The Non-Graduating "Super" Senior Survey

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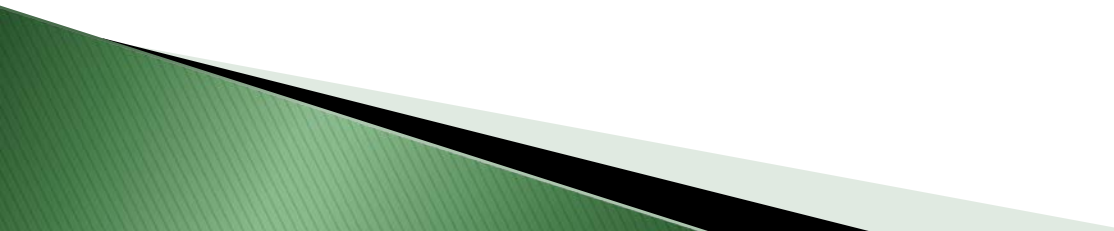   Database Coordinator

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A Vicious Cycle

- Budget shortfalls have led to reduced course offerings which in turn has resulted in course bottlenecks.

- This situation can be exacerbated by registration priorities, such as those granted to seniors close to graduation.

- For example: Super seniors with registration priority take space in required courses which then reduces the availability in those courses for other students.

- Finding ways to help seniors graduate sooner, and therefore reducing the likelihood of their becoming super seniors is key to improving graduation rates and increasing course availability.

BACKGROUND

▸ In March of 2013, a sample of students who had accumulated over 120 units but who had not yet graduated or applied to graduate were asked to participate in focus groups.

▸ These focus groups were held to help us assess how well the University has contributed to the student goal of degree attainment, as well as to allow students to relate what barriers might have prevented them from graduating sooner.

Attendants' Profile:

Major	Count	Overall Units	Count	%
Accountancy	3	120-129	5	18.5%
Business Administration	1	130-139	12	44.4%
Biological Sciences	4	140-149	5	18.5%
Civil Engineering	1	150 and up	5	18.5%
Communication Studies	1	**Total**	**27**	**100.0%**
Computer Science	2	Overall GPA		
Teacher's Education	1	2.0-2.9	15	55.6%
Electrical & Electronic	1	3.0 -4.0	12	44.4%
General Management	2	**Total**	**27**	**100.0%**
Government	2	Gender		
Humanities	1	Female	16	53.3%
Interior Design	1	Male	14	46.7%
Mathematics	1	**Total**	**30**	**100.0%**
Mechanical Engineering	1	Ethnicity		
Music	1	Native American	1	3.4%
Psychology	2	Asian	4	13.8%
Real Estate and Land Use	1	Black	3	10.3%
Sociology	2	Latino	3	10.3%
Unknown	2	Multi-racial	2	6.9%
Total	**30**	Other	4	13.8%
		White	12	41.4%
		Total	**29**	**100.0%**

FACILITATING THE FOCUS GROUP

- An independent facilitator (a faculty member from within our Communications Department) with a professional background in administering focus groups was enlisted to lead our focus group discussions.

- In order to keep the discussions on track we created an outline of topics relating to issues which could have prevented them from graduating sooner.

OUTLINING DISCUSSION TOPICS
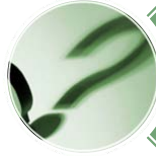
How many years did you think that it would take you to earn your degree when you first entered this university?

How close are you to graduation?
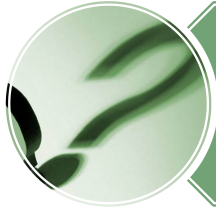
How many units have you completed so far?

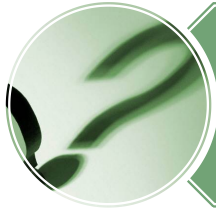How many classes have you taken, on average, per semester?

Have you applied for graduation?
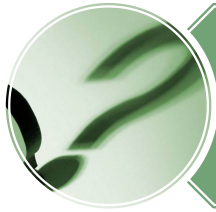
Do you know the procedure?
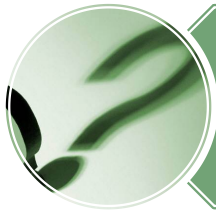
OUTLINING DISCUSSION TOPICS

Do you have a second major or a minor?

Have you changed your major? How many times have you changed your major?

Have you been employed while enrolled at this university? Approximately how many hours did you work?

What major roadblocks prevented you from earning a degree within 4 (for transfers) or 6 years (for native freshmen)?

What would you say is the number one reason you have not yet graduated?

