NOTETAKER REPORT
Strengthening Transfer Student Success Through Guided Pathways and Institutional Partnerships
Presenter: Bill Brown
Title: Coordinator for Direct Transfer Tracks and Transfer Advising Initiatives
Institution: University of South Carolina (USC)
Session Type: Conference Presentation and Discussion
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Topic: Direct Transfer Tracks, Transfer Advising, Institutional Partnerships, and Student Success
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1. Session Overview
Bill Brown, Coordinator for Direct Transfer Tracks and Transfer Advising Initiatives at the University of South Carolina, presented strategies for improving transfer student success through structured academic pathways, intentional advising, and collaboration between two-year and four-year institutions.
The presentation focused on USC's partnerships with the South Carolina Technical College System, particularly Midlands Technical College and Greenville Technical College.
Brown emphasized the importance of returning to the fundamentals of transfer advising by addressing students' primary concerns about credit transferability, time to graduation, educational costs, and access to academic support.
The session highlighted USC's development of direct transfer tracks and transfer guides, which provide students with clearly defined academic plans to support successful transitions from technical colleges to the university.
Central Message: Effective transfer pathways require more than course equivalencies. They require intentional planning, consistent communication, institutional collaboration, and a commitment to student success.

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2. Key Discussion Points
A. Understanding Transfer Student Concerns
The presenter identified several questions that students commonly face when considering transferring between institutions:

- How will my credits transfer?
- How long will it take to graduate?
- How much will my education cost?
- Who will help me navigate the transfer process?

Brown explained that students may transfer through several pathways, including vertical transfer, lateral transfer, reverse transfer, and transfers within the USC system.
Although transfer students have previous college experience, they may not understand the policies, academic requirements, and resources available at their receiving institution.
To address these challenges, USC provides transfer equivalency information, structured academic plans, and direct access to transfer advising support.
Key Takeaway: Transfer students benefit from clear information and individualized guidance before and after transitioning to a four-year institution.
B. Direct Transfer Tracks and Transfer Guides
One of the major initiatives discussed was USC's development of direct transfer tracks and transfer guides. These resources are designed to help students understand which courses to complete at their technical college and how those courses will apply toward a bachelor's degree at USC.
The presenter explained the distinction between the two resources.
Direct Transfer Tracks
Direct transfer tracks are formal agreements between USC and partnering technical colleges.
Often described as "2+2" pathways, these agreements provide students with a semester-by-semester academic plan.

Students generally complete approximately two years of coursework at a technical college before transferring to USC to complete their bachelor's degree.
These tracks identify:

- Required courses at the technical college.
- Corresponding USC course equivalencies.
- Minimum grade requirements.
- Credit hours.
- Course sequencing.
- Major requirements.
- Recommended transfer timing.

Students participating in designated tracks may also receive catalog-year protections based on when they entered the transfer pathway.
However, participation in a direct transfer track does not guarantee admission to USC. Students must still satisfy university admission requirements.

Transfer Guides

Transfer guides are academic planning resources rather than formal transfer agreements.
Often described as "1+3" pathways, these guides generally recommend the first 30 transferable credit hours that students can complete at a technical college before transitioning to USC.
The guides help students begin their education at a technical college while maintaining progress toward their intended bachelor's degree.
Key Takeaway: Direct transfer tracks and guides provide students with a clear academic roadmap, reducing uncertainty and improving course selection.

C. Expansion of Transfer Pathways

USC has significantly expanded its direct transfer pathway offerings since 2021.
The presenter shared the following growth:

Year	Number of Direct Transfer Tracks
2021	12
2022	12
2023	22
2024	26
2025	33
Planned Expansion	35

The university also maintains approximately 19 additional transfer guides.
The presenter reported approximately 53 total tracks and guides across its statewide partnerships, with additional pathways under development.
Each pathway requires annual review to ensure alignment with current academic requirements and institutional policies.
Brown emphasized that pathway development is intentional and based on factors such as student demand, academic program requirements, available resources, and workforce needs.
Key Takeaway: Expanding transfer pathways creates more opportunities for students, but institutions must commit resources to maintaining accurate and relevant academic plans.

D. Institutional Partnerships

USC maintains formal transfer partnerships with Midlands Technical College, Greenville Technical College, and the broader South Carolina Technical College System.
Brown emphasized that strong relationships between institutions are essential for successful transfer initiatives.

