Systemness as a Leadership Mindset: Advancing Transfer Student Success

Dr. Jason E. Lane

University of Illinois System

Change

Leveraging the Power of Systemness to Improve the Success of Students and Society

"A system is a set of related components that work together in a particular environment to perform whatever functions are required to achieve the system's objective."

~Donella Meadows

Why are we here?

- We've missed the target
- Too many students face barriers in transferring
- The pathways are fragmented; and created by our decisions.
- We have a shared interest in building a better, more seamless transfer system – together.

TRANSFER LAND
the chaos for transfer students
GRADUATION
LACKING GRADUATION REQS
Poor Advisement
FIND ANOTHER WAY!
Register for courses
Seamless Transfer
MISSED DEADLINE!
WELCOME TO SUNY
STOP!
Enrollment
SUNY SAIL INSTITUTE
Empowering Strategic, Academic, and Innovative Leadership

Pipeline Trends: Transfer is the future

Fewer Children & Aging

17% > 65 & Growing
-13% birthrate (2007)
-1.9% population (2020-21)

Declining High School Enrollments

↓10% in high school grads by 2037
62% of HS seniors go to college (2010=68%)

Changing Enrollments

2.5 m ↓undergrads (2012-2022)

Increasing Diversity

Hispanic/Latino 1↑3% 2010-21
White (non-Hispanic) 4↓.2%

Adult Leaners

40 M nationally, some college, no degree

Oversaturation of Institutions

- 500 colleges in NE
- Multiple colleges closed since 2020

Reported Challenges in Successful Transfer

- Maintenance of course equivalencies
- Timely evaluation of transfer credits
- Data access
- Aligning curricula across institutions
- Collaboration across institutions

Source: Lane, J.E., Knox, D., Khan, M. (2022). *The Role of Higher Education Systems in Advancing Transfer Student Success*. National Association of System Heads.

Source: Lane, J.E. (2018). Data Analytics, Systemness and Predicting Student Success in College: Examining how the data revolution matters to higher education policy makers. In Gagliardi, J., Parnell, A., Carpenter-Hubin, J. (eds.). *The Analytics Revolution in Higher Education: Big Data, Organizational Learning, and Student Success.* Henderson, VA: Stylus Press.

Different Perspectives

Systems Level

Campus Level

Without a system map

With a system map

Adobe Stock | #101678267

Institutional Thinking vs Pathway Thinking

Institutional Thinking

- Protect autonomy
- Optimize local metrics
- Focus on enrollment capture

Pathway Thinking

- Align outcomes
- Optimize student progression
- Share responsibility

Instead of pulling against each other, what if we all start rowing in the same direction?

Institutional Thinking
Transfer Student Success
Pathway Thinking

"The significant problems we face
cannot be solved with the same
level of thinking
we were at when we created them."
- Albert Einstein

2
5
4

Change in our way of looking at the world

Change in mental models & paradigm

Personal Development

Change in the systems we create & inhabit

Changes ways of organizing, designing & managing systems

Systems Change

Mindset Shift

STOP LOOKING

at how institutions operate

START LOOKING

at how students experience higher ed

Mindset Shift

STOP ASKING

"Why are the students failing?"

START ASKING

"How are we failing the students?"

Then look for ways we can work together

Mindset Shift

STOP
Proctecting Turf

START
Expanding Opportunity

What Systemness is Not

- Not merger
- Not loss of identity
- Not central control
- Not uniformity

Systemness

Definition: **Systemness is the leadership practice of aligning independent organizations, offices, and activities around shared student outcomes**, greater resource effectiveness, and advancing state needs.

- Systemness is not about sameness – it's about alignment, coherence, and purpose.

Low Alignment
Absence of collective action
High Alignment
Potential for emergent functions

The Systemness Transformation Model

Gates Foundation

Lane, J.E, Khan, M.I, and Todtman, J. (2024) Multi-Campus System Transformation: Understanding How Higher Education Systems Lead, Scale, and Accelerate Equitable Student Success. National Association of Higher Education Systems (NASH)

Transformation across systems ...

