UC SANTA BARBARA

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A Successful Start

It’s your first day as a transfer student at a major research university. You’re not a complete newbie — maybe you’ve studied at a community college or a different university — but still you’re nervous. As you walk around campus, it seems that most of your peers have settled in, found friends and otherwise already know their way around the complicated particulars of university life.

At UC Santa Barbara, a new center aims to address the myriad issues facing transfer students as they transition to a four-year university by offering a centralized space for academic and social support. Situated inside the UCSB Library, the Transfer Student Center (TSC) provides academic advising, transfer-specific workshops and events and access to campus resources. Services once spread across several locations are now consolidated at TSC, in the heart of campus, to meet the varied needs of transfer students.

“Our ultimate goals for undergraduate education are academic excellence and diversity, and the Transfer Student Center directly aligns with achieving those goals,” said Carl Gutierrez-Jones, associate vice chancellor in UCSB’s Office of Undergraduate Education. He believes the center will have a huge impact on an underserved population. “It is a much-needed, centralized resource for a population we care deeply about,” he said. “We want to see transfer students succeed and thrive in our environment, and this center will help them feel welcomed and supported.”

December Brown, a transfer student and a member of the Transfer Student Alliance, has been closely involved in the development of programming and activities for the new center. A film and media studies major who transferred to UCSB as a junior, she says it is now her mission to ease the transition for other UCSB transfer students before she graduates in June.

According to Brown, a gap in experience is a major hurdle for many transfer students. “If I’m the same age as this other person who has been here for a few years more than I have, then they’re ahead of me and I don’t feel like I know that much,” Brown said. “I know a lot of transfers who aren’t sure how to get involved. You are thrown into this upperclassman life without having a central social area like the residence halls.”

It’s not just social and extracurricular activities that can cause stress. UCSB operates on a quarter system, and many transfer students are used to semesters. As Brown explained, “As soon as you start a class, there’s a midterm, and then a final, and then you do it all over again. I struggled, just like a lot of my friends did, getting used to that.”

The TSC addresses these needs by offering specialized research and writing workshops, as well as a course designed specifically for transfer students entering the university. Services such as career counseling and financial aid assistance are also available in the center, as are librarian-led research workshops that take advantage of TSC’s setting inside a flourishing university library.

“Locating the Transfer Student Center inside the library is a natural fit because the library serves as an academic anchor where students spend the majority of their time outside the classroom,” commented University Librarian Denise Stephens.

Currently, 24 percent of UCSB students are transfer students, though the campus has set a goal of increasing that number to 33 percent. The TSC is sure to become a vital resource to help growing numbers of transfer students successfully and quickly integrate into the university.

Brown, for one, credits her experience at UCSB to her involvement with other transfer students — and she hopes to inspire others to get involved. The TSC, with its defined mission and central location, will make being a transfer student easier, Brown said, and she revels in the possibilities.

“I could have never gotten this experience being at a community college,” Brown explained. “It really changes you when you’re away from home and living somewhere else. You’re challenged to push yourself when you get here, and to do as much as you can before you walk the commencement stage at the end.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.