

Transferring Colleges: 10 Frequently Asked Questions



How Do I Know Whether to Transfer Colleges?

There are plenty of legitimate reasons to transfer if you realize a [college](#) simply doesn't meet your academic or social needs, says Mimi Doe, co-founder of Top Tier Admissions, a Massachusetts-based advising firm.

For some students, they figure out they want to be in a different geographic setting, such as an urban rather than rural campus, Doe says. Others want to further their education after community college.

Transferring may be a good option if your current college doesn't satisfy your career goals, says Dan Lee, co-founder of Solomon Admissions Consulting in New York. For instance, "If you want to be an investment banker and work on Wall Street and go into finance, there are certain schools that are target schools for investment banks," he says.

But don't transfer out for the wrong reasons, Doe says. If your motivation for transferring is because you're homesick, frustrated by a long-distance relationship or just trying to [get admitted to an Ivy League school](#), really consider whether making the change is necessary.

[Read: [A Checklist for New Transfer Students](#).]

What Are the First Steps I Should Take to Transfer?

"Educate yourself," Doe says. Look into admissions statistics at other universities, review your [high school](#) and college transcripts, and create a list of schools that seem like a match. Experts also recommend exploring ways to improve your application, such as by joining clubs or building strong relationships with professors who can write a solid [letter of recommendation](#).

Doe suggests that prospective transfers create a spreadsheet of schools with information, such as when students can transfer in – some schools may only allow you to start in the fall, for example – and whether you need a required minimum number of credits. Consult the application requirements, which are typically listed on the school's website.

When Should I Transfer?

That depends on a number of factors, says Gordon Chavis, associate vice president for enrollment services at the [University of Central Florida](#). And those can be different for each student.

If you transfer during your first year, your high school transcript may hold more weight, experts say. At UCF, Chavis says, admissions officers are more likely to look at your high school transcripts and related materials if you enter with fewer than 60 credits. Prospective transfer students should consider whether their high school grades may help or hurt their odds of admission.

While most students enter college in the fall, some schools also open their doors to enrollees in the spring semester. Juan P. Espinoza, associate vice provost for enrollment management and director of undergraduate admissions at [Virginia Tech](#), says the school launched spring enrollment this year as a result of feedback from community college students. Espinoza says that some were wrapping up their associates degree during the winter, making spring admissions "a perfect situation for a lot of those students to ensure that they'll be able to continue their academic journey without having to delay graduation."

While he says spring admissions criteria may vary by institution, Virginia Tech has the same standards as the fall semester.

[See: [Colleges With the Most Transfer Students](#).]

How Selective Are Admissions for Transfer Students?

Some experts say it's often more difficult to get admitted as a transfer applicant. Still, that can vary from school to school, depending on the level of competition and the number of available spaces in the class, says Julie Shimabukuro, director of undergraduate admissions at [Washington University in St. Louis](#). Schools may also reserve spots for transfer students, experts say.

Transferring into highly selective, top-ranked colleges can be particularly difficult, Doe says; they usually have higher freshman retention rates, [as U.S. News data illustrate](#), resulting in fewer openings. [Princeton University](#), for example, accepted 13 transfer students for entry in fall 2018 out of a pool of 1,429 applicants, according to the school's website.

Looking broadly at four-year schools across the U.S., transfer students may have slightly more difficulty getting in. According to a [report](#) from the National Association for College Admission Counseling, the average rate of admission for a transfer applicant is 62 percent. Comparatively, first-time freshman applicants are admitted at a rate of 66 percent.

NACAC reported that the top two factors considered in admissions decisions were grade-point average at other postsecondary institutions and average grades in transferable courses, with less emphasis on high school grades and standardized test scores.

Can I Transfer and Still Graduate in Four Years?

Time to graduation depends on several factors, says Drew Miller, a former admissions counselor at [Liberty University](#) in Virginia who himself was a transfer student.

For example, the answer may be yes if you entered college set on eventually changing schools and took courses for credit that you confirmed would transfer elsewhere. Others start their undergraduate education with no intention of leaving and may have to make up credits at the new school.

The answer may also depend on whether you plan to change majors or need to fulfill certain general education requirements, among other factors.

How Do I Know if All My Credits Will Transfer?

"Students need to make certain they're talking with advisers, so that they have a clear picture about the credits they have taken, and whether those credits will transfer to the new institution," Chavis says. He says that will help students make an informed decision.

Can I Apply to Colleges I Was Previously Rejected From?

In most cases, experts say students can apply to colleges that previously denied them, although Lee says some of the [most selective schools](#) may not review a resubmitted application. If you reapply to any college, focus on how your credentials have improved and find ways to revise your application, perhaps by mentioning new achievements and rewriting your [college essay](#).

Even if you are considering switching schools, work hard during the fall semester of your first year and achieve high grades, Doe says. "You want to have the professors know you," she says, so they can write detailed recommendations.

[Read: [2 Transfer Student Essays That Worked.](#)]

Am I Eligible for Financial Aid as a Transfer Student?

In most cases, transfer students can apply for [financial aid](#), though they will need to submit the necessary information, such as completing the [FAFSA](#), experts say. Lee warns that some institutions are more likely to admit those who don't apply for financial aid, though experts say this varies overall.

Some schools offer [transfer scholarships](#), particularly for community college students. One such example is the [University of Maryland University College](#), which enrolled more than 10,000 new transfer students in fall 2017, per U.S. News data.

Kelly Grooms, UMUC assistant director of admissions and community college alliances, credits high transfer rates to a popular scholarship program, articulation agreements between schools that make the process easier and the ability to transfer in as many as 70 credits from two-year schools and up to 90 credits from four-year colleges. Students seeking financial aid may want to explore similar offerings in their state.

Other resources for community college graduates transferring to four-year schools include scholarship programs from private organizations, such as Pearson and the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation.

Merit aid scholarships may also be available to various types of transfer students, though the amount varies by school. For the 1,107 ranked schools that reported [merit aid](#) data to U.S. News, the average percentage of full-time students in 2017-2018 – looking at the total population, not just transfers – receiving these awards was 14 percent. Some colleges, however, offered funds to more than 40 percent of enrollees.

How Much Does it Cost to Transfer Colleges?

Typically, you only pay an [application fee](#). But Doe says that if you plan to visit campus, you may need to pay for travel.

How Can I Pick the Right School the Second Time Around?

Transfer applicants tend to know more about what type of college they want than freshman applicants, Lee says. If not, he advises focusing on finding a school that will help achieve one's career goals.

"The important thing is to understand why the current institution isn't satisfying their needs," Chavis says, "so that they don't make that mistake again."

One way to find out if a student may be the right fit for a college is to look at the Common Data Set on the school's website. The CDS is a collaboration between publishers and the higher education community that offers a set of data standards and definitions.

Information in the Common Data Set includes admissions criteria and data on transfer applicants in prior years. Using the CDS, students can get an account of what a college requires before they begin the transfer process.

Students may also want to determine how transfer-friendly a college is by reaching out to its admissions office. According to NACAC, 75 percent of colleges designate at least one admissions officer to work exclusively with prospective transfer students.

Grooms says transfer students should come to their new school prepared with a plan for their education and future.

"We're hoping to hear that they're motivated to move forward with pursuing their bachelor's degree ... that they've put some thought into how they're going to be paying for it ... and that they've put some time and thought in what they actually want to do," she says.

Tags: College, Transfer students, Transfer process, financial aid

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