...requires aligning 5 key drivers.

Levers of Alignment

Backbone Structures	Convening	Onboarding Practices	Program Review
Board Development & Resolutions	Data	Operational Missions	Role-Alike Groups
Continuous Communications	Hiring Practices	Policy Audits	Strategic Planning
Contracting	Mandates	Professional Development	System Shared Governance

Curricular Alignment: Transfer Paths

- Lower division coursework in the major to achieve junior status after two years of full-time study.
- SUNY faculty disciplinary committees of 2-year and 4-year faculty identified core courses in each discipline and created generic descriptions for each course.
- Two rounds
  - 1.0 (2009-2010)
    - 400 faculty involved
    - 37 disciplines covering 90% of transfer students
  - 2.0 (January – April, 2014)
    - Nearly 900 faculty involved
    - 59 disciplines covering over 95% of transfer students

SUNY The State University of New York

Transfer Path

Discipline: Computer Science

SUNY transfer paths outline the knowledge and skills that are essential for students to complete during their first two years of study for a major in a given discipline. The coursework described below will meet degree requirements at all SUNY campuses offering majors in the above discipline. If you complete this coursework successfully, you will be well-positioned to finish your degree with an additional two years of study at your SUNY transfer college.

Use this transfer path to discover both courses related to your major and general education requirements that will prepare you for transfer. Click on each course to view a course description. Then, to map your first two years of courses, visit Planning Your Coursework.

Lower-Division Major Requirements

It is important for students to have the necessary in-depth coverage of the computer science knowledge and skills outlined in the courses and descriptions below to be ready for their junior level courses. It is recognized that SUNY campuses sequence these topics across their computer science courses in different ways within their academic programs. Therefore, the computer science programming sequence (CS I, CS II, and CS III/Data Structures) in the transfer path should be taken at the same institution prior to transfer. In addition, students should cover the mathematics knowledge and skills outlined in the transfer path within the first two years of full time study.

The contents listed in this section are specifically related to your field of study and are part of the requirements for graduation in your major:

- Computer Science I
- Computer Science II
- Computer Science III/Data Structures
- Computer Architecture and Organization
- Calculus I
- Discrete Mathematics
- Natural Science elective (to satisfy SUNY General Education requirement)

The following courses are recommended (see advising notes):

- Calculus II
- Linear Algebra

Results of the Interim Assessment

(2011 vs. 2015 starting 3-year associate cohort)

↑ Completion Rates INCREASED

Time to Degree DECREASED

↓

# of Credits at Completion DECREASED
(9,000 credits total)

↓

What Made This Work

- Faculty engagement
- Policy alignment
- Central data
- Clear communication
- Sustained leadership commitment

Pathway to Multiple Credentials at SUNY

Mohawk Valley Community College

Teaching Assistant I (14 weeks)
Teaching Assistant II (14 weeks)
Associates in Teaching Transfer

SUNY Oneonta

Bachelors in
Teacher Education

Stony Brook University

Advanced Certificate
in Educational Leadership

Complete LA Success Coaches Stay with the Students

Look beyond the immediate to ask:

Where are students losing momentum in your ecosystem?

Where does alignment break down?

What data are you not sharing?

What would pathway thinking look like here?

SYSTEMNESS LEADERSHIP MATTERS IN TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS

- Students move.
- Institutions decide.
- Leaders align.
- Culture sustains.

Culture Sustains What Policy Starts

- Innovation
- Collaboration
- Shared accountability
- Public recognition
- Leadership storytelling

Celebrating Systemness

- Celebrate alignment, not just outcomes
- Recognize cross-institution leadership
- Honor collaboration that serves students
- Reward behaviors that advance the ecosystem

The power of shared vision

"Despite current ads and slogans, the world doesn't change one person at a time. It changes as networks of relationships form among people who discover they share a common cause and a vision of what's possible."

Margaret Wheatley & Deborah Frieze

Using Emergence to Take Social Innovation to Scale

What does Systemness Look Like for You?….

Questions (and answers?)