Possible reasons you have not yet graduated:

- Fitting required courses around your work schedule
- Changed your major
- Difficulty getting GE courses, prerequisites, and major courses
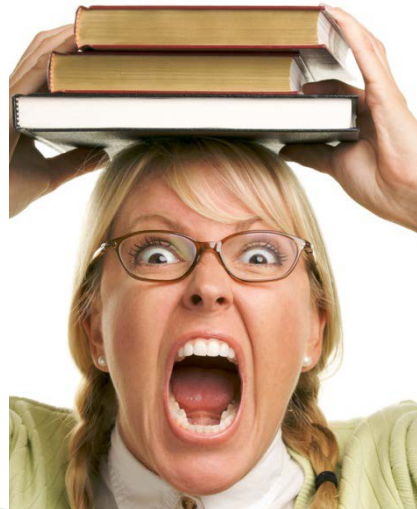
Have you experienced difficulties or frustrations with course availability?

Seats were not available in required GE courses

Seats were not available in required major prerequisite courses/upper division courses

Required courses in my major were not offered consistently

Have you experienced difficulties or frustrations with academic advising?

- Unclear Major/GE requirements
- Received wrong information regarding General Education/major requirements and took extra courses as a result
- Sought help from an Advisor but did not receive clear information regarding General Education and or Major requirements
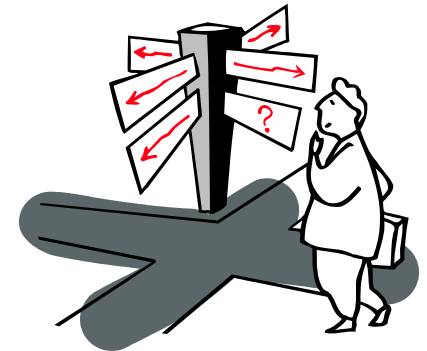
Have you experienced difficulties with the degree evaluation office?

- Applied for graduation without seeking assistance or advising
- Sought help in applying for graduation but did not receive sufficient information
- Was recently informed that one or two additional courses were needed in order to graduate
- Confused by conflicting advice received from my major advisor, the Advising Center, and/or the Degree Evaluation Office
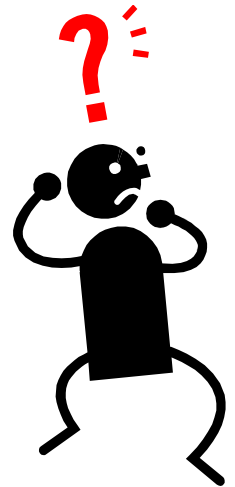
COMMON THEMES

Student comments and discussions recorded during the focus groups were transcribed and separated into common themes.

Individual comments were not scrutinized for accuracy.

CATEGORIES DERIVED

Advising

Transfer
Students &
Transferring
Units

Courses &
Course
Availability

Non-traditional
Students

General
Education
Requirements

Type of Major &
Changing Majors

Graduation
Requirements
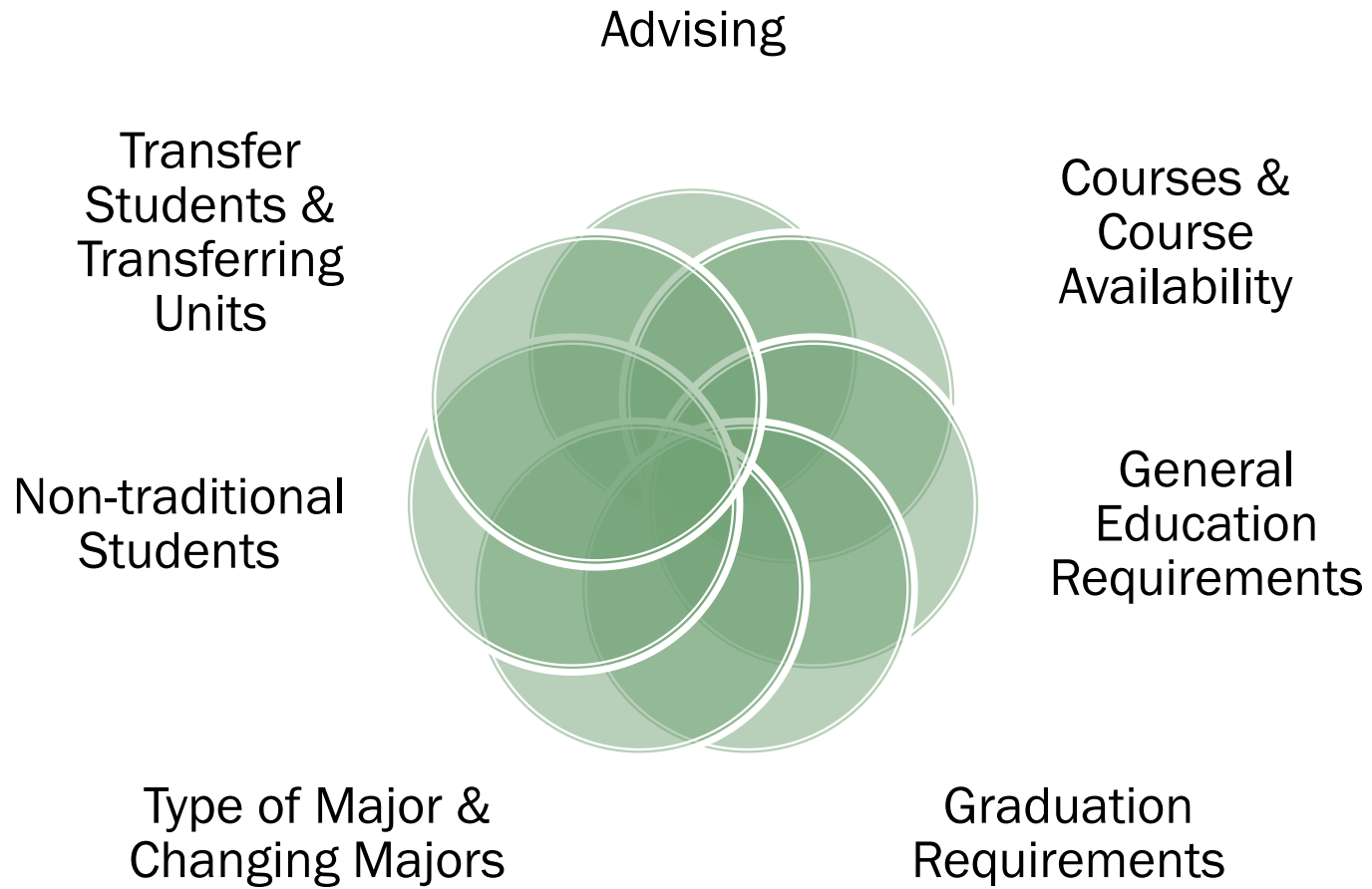
STUDENT COMMENTS REGARDING "ADVISING"

