

The Triton Transfer Hub

Triton Tools and Tidbits • Season 2, Episode 3 • Running Time 28:42 minutes

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

students, transfer, ucsd, triton, classes, support, uc san diego, transfers, campus, transfer student, people, hub, uc san diego's, institution, peer, professors, graduate, quarter, coaches, admin

SPEAKERS

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Ian Daly 00:03

Hello and welcome to another episode of Triton Tools and Tidbits. This week, we have a special episode. An undergraduate and peer counselor here at UC San Diego at the Triton Transfer Hub took on the challenge of making an episode about the Triton Transfer Hub. So, without further ado, here is Maliq de Pina.

Maliq de Pina 00:28

The Triton Transfer Hub is UC San Diego's first campuswide, full-spectrum, transfer-specific support system. Through peer-to-peer support and collaboration across the whole UCSD campus., the Triton Transplant has provided unparalleled support to the Triton transfer student population. One in three undergraduate students at UC San Diego transferred from another post-secondary educational institution, the largest transfer student population of any UC campus. Surprisingly, UCSD was the only UC school with no centralized support system for transfer students. Transfer students for a variety of reasons tend to have a fundamentally different experience at UCSD than students who matriculate directly from high school. A combination of non-traditional backgrounds and increased work and family commitments, put transfers into a uniquely isolating position, leading to both feelings of disconnect and longer times to degree. To start things off, I decided to reach out to my transfer friends, Sam Shivongu, a recent 2020 real estate development graduate and Tanome Walinet Murray, former Black Resource Center Transfer Success leader and village RA. To discuss the experience of navigating UCSD and helping other transfers navigate UCSD prior to the formation of the Triton transfer hub. So first, I just want to hear a little bit about like, how was it for you like what was your experience like? What did it feel like to be new to UCSD? And how was that like that first quarter and like that first year for you?

Sam Tshibangu 01:55

Having already lived in San Diego and having a lot of friends at SDSU like I heard about UCSD. But I didn't really know what UCSD was, I haven't really met a lot of people from UCSD so I couldn't really get a gauge on the type of people who went there outside of what you hear. And coming into the school for orientation was kind of a culture shock, but not really because it's somewhat representative of the city of San Diego in a good and a bad way. But upon entry, my first few months here, the culture shock

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for me as a young black male, was that there was not anybody in my classes that looked like me. And on top of being the transfer student where a lot of your classes, there aren't really going to be as many students that are your age as outside of your major classes. It's a little different, to say the least. When I transferred into UC San Diego, I was already 21 or 22, if I'm not mistaken. So, I was in a different mind frame. You know, everything that comes with early college life, you know, I got out my system prior to coming into school. So, I was just coming in ready just to get school done, get school taken care of, and then to graduating and moving forward into the career field that I chose.

Tanome Walinet Murray 03:25

So, I think that was probably one of the hardest things for me was transitioning into the intensity and the speed of classes in UCSD. And I think also the imposter syndrome that comes with being in a new place. I got to UCSD, and it was kind of like all the people are smart. I don't know how I got here. I don't know how I'm going here. And also, being a black student, where oftentimes we are three out of 100 or less. I was sitting in class and just kind of be like I really don't belong here. So, I think transitioning was hard as a transfer because it's like, you're not new to college. But you're also not like, completely accustomed to it. Right. So, it's kind of like you don't want anyone to hold your hand. But you do need help when you get here. It's not like transitioning in as a first year where everybody's new and you can make all these new friends at one time. It's a little bit harder to navigate that way. As with working with transfers, it was hard to kind of direct transfers for resources, specifically for them because we didn't have any resources that were specifically for transfers. If I was programming, I would have to figure out okay, how am I incorporating transfers into this? How am I making this transfer-specific, but at the same time, it's like nothing that we had was essentially transfer-specific up until the transfer hub that we now have, which I think is really really cool.

Maliq de Pina 04:59

Next, I decided to consult a seasoned Higher Education Student Advocate, Chuck Stanley, former Facilities, Operations, and Events Coordinator at the Black Resource Center, and current Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at Sixth College, to get his experience perspective on what challenges transfer students were uniquely facing.

