

2018

# College Access & First-Year Transition Program Review



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**Special thanks** to the Administration, staff and students of Weber State University who took the time to meet with us, especially the **College Access & First Year Transition Team:** Amy Huntington, Coordinator, Jody Perkins, Outreach Specialist, Marissa Smith, College Access & First Year Transition Specialist, and Christian Gutierrez, College Access Advocate.

*The contributors participated enthusiastically and candidly, which yielded learning opportunities, relationship building, this report, and perhaps most importantly, informed recommendations for the College Access & First Year Transition area in the Office of Access and Diversity.*

## INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, the Division of Student Affairs at Weber State University (WSU) went through some efforts to redesign itself. In the redesign, the Office of Access and Diversity was created, which houses multiple areas, programs, and partnerships. One of the areas, Transition Programs and Partnerships (TTP), is now known as the area of College Access & First Year Transition (CAFYT). While not everyone at the University is aware of the transformation, CAFYT is and will continue to be an area whose programs and initiatives impact not only the enrollment, but also the retention and graduation of first generation, historically underrepresented students at Weber State University.

This is a document that sets out recommendations to help start reshaping CAFYT over the next couple of months. It is an attainable set of recommendations that puts the CAFYT team and the students they serve at the very heart of planning this transformation. Along with any other strategies the VP for Student Affairs and the Executive Director of the Office of Access and Diversity may have, these recommendations provide the outline for making CAFYT not only an area of growth but an area that becomes a better place for all who work for and with them.

The site review team collected information that helped identify the challenges and opportunities facing CAFYT. It looked at the challenges facing CAFYT from the perspective of those who work within or closely with the area of CAFYT. This

helped form the basis of the recommendations and helped us understand why they are relevant and necessary. Also, the analytical work presented here includes analysis of past changes, current conditions, and viewpoints of possible futures.

The review team conducted the site visit at Weber State University from November 11-13, 2018. Site review team members included internal reviewers Claire Hughes, Coordinator ASCP Writing & DE Learning Center, Ernesto Hernandez Jr., Instruction & Reference Librarian, Weber State University, and external reviewer Dr. Beatriz Becerra-Barckholtz, Executive Director of College Access Outreach Programs, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

The site review team visited the CAFYT offices and met with administrators, coordinators, staff and students including the following:

- Brett Perozzi, Vice President for Student Affairs
- Enrique Romo, Executive Director for Access and Diversity
- Amy Huntington, Coordinator for College Access & First-Year Transition
- Christian Gutierrez, College Access Advocate
- Jody Perkins, Access and Outreach Specialist
- Marissa Smith, College Access & First-Year Transition Specialist
- Andrea Hernandez, Diversity & Inclusive Programs Coordinator

- Jayson Stokes, LGBT Center Coordinator
- Monica Rodriguez Mesa, Multicultural Counselor
- Olga Antonio, Mentor Coordinator
- Rebecca Tierney, TRIO Talent Search Program Director
- Tashina Barber, Multicultural Counselor
- Laurie Rader, Administrative Specialist
- Amanda Nielsen, Advisor; Retention Specialist
- Jamie Bernstein: Outdoor Program Assistant Coordinator
- Jenny Frame, Community Partner Coordinator
- Leslie Loeffel, Director of Davis Learning Support and Student Services
- Michicko Nakashima Lizarazo, Director for the Center of Multicultural Excellence
- Prasanna Reddy, Director for Tutoring and Supplemental Instruction
- Shari Leder, Career Services Advisor
- Sheldon Cheshire, Coordinator of Leadership Programs
- Teresa Holt, CCEL Program Coordinator
- Woodie Wood-Slaughter, Conference Services & Outside Area Scheduling Liaison
- Eric Amsel: Associate Provost for Academic Programs and Assessment
- Ashley Owens: Coordinator, First Year Experience
- Angie McLean: Disability Services - Psychological Disabilities, Learning Disabilities
- Juan Carlos Santisteban: Counseling Center Staff
- Student Leaders

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the two days of interviews consistent findings emerged that were constructive and others that have negatively impacted CAFYT. Here are some examples:

- CAFYT team's passion about what they are doing and what it means to the students they serve is palpable.
- CAFYT services are clearly student-focused.
- CAFYT services have increased particularly with the need of the Student 2 Student (S2S) program.
- CAFYT has potential for expansion with the right number of staff and budget, especially in the areas of first-year transition initiatives, such as text mentoring and Wildcat Scholars.
- CAFYT is an area that does not seem particularly well integrated within the Office of Access and Diversity.
- CAFYT has not evolved as seamlessly as initially envisioned, possibly because they are the youngest area lacking identity within Student Affairs and/or due to personnel related problems.

