

# Illuminating the New Students in the Shadows

## Background, Experiences, and Outcomes of Transfer Students

The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment at The Evergreen State College performs a variety of research projects for institutional assessment and planning. The following are excerpts of research into the background, experiences, and outcomes of transfer students, who are a significant proportion of Evergreen’s undergraduate student body. This poster represents a collection of observations about transfer students, using a variety of research methodologies, from analysis of administrative data to survey research to student interviews.

This project focuses on the Olympia campus, although Evergreen also has transfer-only programs in Tacoma, Washington and in six Tribal Reservation Based/Community Determined programs around the state. Separate assessments of off-site programs are performed, but are not summarized in this presentation.

Fifty-six percent of all undergraduates came to Evergreen as transfer students. Fifty-four percent of new undergraduates to the Olympia campus arrived as transfer students.

Source: Fall 2006 10th day snapshot (PCHEES)

## Why are transfer students in the shadows?



Many national research projects focus primarily on first-time, first-years. While transfer students represent the majority of undergraduates at The Evergreen State College, much of the attention on assessing the student experience has been focused on first-time, first-years. This is not an unusual situation among institutions, where assessments of new students often exclude transfer students. Despite a commendation for the assessment of entering freshmen, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities noted in 1998 that Evergreen had “not made the same level of effort to collect information about transfer students.” Thus, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment embarked on several projects to better understand transfer student experiences at Evergreen.

In an interview, Shawn commented on his decision to transfer to Evergreen: *“Before I decided to come to Evergreen, I worked as an instructional assistant at Grays Harbor College. While working with the English as a Second Language students, I encouraged them to continue on with their education after they completed the ESL program. That had a big influence on me, because there I was encouraging people to continue on with school, and I felt like I should do that, too.”*

## Educational Pathways to The Evergreen State College

The educational pathways to Evergreen vary with transfer students coming to Evergreen after attending a variety of diverse institutions. Transfer students also enter at various points in their undergraduate education, entering at freshman to senior class standing.

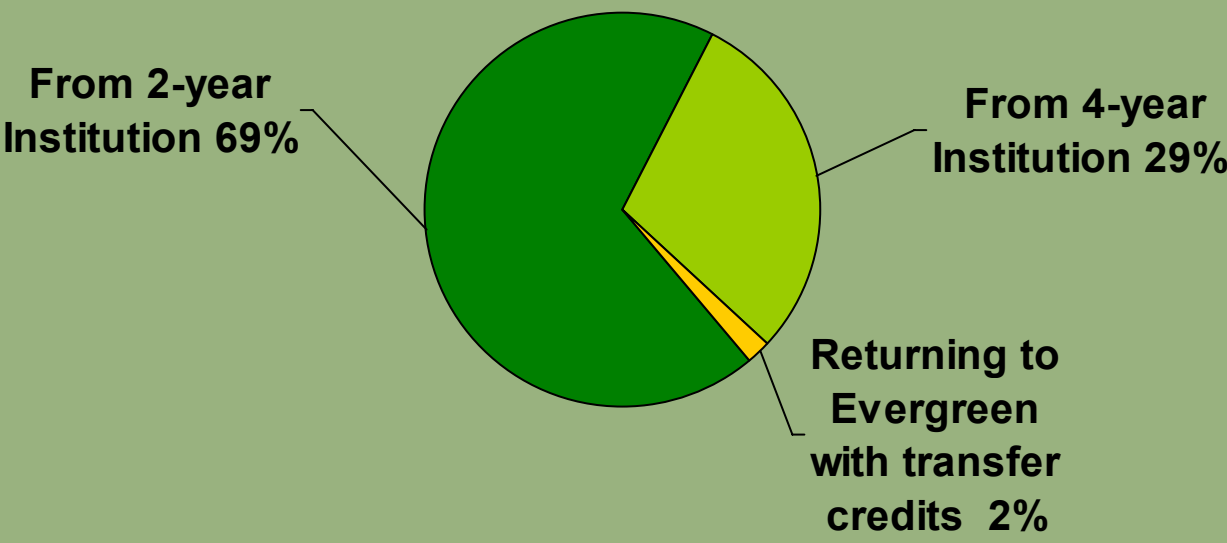


Alyssa transferred credits from Cornish College of the Arts and from completion of an AA program at South Puget Sound Community College. She says of her experience of transferring from Cornish, where she studied drama, to Evergreen, where she is studying science: *“Last year, I spent time trying to figure out how to move my body a certain way that wasn’t normal for it... using my voice properly, and learning the phonetic alphabet. And now I’m working on calculating the molarity of chemical solutions, trying to work in a group [in science at Evergreen.] Cornish did help a lot in group work, I would have to say.”*