Partnership Practices Include:

1. Monthly meetings between USC and technical college representatives.
2. Regular communication among academic advisors and curriculum teams.
3. Annual reviews of transfer tracks and guides.

4. Faculty involvement in evaluating course alignment.
5. Joint problem-solving when curriculum requirements change.
6. Sharing transfer resources and academic planning information.

The presenter noted that USC and Midlands Technical College have an agreement supporting an annual summit involving faculty, advisors, and institutional representatives.
These summits provide opportunities to discuss challenges, evaluate existing pathways, and identify improvements.
Representatives from Midlands Technical College and Greenville Technical College also shared positive experiences with the partnerships.
They emphasized the importance of having a designated USC contact who can provide timely answers to transfer-related questions.
Key Takeaway: Consistent communication and established institutional relationships help advisors provide accurate information and resolve transfer issues efficiently.

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3. Student Success and Graduation Outcomes
A significant portion of the presentation focused on graduation outcomes associated with USC's direct transfer tracks.
Brown shared data indicating that students participating in structured transfer pathways experienced improved degree completion outcomes.
A. Mechanical Engineering
Before the implementation of direct transfer pathways, the reported graduation rate for mechanical engineering transfer students from Midlands Technical College was approximately **12.5%**.
Following implementation, the reported graduation rate increased to **67%** for students participating in the direct transfer track.
This represented a substantial improvement in degree completion outcomes.
B. Biological Sciences
The presenter reported that the completion rate for biological sciences transfer students increased from approximately **9% to 45%**.
The improvement was associated with the development and implementation of structured transfer pathways.
C. Criminal Justice
For the 2023 Midlands Technical College transfer cohort, approximately **62.5%** of criminal justice students graduated within two years of transferring to USC.
D. Overall Transfer Track Outcomes
The presenter reported that several Midlands Technical College transfer cohorts demonstrated two-year graduation rates of 50% or higher.
Some subsequent cohorts experienced rates exceeding 60%.
These outcomes were presented as evidence of the potential effectiveness of clearly structured transfer pathways.
Key Takeaway: Guided academic pathways were associated with substantial improvements in graduation outcomes for several transfer student populations.
Important Note: The presentation reported these outcomes but did not provide detailed information about sample sizes, comparison methods, or other factors that may have influenced graduation rates.

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4. Transfer Student Enrollment Trends
The presenter also discussed transfer application, admission, and enrollment trends for students coming from South Carolina technical colleges.
Fall 2023

- 834 students applied to USC.
- 586 students were admitted.
- 405 students enrolled.

Fall 2024
The presenter reported an increase in applications and admissions compared with Fall 2023.

Approximately 750 students were admitted, with enrollment increasing slightly.

Fall 2025

- Application numbers remained relatively consistent with Fall 2024.
- 677 students were admitted.
- 484 students enrolled.

Although admissions decreased compared with Fall 2024, the number of enrolled transfer students increased.

Key Takeaway: USC continues to attract students from South Carolina technical colleges, and transfer enrollment remains an important component of the university's student success initiatives.

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5. Reverse Transfer Opportunities

Reverse transfer was another important topic discussed during the session.

Brown explained that USC has incorporated reverse transfer information into its transfer guides to help students understand how university coursework may apply toward completing an associate degree at their former technical college.

For example, a student who transfers before completing an associate degree may be able to apply eligible USC credits toward remaining technical college requirements.

The presenter described reverse transfer as beneficial for students and both institutions.

Benefits for Students:

- Opportunity to earn an associate degree while pursuing a bachelor's degree.
- Recognition of previously completed coursework.
- Potential employment opportunities associated with earning an additional credential.
- Continued academic progress toward a bachelor's degree.

Benefits for Technical Colleges:

- Increased associate degree completion opportunities.
- Recognition of students who complete remaining requirements after transferring.

Benefits for USC:

- Continued progress toward bachelor's degree completion.
- Stronger partnerships with sending institutions.
- Additional opportunities to support student success.

Brown described reverse transfer as a "win-win-win" opportunity for students, technical colleges, and USC.

Key Takeaway: Reverse transfer allows institutions to collaborate in recognizing student achievement while supporting continued educational advancement.

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6. Transfer Student Advocacy Committee

The presentation highlighted USC's Transfer Student Advocacy Committee (TSAC).