Several students had to retake courses that they had previously taken at a Community College due to poor advising from both institutions.

This led to course units being transferred despite the fact that the course did not meet GE and/or Major requirements at Sacramento State.

Major and GE requirements are subject to change which adds to the confusion.

Students had trust issues with respect to information coming from their advisors, some felt that they were better off researching issues on their own.

Students need clear direction. They want a reliable roadmap through the coursework to graduation.

COURSES & AVAILABILITY

▸ Waitlists, registration priorities, and impacted courses/programs are roadblocks that make graduation even harder to attain.

▸ Even if there is room accommodate students in a lecture hall, we are hindered by the limitations of available lab space. Lab space restricts the pipeline of majors moving through the program's coursework.

▸ Registration priority issues. Who gets priority and when? Students closest to graduation often need the most help but get the least.

▸ Help your existing students first. We need to lower the student population in order to allow students to flow through the system faster and graduate on time.

▸ Programs and class offerings have been severely impacted by budget cuts.

▸ Half of the students had at least 1 course delay their progression to graduation. When students can't get into the class they need they often take whatever is available.

▸ Student took many "burning classes" to stay enrolled and maintain full-time status, qualify for Financial Aid, etc...

GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

GE requirements are not always relevant (or useful) in relation to a student's major.

GE requirements are overly complex and difficult to navigate.

Focus group participants questioned the need for 9 units of upper division GE coursework, as well as the Foreign Language requirement.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

- One student took a graduation workshop, workshop counselors argued with one another, contradicted each other on course requirements, and gave vague/bad advice ("sometimes yes, sometimes no" type responses).

- Core courses are only offered once a semester or once a year.

- Degree requirements posted on-line to sites such as *assist.org*, departmental and campus-wide websites are not always up-to-date.

MAJORS & CHANGING MAJORS

- Rigid structure of the University, different departments and colleges on campus can be very self-focused, creating silos.
- Departments with a broad area of study can take longer for students in that major to find their focus which complicates the critical path to earning a degree.
- Some majors keep students waiting for long periods of time. While waiting for formal acceptance into the program, students took a variety of other courses not relevant to their major.
- Changing majors during their college career created unit accumulation
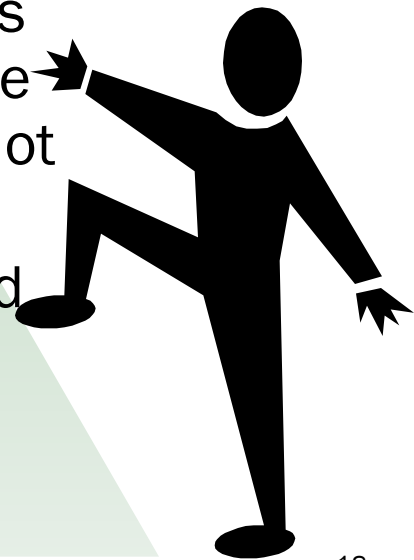
NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

- Academic records for older returning students are so dated that they cannot be verified.