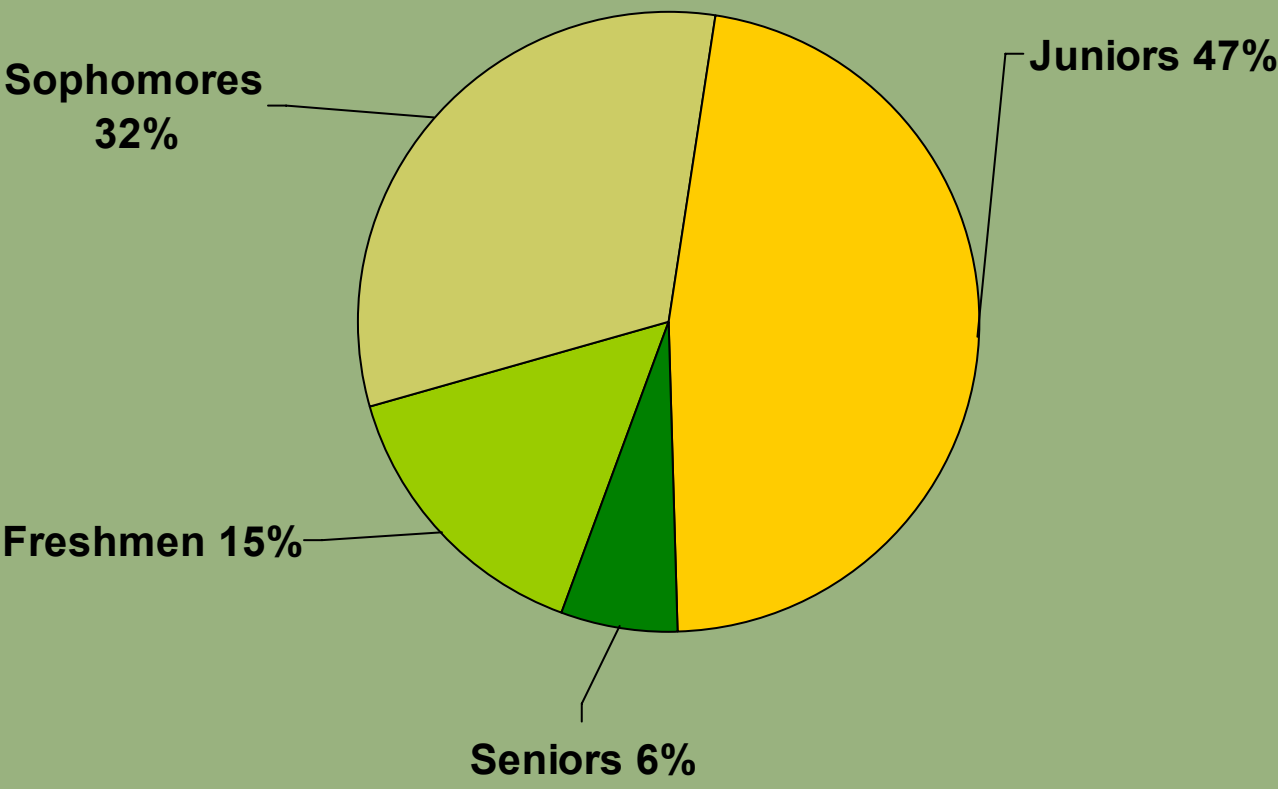
Twenty-six percent of new transfer students in Fall 2006 came in with an associate’s degree (e.g. AA, AS, ATA).

Dichotomous categories of “transfers from two-year institutions” and “transfers from four-year institutions” are often too misleading to be useful. It is common for transfer students to come with credits from multiple institutions.

Types of Institutions Transferred from Most Recently  
New Transfer Students, Fall 2006



Class Standing at Entry  
New Transfer Students, Fall 2006



Fifty-one percent of new transfer students in fall of 2006 arrived with credit from more than one institution, often a mix of two- and four-year colleges and public and private institutions.



Sarah attended Edmonds Community College during High School and the University of Haifa in Israel.