Chuck Stanley 05:19

There was an extra amount of energy used to get to UCSD on top of the energy that they needed to use to navigate where they were before UCSD, right? And so, for me, I use that—especially working with transfer students as kind of a starting point—you're working with students—to know that the energy level just isn't the same. And that's not to say, taking the same number of classes and being as involved and whatnot. I'm saying there's an extra step that's already been taken by transfer students. So, in my mind, trying to help—leveling the playing field—trying to help catch up for lack of better terms.

Chuck Stanley 05:55

And so, what I see is an institution that—so a lot of what I do with my work with my students is being very honest about what my experience has been and who I am as a person, not to say do the same thing, but to put it in context. So, they can say, Okay, this is how I'm like Chuck or not like Chuck, and this is some of the things that I can try based on what he was saying. And so, when I see UCSD, I see a place that I don't know if I can make the size of the institution, the quarter system. And one of the big

places that I think is when a third, like you were saying of the population has come from someplace else. And we're still catching up on creating systems to help those students be successful.

Chuck Stanley 06:37

I think there are two foundational things I think in leveraging resources; when it's when it's all said and done, I think the experiences about leveraging resources. One of his—one of those things is getting to know yourself, right? It's hard to know what you need, what you want, if you don't know yourself well, know how you operate, know where that—where your challenges are, know what your strengths are, that you can help to leverage those strengths and maximize those strengths.

Chuck Stanley 07:01

And the other is to be able to ask for help. And so, who you are in this institution is going to look different based on the size of the institution and based on the demographic breakdown of the institution, based on the geographic location of an institution. And then your support's changed. The people that helped our transfer students be successful on—in achieving this goal, whatever—wherever this goal of being at UCSD falls in the plan, there are people that help students get to that goal. So what are we doing now to help students connect with people to help them get to their next goal, whatever it is, whether it's they're transfer students have been accepted to UCSD but now have to work on being accepted to a specific program or they've been accepted to UCSD but have to now get their social foundation settled, accepted to UCSD you still have to figure out how to graduate UCSD and make it through an institution that can be very, very challenging; academically challenging, socially challenging, emotionally challenging.

Maliq de Pina 08:08

As more and more Triton transfers voice their experiences, folks across the entire university began calling for additional support for transfer students specifically. With the collaboration of departments, colleges and upper administration, Adarsh Parthasarathy, 2019 and 2020 academic year Vice Chair of Academic Affairs with Associated Students championed the formation of the Triton Transfer Hub in the fall of 2019.

Adarsh Parthasarathy 08:33

started making our first hire. Once Jackie, and I sat down and we were going through the interviewing the applicants and everything, that's when it became real, because we had an info session, which was for people who thought that they might want to become peer coaches. And like, I want to say 30 people showed up or something like that. And we weren't really expecting that many people to show up because we didn't have a brand or a presence. And no one really knew what was going on. But a ton of people came, and we were thrilled. And that's when I realized, you know, there is real human interest in this. It's not just something that happens—one day decided, okay, maybe students need this—this is actually something that students are going to come out for and dedicate their time toward. And that's kind of when I had an appreciation for what was being done here.

Adarsh Parthasarathy 09:22

I think, since this is something that happens so early in my time in student government, I didn't realize the power that students had. But the fact is that the Triton Transfer only came about because of student involvement. The admin of course, they were extremely helpful, and they were completely supportive,

but the idea would have never happened if it weren't for students in positions of leadership, who were basically pushing this through. So, I think that was the biggest surprise and definitely an eye opener for me, which is that when you're on a college campus, even when it's big as, as UCSD you have a lot of power as an individual student. And that's something that if you can identify a problem as a student, you have more power than you know. And it's hard to realize that until you're witness to what students who just have a good concept of what their fellow students want, can achieve when they put their heads together.

Maliq de Pina 10:16

After talking with Adarsh, I reached out to our supervisors, Dr. Lindsay Romasanta, Director of Student Success programs, and Dr. Jackie Duerr, Programs Manager of the Triton Transfer Hub to get an admin perspective on the Triton Transfer Hub's beginnings.

Lindsay Romasanta 10:30

Thinking about how transfer students really wanted to maximize the time that they were at UC San Diego, what were some ways that we can make that transition a little bit better? So that's sort of how we started to, you know, having conversations with campus stakeholders, and most importantly, with students about what is it that you need? What are some gaps? And how can we make sure that we plan for today for supporting the third of UC San Diego's population, but also start thinking about—dreaming about, you know, what are other ways in which UC San Diego could create a more transfer-friendly and transfer-receptive culture? And that's when Transfer Students Success and the Triton Transfer Hub was born.

