

# Academic Outcomes of Lower Division Transfer Students

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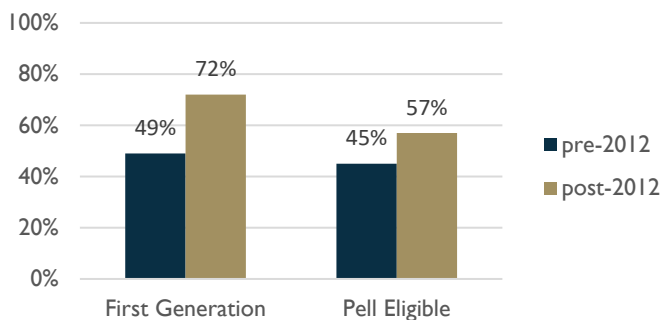
This report examines outcomes for Lower Division Transfer students, specifically, first year retention, graduation, and GPA. Lower Division Transfer students are students who enter as transfers, but without having completed the typical amount of transfer coursework (e.g., 60 semester units). Outcomes for Lower Division Transfer students improved with stricter admissions criteria (Fall 2012 and later cohorts), with improvements across all measures (first year retention, graduation rates, time to degree, and cumulative second semester GPA). When compared to typical, Upper Division transfer students, Lower Division Transfers (Fall 2012 and later cohorts) had similar outcomes, with no significant differences in most measures (first year retention, 2-year and 4-year graduation rates, time to degree, proportion graduated or still enrolled, and cumulative second semester GPA), though a significant difference was found in the 3-year graduation rate, with Upper Division transfers graduating within 3 years at a higher rate.

## Background

Lower Division Transfer students are those who enter the university as Transfers, but without having completed the typical set of Transfer requirements; Lower Division transfer [requirements](#) currently include meeting major requirements, as well as having eligibility for admission as of their high school records. Prior to the 2012 academic year, Lower Division Transfer students had less strict eligibility criteria, in that they did not have to meet specific major preparation requirements. This analysis set out to answer two questions, first, **was the stricter admissions criteria for post-2012 lower division transfers associated with improved academic outcomes?** And secondly, **were lower division transfers as successful as upper division transfers?**

## Analysis by Cohort Groups (Lower Division Transfers only)

Chart I: Student Characteristics by Cohort Group



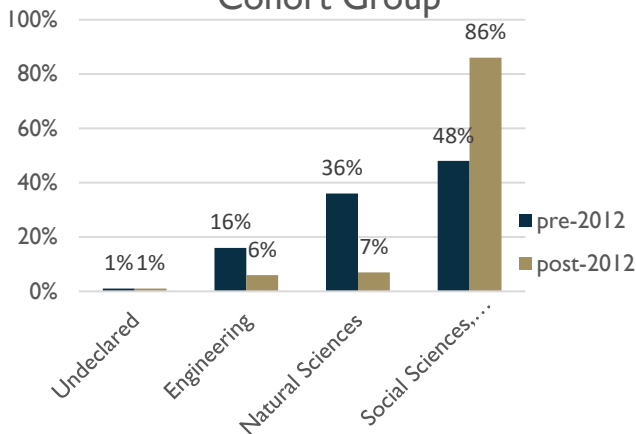
Prior to evaluating academic outcomes, we examined the student characteristics of the groups being compared.

**Lower Division Cohort Groups** were compared, to see how students differed prior to 2012 (less strict admissions criteria) and 2012 and later (more strict admissions criteria). Overall, there have been 391 Lower Division transfer students enrolled from Fall 2005 through Fall 2019, with 288 in the pre-2012 group, and 103 in the post-2012 group. The post-2012 group had a significantly<sup>1</sup> higher proportion of first-generation students, 72% vs 49%, as well as significantly<sup>1</sup> more students who were Pell eligible in the first term (57% vs 45%); see Chart I.

Post-2012 lower division transfers were also significantly more likely to choose majors in the school of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts, and less likely to choose majors in the schools of Natural Sciences or Engineering, as shown in Chart 2 (on the following page).

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Chart 2: School of Major by Cohort Group



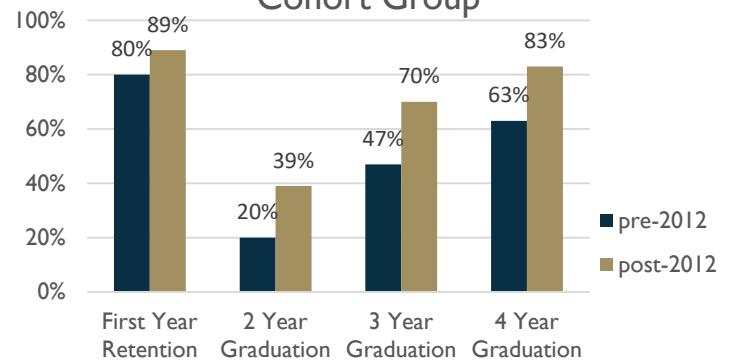
As admissions criteria became stricter, we would expect the academic profile to differ between the two groups, which is what we found -- transfer GPA was significantly<sup>2</sup> higher for the post-2012 group (3.24 vs 3.04).

**Academic Outcomes** To evaluate the academic success of Lower Division Transfer students, we compared academic outcomes of Lower Division Transfer students before and after 2012, to evaluate whether the more recent, stricter criteria was associated with increased success. We found that the post-2012 lower division transfers had a significantly<sup>2</sup> higher cumulative GPA (in UCM courses) at the end of their second semester, 3.04 vs 2.88.

