

UNIV 305: CHSS Transfer Transition Course Proposal for New Course Number

The College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS), in partnership with the Center for Academic Advising, Retention, and Transitions, has offered CHSS sections of UNIV 100 since fall 2010. As UNIV 100 sections began to target special populations, it made sense for the largest college to offer a college-specific section. With multiple CHSS sections offered each fall, the course continues to get strong enrollment and provides entering students with an initial opportunity to identify with their college at this growing university. These CHSS sections provide college-level administrators with the opportunity to connect with students, and more importantly, they provide students with the opportunity to connect with fellow students who are exploring similar academic paths. As the university focuses on retention and degree persistence, CHSS should explore the opportunities afforded by a transfer student transition course similar to UNIV 100 as an additional college-level support mechanism. To make the course more meaningful and to assist in the marketing that will ensure solid enrollment, the CHSS-specific section should have its own college-specific number – UNIV 305.

Because transfer students enter Mason needing to reach higher performance thresholds based on hours attempted, they do not have time to make the adjustment like freshman do. For this reason, we need more opportunities to support and mentor this significant population of the Mason student body in upfront, proactive ways. The concern cannot simply be on the size of the entering transfer student class each semester; in fact, the concern must also be on what a transfer student's cumulative GPA is at the end of the first semester at Mason and what the student's plan is moving forward. In the first semester, we must provide ample opportunity for transfer students to reflect on their experience and develop a new self-awareness that is linked to the new environment, and any new goals. If there is a desire to retain our students and see them persist in seeking a degree, there must be some scaffolding in place for them to develop their skills. The upper-level transfer student transition course is suited to this work.

Transfer students struggle with the transition to the university and underestimate the adjustments they will need to make to their academic habits. In the last several years, CHSS has done a variety of things to support these students, including two new hires (the Director of Advising and more recently the Retention Specialist), the creation of the Transfer Mentorship Program, and additional outreach to and meetings with students who are returning from an academic suspension. A CHSS-specific section of the UNIV 300 transfer student transition course is another way for the college administration to engage this population and provide support in a way that is more proactive and less reactive. Rather than helping to support a student's academic recovery, the course would provide the opportunity for students to set themselves up for success from the start.

A 300-level course for CHSS transfer students would provide oversight and support for students during this critical transition period with the support and oversight of the student's academic home. Transfer students need to be supported in their transition, but they also need to be challenged to acclimate quickly. Transfer students do not have time to discover their options for studying abroad, engaging in research, or taking on leadership roles at the university to name just a few of the many opportunities. They need to be introduced to these – and other – possibilities upon arrival and need to be asked to identify a plan for their Mason career. To work in support of the current CHSS strategic plan, CHSS Undergraduate Academic Affairs (UAA) has identified six programming areas for its undergraduate students to engage in – internships, leadership, research, study abroad, well-being, and service. We look forward to developing a transfer student transition course for our students that allows us to engage students in considering these opportunities and developing individual plans that allow them to meet individual goals and contribute to Mason's dynamic community. Because we intend to fully explore these six programming areas in the final third of the semester and use well-being as an overarching theme for the course, it is important for the course to have its own designated number and be limited to CHSS students.

Assuming strong enrollment, the course will be offered in the fall and spring terms—one section each term. The course will be co-taught by members of the UAA staff with two instructors assigned to each section. The fall section will be open to transfer students admitted to the university for the fall term. The spring section will be open to transfer students admitted to the university for the spring term, as well as those who were admitted for the fall semester. Significant emphasis will be placed on the constellation of expertise that resides in the UAA office and on the personal experience of students to help them realize, develop, and capitalize on their own skills and self-efficacy throughout the semester.