Lindsay Romasanta 11:11

Some of the things that really stood out with what transfer students were seeing is that they really valued someone who was a near peer who also was a transfer student. So, they talked a little bit about how some of their first experiences at UC San Diego were working with fellow peers, but sometimes they weren't transfer students. So, it wasn't as easy to connect or to find relevance. So, we knew that if there's power in peer-to-peer connections, why don't we amplify that a little bit by making sure we have transfer peers that can support fellow transfer students. And I think that's one of the things that I really love about the evolution of how we're supporting transfer students is that we're making sure that the experts—who are transfer students themselves—have the opportunity to co-create the services, the space, the marketing, the new ideas.

Lindsay Romasanta 12:07

So then that way, student voice is at the center of everything that we do. And that's been really wonderful to just sort of see how we've gone from this idea of like stumbling upon finding transfer-specific support, to having transfer-specific peer coaches, who not only can connect one-on-one with students and hear their, you know, frustrations, their concern, but also their dreams and aspirations, but that they could also help co create more than just one on one support. So, whether it's workshops, partnerships, different opportunities, it's just been really impressive.

Jackie Duerr 12:47

Our biggest surprise has probably been the amount of individuals across campus and not—I'm talking more about campus partners, departments, things like that, that really want to be a part of the process.

Many individuals are really excited that there is transfer student support that exists and that we can provide it. And so, there's an eagerness to make sure students are connected to surfaces. So that's been a really great surprise. On the student side, the piece that I think makes UC San Diego unique is this culture of being socially dead. And that is something that I haven't fully seen on this campus. But I'm very much aware that when it comes to providing support, that is something that needs to be considered is, you know, how do we engage students in ways that they want to be engaged? Not necessarily ways that I think students should be engaged, but it's about listening to the students and hearing, what do you want? Things aren't socially dead if you give students what they're looking for.

Maliq de Pina 14:05

Well in its infancy, with less than one full academic quarter of activity under its belt, the Triton Transfer Hub found itself in the middle of a worldwide pandemic, with the rise of COVID-19. Social distancing, multiple stages of campus evacuation, and a world of heightened hardships hit UCSD like a bombshell. However, through tireless effort, seamless teamwork, and continuous adaptability, the Triton Transfer Hub team adjusted to the new virtual environment and continue to drive student engagement through a variety of digital communication vehicles. Along With Sam I consulted my fellow Transfer Success peer coach and recent 2020 Human Biology graduate, Diane Dominique Perez to talk about what it was like adjusting to the remote environment from a student perspective.

Diane Dominique Perez 14:49

I feel like it was difficult mostly because of the fact that—I feel like with in person classes, right, like you have the set schedule: when you go to class and when—maybe you have work, and when you're going to eat and you know, whatever it is. And I feel like with online classes, like, it's absolutely correct that you're—you still do have that schedule. But I feel like at least personally, it was much harder to stick with that schedule, especially because some of my classes were, they didn't meet on Zoom, like, professors would pre-record the lectures, and you just had to look at it at your own time and you just had to do the assignments when they were due.

Diane Dominique Perez 15:27

And I found that to be difficult, at least personally, because I had always thought I had really good time management skills until I took online classes for spring quarter. And then I was like, wow, I really need to change the way that I'm approaching school, I felt like, what helped me the most was trying to put myself in the mindset of that I'm still like, physically going to class. Like, even if my classes were prerecorded, I felt like I, you know, it was best for me to still review the lecture the time that the class was originally scheduled for it, just because for me, like, that was the easiest way for me to not fall behind.

Diane Dominique Perez 16:06

And also, I think the most frustrating part was the fact that all professors teach remote classes differently. And so, there were like, again, like I mentioned, some professors pre-recorded lectures, and some, just, you know, you had to show up on Zoom, even though it wasn't mandatory. But I found it to kind of be difficult because I had to, like, always keep a mental note of like, oh, like this class was pre-recorded, wait, like this class is like not, you know, it's on Zoom and things like that, I found it to be definitely very challenging the first half of the quarter. Just because, you know, it's, again, like another adjustment period. And two, it's kind of weird, just being stuck at home all day.