The committee includes representatives from approximately **18 campus offices** and focuses on improving the overall transfer student experience.

The committee addresses both academic and student life concerns.

Participating offices include representatives from areas such as:

- Academic advising
- Admissions
- Financial aid
- Career services
- Student Success Center
- Carolina Experience
- Other student-facing university departments

Student government representatives have also participated in discussions to provide student perspectives.

Committee Initiatives

One notable accomplishment involved improving the application of transfer credits toward USC's Carolina Core general education requirements.

The committee helped identify opportunities to recognize eligible transfer coursework without requiring students to complete additional petitions.
This process reduces administrative barriers and saves students time.

Ongoing Challenges

The committee has also explored transfer student scholarship opportunities.
However, funding limitations have made progress difficult.
Brown emphasized that financial support for transfer students remains an area of interest and continued advocacy.

Key Takeaway: Supporting transfer students requires coordinated efforts across academic and nonacademic departments.

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7. Audience Questions and Discussion

Question 1: How does USC determine which academic programs receive direct transfer tracks?

Response:

USC considers student demand, workforce needs, program requirements, and available institutional resources.
The presenter explained that programs with very few transfer students may not justify the resources required to create and maintain a formal pathway.
Teacher preparation was identified as one area receiving attention because of South Carolina's workforce needs.

Question 2: How are transfer pathways reviewed and approved?

Response:

Transfer tracks and guides undergo several levels of review.
Academic advisors examine the proposed pathway first, followed by academic department leadership.
The materials are then reviewed by the partnering technical college.
After approval, the pathway is published on USC's transfer website.

Question 3: What campus offices participate in transfer student support?

Response:

The Transfer Student Advocacy Committee includes approximately 18 offices.
The committee addresses academic concerns, student engagement, financial aid, career development, and other aspects of the transfer student experience.

Question 4: How does USC track students participating in direct transfer tracks?

Response:

The presenter acknowledged that student tracking remains challenging.
Currently, USC relies heavily on student self-identification and information shared by partnering technical colleges.
Midlands Technical College provides information identifying students participating in designated transfer tracks.
However, the university does not yet have a fully integrated system for tracking every participating student.

Question 5: How are catalog-year protections handled for transfer students?

Response:

Students entering USC are initially admitted under the current university catalog.
However, advisors work to honor the requirements established when students began their approved direct transfer track.
Course substitutions or exceptions may be used when necessary to prevent students from being required to complete additional coursework because of curriculum changes.

Question 6: Can students with credits from multiple institutions participate in direct transfer tracks?

Response:

The presenter indicated that participation may be possible if the transferred courses satisfy the requirements of the designated pathway.
Students must still meet USC's admission requirements.

Question 7: Are transfer pathways particularly beneficial for students transitioning directly from high school?

Response:
The presenter noted that some students benefit from attending a smaller technical college before transferring to a larger university.
This transition may help students adjust academically and socially before entering USC.
Question 8: What percentage of transfer students were previously denied freshman admission to USC?
Response:
The presenter did not have this information available and indicated that the data would need to be obtained from the admissions office.
Question 9: How significant is reverse transfer to USC's overall transfer strategy?
Response:
Reverse transfer is incorporated into transfer advising resources and is promoted as an opportunity for students to earn an additional credential.
However, the presenter did not provide specific participation or completion figures.
Question 10: Does USC track reverse transfer completion trends?
Response:
The presenter stated that detailed reverse transfer tracking information was not readily available.
Additional data collection would be necessary to evaluate long-term participation and outcomes.

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8. Challenges Identified
Several challenges affecting transfer student success were discussed throughout the session.
A. Maintaining Transfer Pathways
As the number of transfer tracks and guides increases, institutions must devote additional time to reviewing curriculum changes and updating academic plans.
B. Curriculum Alignment
Differences in course requirements, particularly mathematics and language requirements, can create barriers when developing transfer pathways.
C. Student Tracking and Data Sharing
Limited systems for identifying students participating in transfer tracks make it difficult to measure participation and outcomes consistently.
D. Communication Across Institutions
Students may receive incomplete or inconsistent information when advisors are unfamiliar with another institution's policies and degree requirements.
E. Financial Support
Transfer student scholarships and financial assistance remain areas requiring additional attention.
F. Student Awareness
Students may not fully understand the transfer resources available to them or the benefits of participating in structured academic pathways.
Key Takeaway: Institutions must address both academic and administrative barriers to create effective transfer experiences.