It is clear CAFYT is a critical aspect for the Division of Student Affairs. Unfortunately, people do not fully understand this area or may know that CAFYT is mainly responsible for providing outreach to these student populations for the entire University. This is an opportunity for CAFYT to pause, figure out their priorities and align those priorities for a more seamless integration for their students from recruitment through the transition process of becoming students at WSU.

## UNIT MISSION, GOALS & OUTCOMES

College Access & First Year Transition  
Mission Statement: “To increase college participation and success for historically underrepresented and first generation students, through partnerships with schools in our community. Working alongside students as they pursue and successfully complete post-secondary education, we provide targeted support and connections from the end of their senior year in high school through their first year at WSU.”

### Strengths

- There is a clear vision of CAFYT communicated through the mission statement. It explains why CAFYT exists and what it hopes to achieve. It articulates the area’s essential nature, its values and its work.
- Area goals and outcomes are drawn from the mission statement and are linked to institutional goals.
- Goals for S2S outreach tutoring program are modeled after federal grant program objectives because of their similarity. This helps CAFYT align itself to other areas of Access and Diversity.

### Challenges

- No goals, outcomes or statistical reports were found on the website.  
**Recommendation(s):**
  1. Make visible all relevant CAFYT assessment data on the website.

- It is unclear how often CAFYT tracks progress toward specific goals or how often it presents information about their work to an audience primarily of stakeholders from and outside the Division of Student Affairs.

**Recommendation(s):**

2. Create a robust and detailed strategy for communicating your relevant successes to stakeholders. Present information about your work, at minimum on a yearly basis, via area reports, infographics, snapshots, newsletters or other regular forms of communication such as team presentations.

- CAFYT staff did not articulate the impact of their programming initiatives in terms of divisional goals or learning outcomes.

**Recommendation(s):**

3. Begin a reporting structure that facilitates the efficient collection of data relevant to the accomplishments of area objectives and showcase your results.

*“We have a mandate to work with underrepresented students, those that are first-generation, low-income, and ethnically diverse students.” ~ Dr. Enrique Romo, Executive Director for Access and Diversity*



## PROGRAMS & SERVICES

CAFYT programs and services are listed below in two groupings:

- Pre-College:
  - Outreach Conferences such as the Multicultural Youth Conference (MYC) and Latinos In Action (LIA) conferences
  - Student2Student Outreach – includes Outreach Tutoring & Summer Summit Leadership Institute (SSLI)
  - Planning and execution of events such as School Partner Breakfast, Welcome Back Breakfast & Senior Recognition Night
  - Outreach Campus Visits mainly for junior high schools
  - FAFSA Completion
- First-Year Transition:
  - Undocumented Student Support
  - Summer Bridge
  - Participation in New Student Orientation
  - Text-Mentoring
  - Wildcat Scholars

### Strengths

- CAFYT has programs and services that help both pre-college and college students. This raises the visibility of CAFYT substantially.
- Programs and services help increase college access and participation of underrepresented students.
- CAFYT has strategic seating in campus-wide committees in which they can be a voice for their students.

- CAFYT is viewed as a fluid department that is willing to do what is needed when asked. They are willing to go the extra mile, particularly to help students.

### Challenges

- Name change and restructuring of CAFYT was thought to bring clarity and growth. However, CAFYT has become a more “nebulous and ambiguous” area. There remains a lack of distinctiveness as to what CAFYT is or does within the Office of Access & Diversity.

#### Recommendation(s):

4. This challenge presents an opportunity to step back and ask what your area should look like. Personalities aside, Access & Diversity Leadership and CAFYT staff should meet to think strategically about where they are as a unit and how to leverage their strengths. Also, staff should continue the conversations at the one-on-one level candidly discussing expectations and vision.

- There are limited working collaborations with certain departments within Access and Diversity. Lack of collaborative efforts are due to personality issues and lack of mutual understanding of the role of each area. During the interviews, departments were described as territorial and working in silos.