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Sam Tshibangu 16:53

For a heads up that I would give to incoming transfer students, especially with this advent of COVID, is to take your own initiative, because a lot of times, especially as a transfer student, as well, there aren't going to be many people that are going to nudge you along the way, unlike when you are a freshman. Because as a freshman you're, as we would say, you're pretty green, pretty green, you don't really know much. It's a whole new world. So, people are more willing to hold—not necessarily hold your hand, but they're more willing to nudge you along. As a transfer student, when you come in, people have the understanding of Oh, this person already knows how to find their way around. So, if they have a question, we'll answer but for the most part, they can just find their way. That right there is pretty much how the transfer bubble is in a nutshell, with the advent of COVID, it's amplified even more—even more so because now we are back at home, wherever our home is at. And we have to now seek out electronically, we have to now seek out our professors, seek out our counselors, seek out the resources. But it's also a good thing because with us being at home more it allows us to look outside of the campus and not just within the campus.

Maliq de Pina 18:13

With these difficulties being faced by students, I talked to Diane and Dr. Duerr about how they navigated engaging students remotely. And Dr. Duerr's plans moving forward with a new class of transfer students on the way.

Jackie Duerr 18:26

One of my biggest beliefs is developing a strong network. Our—our mission is to serve students academically, personally, and professionally. And so, what that means is we need a very, very wide network. So, we are in the know for things that are happening across campus. We are partnering with academic enrichment programs so that we can host sessions early on specific to transfers and say, 'Here are the things you are eligible to participate in coming in as a junior, coming in within this major.' We are partnering with departments that have the highest number of transfer students to host maximizing your transfer experience workshops.

Jackie Duerr 19:12

The greatest way we can be a support is collaborating across the campus to be in the know and to get word out to students as efficiently as possible. Through our online platforms now, we are doing this through multiple different ways. We might be hosting workshops with departments to get students LinkedIn; we might be doing our live streams through Instagram about a specific topic or to engage students through social media. These are just some of the things that we do. We have been talking about expanding the opportunity for transfers to participate in a forum so that they can reach out and ask questions to either peer coaches or just chat with each other. These are just some of the things that we are doing and plan to do.

Jackie Duerr 20:01

And I'll add to that our biggest collaboration is national transfer student week. And so, we're working on building that up. You know, last year, we had our first one. And this year, the goal is to work across departments and really say, what can you do for your transfer students, and get word out to transfers that there is opportunity, there are ways to involve yourself, but at the same time, coming here to UC San Diego, and any university, it has to be a Choose Your Own Adventure book. I can't dictate what

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transfer students want but as long as we keep hearing, from transfers, what's important to them, we will continue to pivot and adapt our programs to meet those needs.

Diane Dominique Perez 20:48

I found that people were more—they were really into, like the social media stuff that we did, whether that be like the takeovers, or the live streams and things like that. So, I mean, that we're—it's definitely like, something that we still are working on, you know, trying to make a social media presence. But I think that it's—it's still a work in progress.

Jackie Duerr 21:17

The biggest opportunity, as we bring in brand new transfer students is that ability to build that touch point. I'm super excited and really feeling like peer coaches can be such an asset to a brand-new transfer student's experience. And it's just about that outreach. So, you know, in the past, our peer coaches have reached out to students transfer students to say, 'Hey, I'm here, if you need me, here's some tips for the week.' And we will continue to do that moving forward into this quarter. And now that the Triton transfer hub is a little bit more branded than a has been, I'm really confident that students at this point know that tritontransfers@ucsd.edu is a resource for them if they have questions. So, so long as we continue to provide stellar services, provide accurate information, get students linked to the resources that they need, then we will be doing our jobs and we will be doing it very well. That's the greatest opportunity to me, is just that ability to be a presence and be a support for students. And having coaches make that happen. I should add to that we can make that happen in person and/or online, right? So that's also really great. And we can keep that momentum going.

Maliq de Pina 22:53

After all this talk about supporting students and making changes on campus, I went back to Dr. Romasanta and Chuck Stanley to get some professional perspective on what it really means to advocate for students in need at UCSD.

