

Improving Ease of Transfer Between New Mexico State University System Campuses

Strengthening Collaboration, Capturing Insights, and Improving Systems

The New Mexico State University (NMSU) System is a comprehensive network of educational institutions and research centers spread across New Mexico. Anchored by its flagship campus in Las Cruces, the system includes community colleges in Alamogordo, Carlsbad, Doña Ana, and Grants, each offering associate degrees, certificates, and vocational training programs tailored to their respective regions. Additionally, NMSU operates research and extension centers focused on agriculture, forestry, and water management. Committed to accessibility, affordability, and quality education, the NMSU System serves diverse student populations and contributes to the state's economic development through education, research, and community engagement.

Building a Student-Centered Approach to Evaluation

NMSU recognized a need to evaluate the efficacy, effectiveness, and performance of the Aggie Pathways Program. The Aggie Pathways Program provides students at the affiliated NMSU community colleges with opportunities, guidance, and additional support as they complete their two-year degrees. The goal is for them to successfully transfer to and graduate with a bachelor's degree from NMSU.

Underpinning the initiative was an acknowledged need to improve transfer support for students as they transferred from affiliated community colleges to NMSU's main campus or online offerings. To raise student retention and completion rates, transfer practices needed to improve. This evaluation effort was needed to capture feedback about current transfer processes and procedures that could be improved or changed to make it easier for students to navigate transfer processes.

Improvement Project

Improve Transfer Support for Students Within NMSU System

Resource Used

Guiding Questions for Student-Centered Decision-Making

Results

- NMSU leveraged the Guiding Questions for Student-Centered Decision-Making to create an evaluation tool for its Aggie Pathways Program. This effort brought together a cross-functional team to undertake an evaluation of this program that had operated for multiple years.
- Representatives from departments who had not worked together in the past participated in the work. As a result of this project, student-centered decision-making practices were leveraged in conjunction with other major administrative changes at the university.



“There was major interest from finance and budget colleagues, and others within NMSU strategic goal teams, to utilize these questions to spark mindset shifts for working groups and departments. The tool will be disseminated to additional teams at NMSU (and in the NMSU System) for consideration, specifically, to Strategic Plan goal team leads.”

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Kimberly Rumford,
Chief Budget Officer

Shifting Systemic Ways of Working

NMSU has a unique financial infrastructure. Each campus is budgeted separately. However, they functionally operate as one centralized system, linked financially, administratively, and in service to students. Historically, the financial infrastructure lacked system integration (e.g., some electronic information systems do or do not ‘talk’ to one another). This lack of integration influenced budget decisions. The team working on this project at NMSU saw this initiative as an opportunity to apply a more student-centered approach to designing process improvements to transactional processes that support transfer. The team’s breadth of expertise for this project reflected the commitment to keeping students at the center. Subject matter experts in finance and budget processes, student success systems of support, and the Office of the Vice Chancellor contributed to determining what needed to be evaluated linked to transfer-related activities.

Implementation and Outcomes

Once the evaluation was designed, the project team leveraged the SOAR (Southwest Outreach Academic Research) Evaluation and Policy Center to conduct the evaluation of the Aggie Pathways Program. The report looked at Aggie Pathways (AP) student outcomes and compared participating students to similar students who were not in the Aggie Pathway program to assess differences and program impact from fall 2016 through fall 2020.

Improvement outcomes evaluated were based on program objectives, including transfer to and graduation from NMSU-Main Campus, first semester Grade Point Average (GPA) for Main Campus transfers, and time to transfer and graduation. Demographics of the different groups were also examined. In addition, this report reviewed results from a survey that went to current and former AP students and solicited feedback about their experience. NMSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained for the evaluation, and the evaluation results will be used to inform future improvements to transfer processes.

Sustaining Momentum

The use of the Guiding Questions for Student-Centered Decision-Making resource facilitated a more student-focused analysis of barriers and challenges encountered by transfer students. NMSU leaders involved in this work expect that this student-centric approach adopted for this initiative will carry forward to other improvement initiatives, and that the NACUBO toolkits will continue to support continuous improvement at NMSU.