Recommendation(s):

5. Being entrenched in their own responsibilities and having personality differences makes it easy to forget departments not only exist but that they are all serving one main goal: fulfilling the mission of their institution. It is recommended for CAFYT to look beyond themselves to the other departments that play a part in its success. The benefits to your area, department, and division will be worth the effort.

- Expectations of CAFYT from other University areas are inconsistent and misaligned with the department's role. For example, CAFYT has become the "de-facto" area on helping students complete FAFSA applications. Without specific training, helping students complete their financial aid can be problematic for both staff and students. CAFYT is also consistently asked to table events for other departments. While tabling is a great way to increase visibility for CAFYT, events should be relevant to the roles and responsibilities of CAFYT. Lastly, due to unclear and undelineated roles for units within Access and Diversity, CAFYT receives referrals for students who should be seen by other departments.

Recommendation(s):

6. Have a delineation and dictate from the VP of Student Affairs to have the Office of Financial Aid

primarily work with students regarding FAFSA related issues.

- There is no clear process to refer students to the CAFYT area. The "hand-off" of students is not working well due to ineffective communication between Access and Diversity units.

Recommendation(s):

7. Have meetings that include all Access & Diversity office staff to examine and review the current process in student hand-off. Discuss and flowchart process improvements in favor of student success.

- There is a lack of coordination with some of the programming efforts of CAFYT, causing definite overlap between S2S and MYC. This overlap is visible outside of CAFYT, specifically with departments that help put together their events.

Recommendation(s):

8. CAFYT staff should jointly plan events when possible to maximize use of staff, facilities, and resources.

- Information on Access & Diversity, including CAFYT services is not correctly provided when tours are being done by the ambassadors.

Recommendation(s):

9. Train ambassadors on Access & Diversity areas and provide a script to use when talking about Access and Diversity areas.

## LEADERSHIP & STAFFING

CAFYT has one coordinator, two specialists, one part-time para-professional and 30-40 work-study student employees.

### Strengths

- CAFYT has dedicated and passionate people who believe in what they are doing. They have the drive, focus, and competence that keeps them focused on their students' success, which is at the core of their mission.
- Staff are perceived as advocates and are well respected by other division and university and community members. CAFYT staff do relatively well connecting with other academic programs and external partners, which helps raise awareness to the vision of Access & Diversity.
- CAFYT has diverse staff who do not fit the stereotypical demographic of the state, which helps underrepresented students identify with them. It's important to have that connection, especially when students do not see anybody who looks like them.
- CAFYT staff are role models who, by default, can help students see, understand, and appreciate the importance of higher education.
- CAFYT staff have the relatability factor. As they mentioned some have succeeded in overcoming barriers like those confronting their student population.

- CAFYT has a position specific to helping a wider and broader range of students, such as the Undocumented/DACAmented student population.
- CAFYT has an ideal number of hired student advocates (18) who serve the needs of the 11 high schools being served by the S2S program.
- Student employees stated they received proper training. All tutors attend AVID Tutorology training before they are sent out on the field, and the program is working toward having them become CRLA certified.
- The need for CAFYT student employees has increased. CAFYT has gone from servicing 6 schools to 8 schools, to now be partnering with 11 schools (9 high schools and 2 alternative education high schools) in providing S2S services.

### Challenges

- There are not enough full-time staff positions to fulfill all the expectations of CAFYT. Staff seem to be overloaded with tasks and responsibilities that at times hinders them from moving projects forward. Additionally, the lack of an advisor at CME impacts the work of CAFYT.

#### Recommendation(s):

**10.** Have conversations that lead the team to think more strategically about their workload. Shift the placement of CME duties.

**11.** Use performance evaluations to be more intentional on what they



are doing, looking closely at time management tactics.

**12.** Make their part-time position working with undocumented students a full-time position. Change the title to Undocumented Student Resource Advocate to help with the increase of undocumented students.

- CAFYT staff do not work cohesively and in a synergistic manner. Personality conflicts are visible to people outside the area. Additionally, it was mentioned that there are no feedback mechanisms from CAFYT leadership that enables for either under or over performance to be addressed or recognized.

Recommendation(s):

**13.** CAFYT could greatly benefit from professional training, team building exercises and retreats.

- There is a lack of transparency and trust in their communications. People are reticent to speak if they think it is going to impact their jobs.

Recommendation(s):

**14.** CAFYT staff and others within the Access and Diversity office need to be willing to let go of certain past issues. This will be key to fostering a culture of trust and understanding of their roles in their overarching purpose and goals.