Lindsay Romasanta 23:06

Making sure that we centered student voice, making sure that we could do even our own informal check-ins with the student staff that we hired. And just be like, hey, does this sound right to you? What would this look like if we were to do it within these parameters? Or, you know, what are the different aspects? And I think this continuous, reiterative, tapping into student voice is part of the reason why the Transfer Student Success unit is so well-received by transfer students because we know it's been, like, vetted and endorsed by the students who could benefit the most from the services. So those things I think, really just illuminate the importance of making sure that you're asking the right people the right questions, and that you—who you should be asking, definitely, our transfer students themselves.

Chuck Stanley 23:54

I think financial aid is just an easy example of helping build a relationship with a student. To say, when I have a financial aid question, when I have a question on my paperwork, whatever, I know I have that same relationship with—I'm not gonna name call those specific people in financial aid—to be able to go out and say, This is a person that I have the same kind of relationship that I have with Chuck that I can just go in, I know I'm gonna be heard, even if it is—there have been numerous times that a student has said, Hey, I want to meet with you. And I'm like, I got 20 minutes, and they're like, okay, because they

know in that 20 minutes, we're gonna get something done. We're going to figure out how I can help you or figure out who to get you connected to so that they can help. And I think more staff members need to do that. Instead of spending an hour trying to be the one that helped you and not be the best person to help you, I'd rather spend 20-30 minutes and figure out who is the best person.

Maliq de Pina 24:50

Taking this advice of Center and Student voices and concerns, I reached out one last time to see what students want to see in terms of advocacy and support from both students and professional admin alike.

Adarsh Parthasarathy 25:02

What was not clear was the degree to which that was an everyday experience to people. And I think that the last two weeks of the school year, and of course, every week, until today, and probably for many months and years into the future, it's just becoming more and more apparent that having a student reasonably—reasonably be expected to function when there's COVID and they're at home, and they don't have internet access, or they, you know, they're, they got like, a lot of family at home, and they got little siblings running around, and then at the same time, you're watching what's going on in the news, and there's just no ignoring it, you have to be supportive.

Adarsh Parthasarathy 25:38

So, to me, when I originally joined Student Government, student advocacy was, you know, I go into a meeting room, and I try and express what the students want. But where that changed is, it's not about going to the meeting room, it's about setting the meeting. You know, you're in—you have a position of power and a position of leadership, you shouldn't just be attending other people's meetings, and then giving input, there's going to be inherent bias about what doesn't get discussed in that meeting, because it's not yours. So as a student repper, as anyone in leadership, you know, student or otherwise, that idea of setting your own meetings—when you realize that, you know, something needs to be advocated for—is more critical now than ever. And, you know, it should remain that way.

Adarsh Parthasarathy 26:23

One of the—one of the big things that didn't get discussed a lot, you know, from, from an admin, outward facing perspective, as for like, you know, why we should give money to an institution like the Transfer Center, it's because transfers make the university look good. In many ways, transfers are among the most successful students, and the most successful graduates at any institution. And that's also true at UCSD; they tend to have higher GPAs, on average, than freshmen students, they tend to do more research, and they tend to be more involved in campus.

Adarsh Parthasarathy 26:56

But that's not a good r—they're all great reasons for transfer students, but those are not—those don't really hit the core of the problem. And the core of the problem is there's a segment of the population that was being ignored. And that's the difference between like a path of advocacy, and I'm going to attend the meeting where they talk about what transfer students mean to them, versus the more active advocacy, which is pulling some people, pulling some admin and say, This is what transfer students do for you and these are their problems. How are you going to fix them? And that's true for transfer

students—that's true for any student who feels like they're experiencing some form of oppression or that they're being kept down on this campus, or they don't feel represented.

Maliq de Pina 27:39

I dunno. I believe that UCSD, like the rest of the world, is in a very pivotal position in terms of activating students to create positive change. The same way concerted efforts led to the formation of the Triton Transfer Hub, I believe that UCSD will continue to grow and change to accommodate all of its vastly diverse student body. This is Maliq de Pina from the Triton Transfer Hub, and it's been a pleasure.

Ian Daly 28:03

Thank you very much Maliq. I hope all of you enjoyed that episode. And I hope we can get Maliq back for another one. For Triton Tools and Tidbits, I'm Ian Daly. Thank you.