*“I went to the University of Haifa for a year, and it was just a year program so I knew it had to end. When I was looking to transfer to another school after that, I decided that Evergreen was right for me.”*

## Demographics of New Transfer Students

- In Fall 2006, the median age was 23; 38% were 25 or older.
- Fifty-five percent of the population were female; 45% were male.
- Sixteen percent were students of color.
- Thirty-five percent were Pell Grant recipients.
- Seventy-eight percent were Washington residents; 22% were out-of-state residents.
- Eight percent were enrolled part-time.
- According to a 2005 survey of new students, 41% of transfer students had no parent who had earned a four-year degree (one definition of “first-generation”).



## Why do students transfer to Evergreen?

In a 2005 survey of new students, most transfer students reported the following as being influential in their decision to attend Evergreen:

- 📊 Opportunity to design your own education (82% reported influential or very influential)
- 📊 Ability to study in a variety of subjects (81%)
- 📊 Ability to study one subject through multiple disciplines or perspectives (77%)
- 📊 Ability to take integrated programs instead of individual classes (76%)
- 📊 Ability to study in a specific field or discipline of your choice (73%)
- 📊 Close contact with faculty (72%)
- 📊 Ability to do independent study (70%)
- 📊 Quality of faculty (73%)
- 📊 Class size (69%)
- 📊 Natural beauty of the area (63%)
- 📊 Ability to apply learning through internship opportunities (60%)
- 📊 Ability to apply learning through community projects in class (60%)
- 📊 Narrative evaluations instead of grades (57%)

Some factors were influential to a smaller segment of transfer students:

- 📊 Cost of attendance (49% influential or very influential)
- 📊 Availability of financial aid or scholarship (42%)
- 📊 Availability of art programs, art studios (36%)
- 📊 Other friends and family who are attending or have attended Evergreen (37%)
- 📊 Availability of media-related programs, film/video equipment, and/or labs (32%)
- 📊 Availability of science programs, science labs (30%)
- 📊 Availability of classes on evenings and weekends (27%)
- 📊 Availability of computer programs (classes), computer labs (25%)

Factors above are listed by descending mean responses.



Chelsea responded to questions about what she was looking for when she transferred to Evergreen: **“Classes that I could gear more towards my own interests. I was hoping to find some more personalization in my studies.”**

## What percentage of transfer students chose Evergreen because they are “place-bound?”

Seventy-one percent of transfer students who responded to the Evergreen New Student Survey 2005 indicated that Evergreen was their only choice for college. Another 21% said that Evergreen was their first choice among other choices and 8% said that Evergreen was not their first choice.