- CAFYT staff are not given the flexibility and latitude to come up with alternative ideas or perspectives on how to approach their work. Micromanagement has caused lack of integration, productivity, confidence and, for some, drive.

Recommendation(s):

**15.** Micromanagement is mismanagement. Have team building exercises to assess behavior, communicate expectations and redefine lines of entrustment and professionalism.

- A CAFYT staff member does not meet the education requirements needed for the position.

Recommendation(s):

**16.** While a college degree may provide professionals a comprehensive foundation to work in the field of higher education, it cannot provide all the knowledge and experience to have a career in student affairs. If a degree is needed for a position, the staff member must continue their education geared towards completion as soon as possible. Administration in the Office of Access and Diversity must ensure the development of current employees in these areas.

- There is a concern that there are more work-study positions available than there are federal work-study dollars to fund the students to fill them. For CAFYT, there are only

allowed a certain number of work-study positions, and there are no guaranteed number of positions they will get each next year. There is no continuity of student tutors. Some students are not getting work-study notifications timely. This has made it challenging to train and place students in a timely manner at the campuses.

**Recommendation(s):**

**17.** Meet with the Office of Financial Aid to review resources. Provide information of current issues and needs to effectively begin the streamlining and strengthening of processes. Request at least 18 work-study positions to be given to CAFYT on a yearly basis.

**18.** Develop a cadre of work-study students who can provide consistency and continuity.

- Concern over the Utah Board of Regents decision to have in place a college access advisor in every high school in Utah. Staff is unclear how that will affect CAFYT and other Access and Diversity programs.

**Recommendation(s):**

**19.** This should not be a concern, rather it should be an opportunity to work beside someone in helping students understand access to and success in higher education, especially when under 50% of Utah high school graduates make it college after high school.

## FINANCIAL RESOURCES & BUDGET

The only financial resources and budget information provided to the review team was in the self-study report. The budget appears adequate for the current needs of the area.

### Strengths

- CAFYT has its own index that is now funded each year. In addition, two new index numbers have been set up for their summer bridge and conferences.
- CAFYT has been successful in acquiring at least one large scale grant which has expired since, and a couple of smaller grants.

### Challenges

- The fiscal picture for this area is not clear and does not make sense to everybody involved. There is a lack of understanding or knowledge that there have been monies specifically geared toward CAFYT. There is also the perception that growing the area is not an option unless they are getting additional grants.

**Recommendation(s):**

**20.** Train employees on budget process and philosophy to allow for better understanding of management of resources.

**21.** Student Affairs has made available grant funds that are \$10K dollars at a time that are

specifically tailored for assisting underrepresented students. Student Affairs administration is encouraging new ideas and CAFYT should apply.

**22.** Consider hiring a grant writer for the Division of Student Affairs to grow the area of college access through additional grants.

**23.** Continue the “push” for Weber State University to become a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Given the growing number of Latino or Hispanic (12%) students, this should become an institutional priority.

- The S2S index name has caused confusion when identifying the account. While the number will not change, the S2S title should be renamed to CAFYT.

Recommendation(s):

**24.** Have CAFYT coordinator request and follow the proper processes for the name change.

- Undocumented/undocumented program has limited funding.

Recommendation(s):

**25.** Look for private funding to provide more scholarships.

**26.** Work with the Writing Center to provide donor appeal and scholarship writing workshops for undocumented students.

## FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT & TECHNOLOGY

CAFYT facilities include several offices in a suite that shares a common study, lounge areas, and a front reception desk with other Access & Diversity programs. Space is shared by full-time and part-time staff.

### Strengths

- CAFYT is in a centrally located place on campus. They are in the union, which is the heart of the university.
- CAFYT and surrounding offices make their location feel like an inclusive home-like environment.
- CAFYT staff have learned to “make do” with the technology they have.
- Computer workstations are available for students and student workers.

### Challenges

- CAFYT shares office space with other programs causing space to be limited. Due to the tightness of space, FERPA concerns were brought up by the student workers who help fill out FAFSA applications. Additionally, there was a privacy concern regarding undocumented students who may be afraid to speak openly given the proximity.

Recommendation(s):

**27.** Speak to neighboring offices or suites of a potential partnership to be able to overflow the students to other areas within the building.

**28.** Redesign some of the front area to address problems of privacy and noise issues.

- Location of the office in the Union is not the best. It feels “dungeon-like” because they are in the bottom end quarter of the building. People don’t know where we they are located on campus and in the building.

