. Our relationships and collaborative efforts across campus will help us to do this and will enhance our outreach to this important population.

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(Bridge to Success...continued on page 16)

*(Bridge to Success...continued from page 15)*

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## APPENDIX

### Developed Questions:

The questions below are the original questions developed by the group. Each Librarian adapted and edited the questions to fit their own teaching style.

#### Using this source: What is it about?

1. The answers to the following questions will help you determine whether this source could be used for your research paper/project.
  - a. What is this source about?
  - b. Is this source relevant for your research paper/project? Why or why not?
  - c. What aspects of this source apply to your topic (You can be broad here)?
2. Where is this source “published?”
  - a. Is it published in a magazine, an online magazine, a blog, a journal or somewhere else?
  - b. Investigate this “publication.” What is its mission or purpose? What are the titles of other articles/posts in this “publication?” What is this “publication” about?
3. Who has written this source?
  - a. Google the author(s). What did you learn about them?
  - b. From what you found, can you say that this person has a professional background on this topic? Why or why not?
  - c. From what you found, does this person have an official responsibility that is relevant to this topic? How do you know that they have this responsibility?
  - d. From what you found, did this person learn about this topic in some other way? How did they learn about it?