First year retention (e.g., to the following fall) was significantly<sup>1</sup> higher

for the post-2012 group, 89% vs 80%. We also found that time to degree was lower for the post-2012 group; mean time to degree was 3.44 for the pre-2012 cohorts and is currently 2.58 for the post-2012 cohorts. As several students from the post-2012 cohorts were still enrolled as of Fall 2020, we also compared the proportion who have graduated within 2, 3, and 4 years; we found that post-2012 students were significantly<sup>1</sup> more likely to graduate within 2 years, 3 years, and 4 years; see Chart 3 for details:

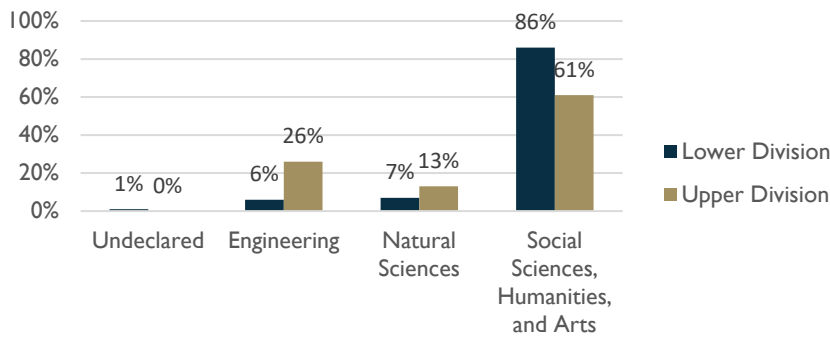
Chart 3: Retention and Graduation by Cohort Group



## Analysis by Class Standing (post-2012 only)

**Lower vs Upper Division** transfer students from 2012-2019 were compared, to see how these two groups of students might be different. Overall, there were 1436 transfer students between Fall 2012 and Fall 2019, with 103 Lower Division, and 1333 Upper Division transfer students. Student background characteristics were similar; there was no significant difference<sup>1</sup> in the proportion of students who were first-generation college students (72 vs 66%), nor in the proportion of students who were Pell eligible in the first term (57 vs 64%). We did find that lower division transfer students were significantly more likely to choose majors in the school of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts, and less likely to choose majors in the schools of Natural Sciences or Engineering; see Chart 4, at the top of the following page:

Chart 4: School of Major by Transfer Type



Transfer GPA was also significantly<sup>2</sup> higher for the lower division transfers, compared to upper division transfers (3.24 vs 3.13).

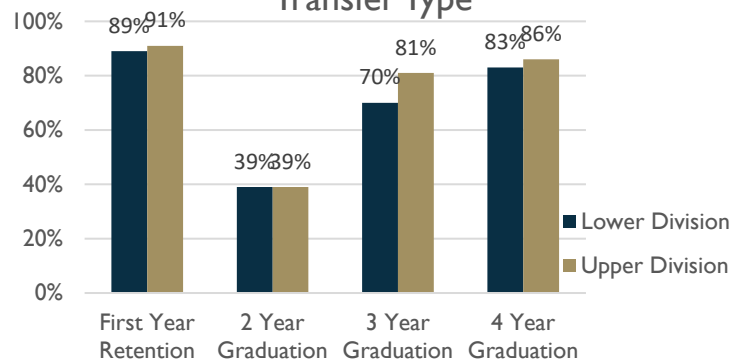
**Academic Outcomes** To evaluate the academic success of Lower Division Transfer students, we compared academic outcomes of Lower Division Transfer students to that of Upper Division transfer students, to evaluate whether transfer students that enter the university with fewer units are equally successful as traditional, Upper Division

transfer students. We found that there was no significant<sup>2</sup> difference in the cumulative GPA (in UCM courses) of Lower or Upper division transfer students at the end of their second semester, 3.04 vs 3.05.

First year retention (e.g., to the following fall) was not significantly<sup>1</sup> different between Lower and Upper division transfers, 89% vs 91%. We also found no significant<sup>2</sup> difference in time to degree; mean time to degree is currently at 2.58 for the Lower Division Transfers and 3.13 for the Upper Division Transfers. As several students (of both transfer types) were still enrolled as of Fall 2020, we also compared the proportion who have graduated within 2, 3, and 4 years; we found no significant<sup>1</sup> difference in the proportion who have graduated within 2 years or 4 years, but a significant<sup>1</sup> difference in the proportion who have graduated within 3 years; see Chart 3 for details. Note that 2-year graduation is based on cohorts from Fall 2012 through Spring 2019-, 3-year graduation is based on cohorts from Fall 2012 through Spring 2018., and 4-year graduation is based on cohorts from Fall 2012 through Spring 2017.

Overall, there was no significant<sup>1</sup> difference in the proportion of students who have graduated, or were still enrolled as of Fall 2020, with 85% of Lower Division and 87% of Upper Division transfers either graduated or still enrolled.

Chart 5: Retention and Graduation by Transfer Type



## Conclusion

We found that several outcomes improved for Lower Division transfer students after the stricter admissions criteria were implemented in Fall 2012, with later Lower Division transfers having higher cumulative semester 2 GPAs, higher first year retention, shorter time to degree, and higher rates of 2-, 3-, and 4-year graduation.

When we compared Lower and Upper Division transfer students from Fall 2012 onward, we found similar outcomes, with no difference in cumulative semester 2 GPAs, first year retention, time to degree, overall graduation rates, and both 2-year and 4-year

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graduation rates. We did find a higher 3-year graduation rate for the upper division transfer students, but lower division transfer students appeared to catch up at the 4-year graduation mark.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Calculated via Chi-square test of independence; a threshold of  $p < .05$  was used for significance testing
  2. Calculated via an independent samples t-test; a threshold of  $p < .05$  was used for significance testing
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