

2011-12 Assessment of Summer Start/Summer Bridge Impacts
January 18, 2013

This report presents the results of the first phases of our assessment of the impacts of Summer Start/Summer Bridge programs on student persistence, retention, and engagement at UCI.

We investigated UCI's Summer Start-Summer Bridge program using mixed methods to assess the relative impacts of the Bridge program. Summer Bridge participants are low-income, first generation students. We collected data on four student groups, Summer Bridge participants, Summer Start participants, and two control groups, freshmen and transfer students who did not participate in any summer courses at UCI.

Methodology

Three sources of data (individual student records, student surveys, and individual interviews) were collected and analyzed for this project. We made several comparisons among groups; Bridge students were compared to both Summer Start (non-Bridge) students and students who did not enroll in a summer program on two performance measures (first year cumulative GPA and units completed). We analyzed responses to pre- and post-perception surveys completed by students who participated in the 2010 Summer Start (non-Bridge) and Bridge programs. Finally, we conducted in-person interviews with 20 freshmen and transfer students (students who completed Bridge, students who completed Summer Start, and students who did not participate in a summer program and are not low-income, first generation) to better understand the issues, perceptions, and needs of low-income, first generation students in comparison to students outside this group.

Results

Our multivariate analyses of student records, displayed below, found that participation in Summer Bridge positively impacts freshman students' academic success as measured by first year cumulative grade point average.

Table 1 - Characteristics of 2010 Freshman Summer Bridge Students and Comparison Groups

| | Freshman Summer Bridge | Freshman Summer Start | Freshman Comparison Group |
|---|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Demographic Characteristics | | | |
| Percentage of Male Participants | 39% | 51% | 47% |
| Percentage of White Participants | 6% | 20% | 20% |
| Average Age | 18.2 | 18.09 | 18.23 |
| Academic Performance Measures | | | |
| High School GPA | 3.9 | 3.86 | 3.88 |
| SAT Reading * | 513.27 | 575 | 575.6 |
| SAT Math * | 572.86 | 622.14 | 629.3 |
| SAT Writing * | 513.67 | 581.79 | 581.7 |
| Institutional Performance Measures | | | |
| High School API Score * | 4.91 | 7.5 | 7.51 |

* Differences between groups are statistically significant ($p=.05$).

Our analysis of pre- and post-perception surveys suggests that students who participated in Summer Bridge are more likely to report that their participation positively impacted their sense of confidence and reduced their nervousness about both their studies and faculty interactions. The results also suggest that Freshman Summer Bridge students compared to the Freshman Summer Start students are more likely to describe their UCI experience as academically and socially challenging, and to report that the pace of the quarter system is fast. The same pattern does not hold true among transfer students; Transfer Summer Start students are more likely than Transfer Summer Bridge participants to describe their UCI experience as socially challenging and the academic pace of the quarter system as fast.

We randomly selected 36 students to interview, 25 freshman and 11 transfer students. We successfully interviewed 20 students (14 freshman and 6 transfer entrants) during the 2011-12 academic year. Our interview results suggest both that participation in Summer Start/Bridge programs impact students' perceptions of their experiences at UCI and that the freshman and transfer experience differs. Our interviews with students who came to UCI as freshman found that students who participated in either Freshman Summer Start or Freshman Summer Bridge felt more confident and better prepared academically for their first full academic year. Students reported that they felt socially comfortable, that they had a network of peers that they could rely on, and generally described their transition experience as neutral or favorable. In contrast, freshman students who did not participate in Freshman Summer Start or Freshman Summer Bridge described their first year experience as challenging, both academically and socially,

shared that they had limited knowledge of campus resources, and described their transition experience as difficult. Our interviews with transfer students suggested that participation in either Transfer Summer Start or Transfer Summer Bridge facilitated students developing a social network, and better prepared for how they would need to manage their time in a quarter versus semester academic system. Transfer students seemed to be most challenged by the multiple responsibilities they had, managing family expectations, adjusting to a new living environment, and balancing work and school. Overall, our interviews with transfer students suggested that the transition was different as a function of enrollment status and potentially more challenging for transfers than freshman.

Next steps

Our analyses of quantitative and qualitative data suggest that Summer Start/Summer Bridge has meaningful impacts on student engagement and academic performance for freshman students. The results for transfer students are more complicated and less clear. We are continuing to review student records to determine longitudinal impacts, and have developed a more expensive plan for collecting data from students each year they are enrolled at UCI through graduation. We believe these efforts will help us to better understand the academic and perceptual impacts of participation in Summer Start and Bridge programs. We are also starting to collect and analyze data on 2011 and 2012 entering cohorts to determine if the trends we have observed in the 2010 cohort exist with other groups. We believe these efforts to study multiple cohorts longitudinally will give us a more robust picture and understanding of the impacts of Summer Programs on student persistence, retention, and engagement. Finally, because we have much more limited data on transfer students and the impacts of these summer programs on this population, we have initiated an interview study in Winter 2013 of all currently enrolled Transfer Summer Bridge participants. We believe these interviews will help us learn more about the impacts of these programs on our students and help us to improve our academic and programmatic offerings to facilitate a more successful academic and social transition for these students.