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9. Best Practices Highlighted
The presentation identified several practices that institutions may consider when strengthening transfer student support.
1. Develop Guided Academic Pathways
Provide students with clear semester-by-semester plans showing required courses, transfer equivalencies, and degree requirements.
2. Establish Regular Institutional Communication
Schedule consistent meetings between two-year and four-year partners to discuss student needs and curriculum alignment.
3. Engage Faculty and Advisors
Include academic advisors and faculty in pathway development, review, and approval.
4. Maintain Updated Transfer Resources
Review transfer guides annually to ensure that students receive accurate information.

5. Promote Reverse Transfer
Help students understand opportunities to complete associate degrees after transferring to four-year institutions.
6. Strengthen Cross-Campus Collaboration
Involve academic and student support offices in improving the transfer experience.
7. Use Student Success Data
Evaluate graduation outcomes and student progression to determine the effectiveness of transfer pathways.
8. Provide Professional Development
Train advisors and faculty on available transfer tools and resources to improve communication with students.

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10. Next Steps and Recommendations
Based on the initiatives and priorities discussed, the following next steps were identified.

Priority Area	Recommended Action
Transfer Pathway Expansion	Continue developing direct transfer tracks in high-demand academic programs.
Curriculum Alignment	Conduct annual reviews of course equivalencies and degree requirements.
Institutional Partnerships	Maintain monthly meetings and annual partnership summits.
Student Tracking	Explore improved systems for identifying and monitoring students participating in transfer pathways.
Reverse Transfer	Increase awareness and examine opportunities to collect participation and completion data.
Student Engagement	Strengthen connections between transfer students and university support offices.
Financial Support	Continue advocating for transfer student scholarship opportunities.
Advisor Training	Expand professional development on transfer resources and academic planning tools.
Outcome Assessment	Continue monitoring graduation rates and evaluating pathway effectiveness.

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11. Implications for South Carolina Higher Education
The initiatives presented demonstrate how structured transfer pathways and intentional institutional partnerships can support student success across South Carolina.
Technical colleges and four-year universities may benefit from establishing clearer transfer agreements, coordinating academic advising, and regularly reviewing curriculum requirements.
The reported improvements in graduation outcomes suggest that guided pathways can play an important role in helping transfer students complete bachelor's degrees.
Additionally, USC's emphasis on reverse transfer and cross-campus collaboration highlights the importance of supporting students throughout their educational journeys rather than focusing solely on admission and enrollment.
Institutions should also consider developing more effective methods for tracking transfer student participation and evaluating the long-term impact of transfer initiatives.

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12. Overall Session Summary
Bill Brown's presentation highlighted the University of South Carolina's efforts to strengthen transfer student success through direct transfer tracks, academic planning guides, institutional partnerships, and coordinated student support.
USC's expansion from 12 direct transfer tracks in 2021 to 33 in 2025 demonstrates a continued investment in improving transfer pathways.
The presentation also reported substantial improvements in graduation outcomes for selected academic programs, including mechanical engineering, biological sciences, and criminal justice.

Partnerships with Midlands Technical College and Greenville Technical College were emphasized as essential components of these initiatives.
While challenges remain in student tracking, financial support, and curriculum alignment, the university continues to refine its approach through regular communication, annual reviews, and collaboration across campus departments.
The session reinforced the importance of creating transfer systems that are transparent, student-centered, and focused on successful degree completion.

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13. Final Takeaway
Successful transfer pathways are built through intentional academic planning, strong institutional partnerships, and consistent student support.
The University of South Carolina's direct transfer tracks and guides demonstrate how clear academic roadmaps can help students make informed course selections, reduce unnecessary coursework, and improve their opportunities for timely graduation.
The presentation emphasized that the ultimate measure of transfer initiatives is not the number of agreements developed but the success of the students who use them.
Closing Message: Institutions should continuously evaluate their transfer practices, strengthen communication, and prioritize student outcomes when developing and maintaining academic pathways.

Notetaker's Note: This report was developed from the provided session transcript. Some numerical figures and terminology may contain transcription inconsistencies. Reported statistics should be verified against the presenter's official slides or institution