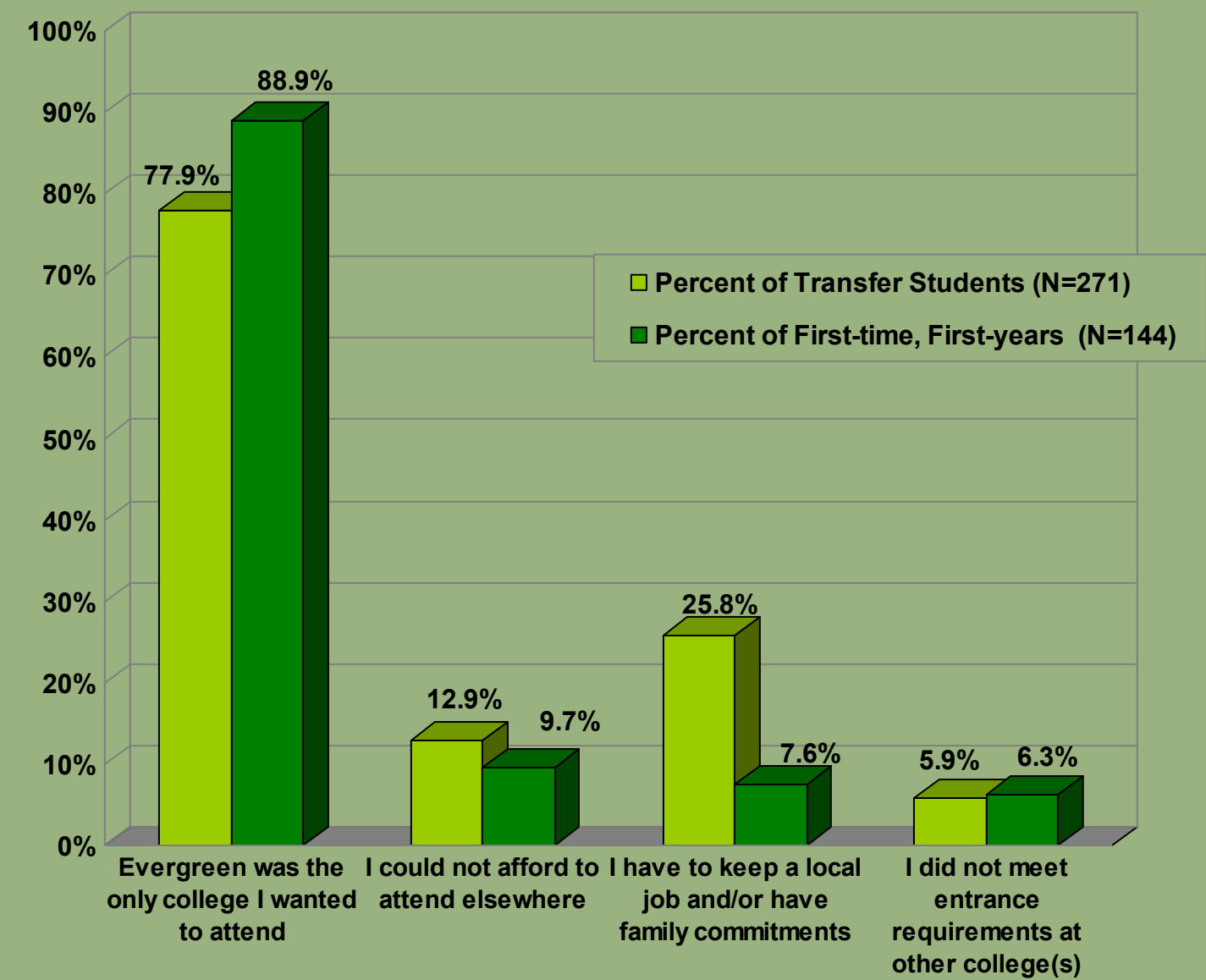
Of the transfer students who said Evergreen was their only choice, 12.9% indicated that they could not afford to attend elsewhere and 25.8% said that they had to keep a local job or had family commitments. Students were able to mark as many explanations as applied to their situation.

Of all transfer students who responded to the Evergreen New Student Survey, 13% fit the following criteria related to place-bounded reasons for choosing Evergreen:

- 📊 Evergreen was their only choice
- 📊 They could not afford to attend elsewhere and/or they had a local job or had family commitments
- 📊 Did not indicate that Evergreen was the only college they wanted to attend.

If Evergreen was your only choice, why was it your only choice?  
*Mark all that apply.*

(Includes only those students who indicated Evergreen was their only choice)



## How do transfer students perceive their own level of skill upon entry?

In a 2005 survey, new students rated themselves in a variety of skill areas. On average, transfer students reported a moderate to high level of skill in areas ranging from writing effectively to understanding and applying scientific principles and methods.

The scale students used to rate themselves was: 0=No Skill, 1=Low Skill, 2=Moderate Skill, 3=High Skill, 4=Very High Skill.

Skill areas with the highest average reported level of skill:

- 📊 Learning independently (mean response was 2.94)
- 📊 Working cooperatively in a group (mean was 2.83)
- 📊 Participating in class discussion (mean was 2.80)
- 📊 Understanding and appreciating the arts (mean was 2.80)
- 📊 Writing effectively (mean was 2.79)

Skill areas with the lowest average reported level of skill were:

- 📊 Understanding and applying quantitative reasoning principles and methods, e.g. mathematics, statistics (40% reported low or no skill; mean response was 1.80)
- 📊 Understanding and applying scientific principles and methods (28% low or no skill, mean was 2.09)
- 📊 Readiness for a career (26% low or no skill; mean was 2.19)
- 📊 Managing time effectively (24% low or no skill; mean was 2.19)

More than 20% of new transfer students rated themselves as having no skill or low skill in each of the four areas listed above.



Alice transferred from Lower Columbia College in Longview, Washington. Reflecting on her own path to Evergreen she commented: **“It’s really made me passionate about people being aware that everyone learns differently. I don’t know if everyone could sit in an Evergreen class and do really well, but I know people who might not ever think that they could finish school or go to college. Just because they didn’t do well in high school, doesn’t mean they can’t do well once they go beyond that.”**



# What are the most common fields studied among transfer students?

New transfer students were asked, “Do you plan to focus on a particular field of study or discipline at Evergreen?” Seventy-seven percent said that they did plan to focus on a particular field; 19% said that they didn’t know; and 4% said that they did not plan to focus on a particular field.