Recommendation(s):

**29.** Consider redistribution of space and/or add directional signage.

- CAFYT technological equipment is lacking. Front computers for student use are not working. An attempt to get refurbished computers through the “computer shuffle” fell through as they did not get what they thought they were going to get. Additionally, there is a lack of understanding of the process to follow to replace technology when needed.

Recommendation(s):

**30.** Although computers are already being replaced, moving forward, there needs to be more transparency about the process of updating/replacing computers.

- Room space needed for conferences such as LIA and MYC is limited in the union building, which has forced CAFYT to conduct conferences during school breaks. It seems this affects negatively the visibility of the CAFYT events and WSU.

Recommendation(s):

**31.** Talk to faculty about possible space-sharing capabilities for student events. Hopefully this could create a shift of how faculty think about the importance for sharing their space.

- There is not a reliable or up-to-date (modern) tracking system used to track student services and student participation in activities.

Recommendation(s):

**32.** Resubmit, with high importance, the proposal submitted back in 2017 for a new tracking system.

**33.** Make it a priority to implement the use of Starfish, the Banner tracking component or an Access database to begin the tracking of student services.

*“It felt very much from the time I got here, that we make do with what we have, but understand now there is a process to follow acquire technology needs.” ~ CAFYT staff member*

## ETHICAL & LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

CAFYT team seems to be aware of the ethical and legal standards that are applicable and relevant to all aspects of their programs and services.

### Strengths

- FERPA trainings are ongoing as well as trainings on how to report safety and abuse issues.
- Staff follow established University procedures for minors on campus.
- There was mention of how campus police and risk management have become much more acutely aware of minors on campus issues and safety.
- CAFYT ensures parent permission is documented to monitor liability and safety for their events.
- Volunteers who participate in the LIC or MYC conferences are registered with the police department, have background checks, and go through specific training.

### Challenges

- High schools are the primary working sites for student employees.

Recommendation(s):

**34.** CAFYT should pay close attention to labor laws governing student employees. They should also work closely with the WSU Office of Human Resources to ensure relevant policies are being followed.

## ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

CAFYT has clearly defined and measurable unit goals and student learning outcomes that are consistent with the unit's mission.

### Strengths

- CAFYT uses multiple assessment methods to provide information about their programs and services. This is important since relying on only one method to provide information about the program will only reflect a part of students' achievement.
- Methods of assessment chosen allow the assessment of both strengths and weaknesses.

### Challenges

- No clear mention of using established accreditation criteria/standards in the CAFYT assessment plan.

Recommendation(s):

**35.** CAFYT should identify how their programs and services are using the standards and guidelines published in "CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education" by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS).



- CAFYT does not seem to have a culture of assessment accountability. There was no mention of whether CAFYT staff has participated in a unit-level assessment project or if they have actively leveraged assessment results to improve the quality of their work.

**Recommendation(s):**

**36. Learning and improving data literacy is a never-ending process. As such, it is essential CAFYT keep assessment and evaluation on their radar. They must help their staff become familiar with the basic principles of evaluation in order to allow them to become confident in their ability to do assessment. They can achieve this by having assessment boot camps or training sessions for the entire staff. This will make them more open to the ideology of assessment and the way it can impact their work.**

*“CAFYT has their work cut out for them. They have to break down the silos to work together to address the needs of their students.” ~ Weber State University Administrator*

## CONCLUSION

Weber State University and the Office of Access and Diversity have great reason to be gratified about the focus, commitment, and drive that comes from CAFYT. The passion CAFYT has is witnessed among the stakeholders who know them and is demonstrated through their work together. It is evident that The Office of Access and Diversity has clearly gone through several difficult periods of restructuring and transition without having allotted themselves enough time for adjusting. This has caused for CAFYT to not be in a place where they have the visibility and connections needed both within Weber State University and with the broader community.

CAFYT, together with other units in the Office of Access and Diversity, need to make an explicit, visible pathway underrepresented student can follow in their transition to and through college.

Additionally, CAFYT needs to be more engaged with the first-year experience curricula and be critically and intentionally aligned with their retention programs, particularly those from the Center for Multicultural Excellence. Lastly, CAFYT must have a continuous push to tell their story, but they need to know who they are first, in order to best move this area forward.

**Go Get ‘Em, Wildcats!**