Those students who indicated that they plan to focus on a particular field were asked to write in their chosen field of study. The responses to this open-ended question were coded into Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) 2000 codes. Many students indicated more than one field of study.

Most common fields of study mentioned were:

- Visual and Performing Arts (18%)
- Natural Resources and Conservation (15%)
- Social Sciences (14%)
- Education (13%)
- Psychology (13%)
- Area, Ethnic, Cultural, and Gender Studies (10%)
- English Language and Literature/Letters (9%)
- Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences (8%)
- Biological and Biomedical Sciences (7%)
- Public Administration and Social Service Professions (6%)

In an interview Katie described her focus at Evergreen: “ I would eventually like to go into business, but it’s an area of business. It’s venture capitalism, micro-credit loans, economic sustainability... So that’s been my focus here. My first quarter I took Innovation and Leadership in American Business, so that was some business grounding. This quarter I am in Environmental Economics. I took that because it is an economics basis, and I am very passionate, and I actually really like economics.”



A comparison was made between responses from the same students on the Evergreen New Student Survey and on the Evergreen Student Experience Survey (a survey administered in the spring of the same academic year). Ninety-six percent of the transfer students who reported they “did not know” if they would focus on a particular field in the fall specified a focus by spring.

# How satisfied are transfer students with their experiences?



Anna is focusing on pre-veterinary studies at Evergreen. She described her most valuable experiences at Evergreen: “A lot of it is the teachers... It seems like they go beyond just giving information. They involve you. For a while now I have been really touched by teachers, also at Shoreline [Community College.] Before I would just go to class, but then you talk with them and they don’t just say do this or that but they ask you questions and make you think.”

On the Evergreen Student Experience Survey 2006, the mean (average) response among those students originally admitted as transfers was “satisfied” on all satisfaction items.

Areas with the highest level of satisfaction were:

- Relationships with faculty
- The overall quality of instruction
- Narrative evaluations by faculty
- Progress in achieving personal educational goals
- Lectures and other presentations by faculty
- Interdisciplinary approach to course content

Areas with the lowest level of satisfaction were:

- Evergreen’s support for your development in quantitative reasoning
- Campus activities
- Experiences with diversity at Evergreen (ethnic/racial, political, socioeconomic, sexual orientation, etc.)
- The amount of diversity at Evergreen

In some areas, there were statistically significant differences at p≤.02 between transfer students and first-time, first years. More transfer students were satisfied with seminars as a way of learning, opportunities for community service or volunteer work, experiences with diversity at Evergreen, and the amount of diversity than first-time, first-year students.

# How do transfer students fit into Evergreen’s assessment plan?

Transfer students are an important part of Evergreen’s assessment plan. Institutional Research and Assessment uses a variety of tools and measures to assess transfer student experiences and outcomes.

Evergreen is not the only institution that is interested in illuminating the background, experiences, and outcomes of transfer students. In 2006, the Washington Office of Financial Management and the Higher Education Coordinating Board approved a new accountability framework for public higher education in Washington. It included a new measure that addresses transfer student outcomes. According to the *Accountability for Student Success in Washington’s Higher Education* report the measure was “intended to show how well the two-year and four-year sectors of higher education are connecting to form a single system that works seamlessly for the student.”

A few transfer student outcomes at Evergreen include:

- Seventy-four percent of transfer students new to Evergreen in fall 2005 returned fall 2006; 83% of continuing transfer students who attended fall 2005 returned fall 2006.
- The Evergreen Student Experience Survey responses summarized above.
- The responses from Evergreen alumni on surveys. On one survey a year after graduation, 89% of alumni (who originally transferred to Evergreen) indicated that if they could start college over again, they would choose Evergreen.

Amadou transferred from the University of Dakar, Senegal to finish his undergraduate degree. He is now in the first year of the Master of Public Administration program at Evergreen. The following are his comments on what he found to be most valuable at Evergreen: “The seminar system, the exchange between students. It’s not just a one-way teaching, where students are receivers. They learn something and then they are expected to give that back. I like the way that seminars are organized. I wanted to learn what people think about me, what they think about my thoughts.”



For more information go to: [www.evergreen.edu/institutionalresearch](http://www.evergreen.edu/institutionalresearch)