- It can take up to a year to get old/archived transfer records tracked and processed at Sac State.

- Older students were frustrated by having to retake classes that they had taken many years ago.

- Suggested we have specialized/dedicated advisors for non-traditional students to aid in the transfer process to help them navigate the many unique issues/situations that they may face at Sac State.

TRANSFERS & TRANSFER UNITS

If students had the ability to take a test for an exemption instead of retaking a class previously taken at community colleges that would help them progress to graduation sooner.

Why are courses taken at a campus inside the CSU system not transferrable to other campuses within that system?

Community college advisors told students that some units would transfer to Sacramento State, which ended up being incorrect, resulting in having to retake classes to fulfill GE/Major requirements.

Better communication between the community colleges and Sacramento State is needed so that information regarding transfer units are up-to-date, consistent, and reliable.

Expanding course equivalents from community colleges as they pertain to fulfilling requirements at Sac State will reduce the amount of courses taken.

GENERAL COLLEGE EXPERIENCES

- All students in the focus groups had taken significantly longer to graduate than anticipated - 50% of them were frustrated by that fact.

- Most shared the blame (with the University) in relation to why they have accumulated so many units.

- Some felt that the University is more concerned with the funds students bring in through tuition and enrollment than with their actual education and welfare.

- Campus beautification and cosmetic upgrades are taking precedence while classrooms and lab space are outdated and ill-equipped.

- California's Master Plan is broken, outdated, and needs to be revised or scrapped. It is not applicable to the current educational environment or the needs of today's students.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS WERE USED TO DEVELOP A SURVEY INSTRUMENT

- Results from the focus groups were then reviewed and analyzed to aid in identifying the reasons why some seniors acquired more units than necessary to earn degrees in their majors.

- Common themes were then used to develop a survey instrument to administer to the entire super senior population.

SURVEY SAMPLE & METHODOLOGY

▸ A Non-graduating Senior Survey was designed to allow "super seniors" the opportunity to relate and identify barriers which might have prevented them from graduating sooner.

▸ This was administered to all non-graduating seniors who had over 120 cumulative units prior to the spring 2013 semester but who had not yet applied to graduate.

▸ 1,650 survey questionnaires were distributed. 423 surveys were returned, for an overall response rate of 26%.

Non-Graduating Senior Survey (Native Respondents)
Student Characteristics

	ALS	BUS	ECS	ED	HHS	NSM	SCI	SP	UND	Total
Distributed	37	40	86	6	70	74	41	2	4	360
Responded	7	11	21	2	20	19	8	0	0	88
Response Rate	18.9%	27.5%	24.4%	33.3%	28.6%	25.7%	19.5%	0.0%	0.0%	24.4%

	Arts & Letters		Business		Engineering & Computer Science		Education		Health & Human Services		Natural Science & Math		Social Sciences		Total	
	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean
Academic Characteristics																
Overall Units	7	127	11	139	21	135	2	136	20	134	19	134	8	132	88	134
Overall GPA	7	3.18	11	3.06	21	2.96	2	2.47	20	3.06	19	2.92	8	3.04	88	3.00

	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Gender																
Female	5	71.4%	9	81.8%	6	28.6%	2	100%	11	55.0%	14	73.7%	6	75.0%	53	60.2%
Male	2	28.6%	2	18.2%	15	71.4%			9	45.0%	5	26.3%	2	25.0%	35	39.8%
Total	7	100%	11	100%	21	100%	2	100%	20	100%	19	100%	8	100%	88	100%
Ethnicity																
Asian	2	28.6%	7	63.6%	3	14.3%	0	0.0%	8	40.0%	7	36.8%	4	50.0%	31	35.2%
Black	1	14.3%	0	0.0%	2	9.5%	0	0.0%	2	10.0%	1	5.3%	0	0.0%	6	6.8%
Latino	0	0.0%	2	18.2%	5	23.8%	0	0.0%	4	20.0%	4	21.1%	3	37.5%	18	20.5%
Multi	1	14.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	5.3%	0	0.0%	2	2.3%
Other	0	0.0%	1	9.1%	3	14.3%	2	100%	2	10.0%	2	10.5%	0	0.0%	10	11.4%
White	3	42.9%	1	9.1%	8	38.1%	0	0.0%	4	20.0%	4	21.1%	1	12.5%	21	23.9%
Total	7	100%	11	100%	21	100%	2	100%	20	100%	19	100%	8	100%	88	100%

Non-Graduating Senior Survey (Transfer Respondents)
Student Characteristics

	ALS	BUS	ECS	ED	HHS	NSM	SCI	SP	UND	Total
Distributed	156	277	253	19	240	162	170	2	11	1290
Responded	43	77	61	5	56	39	51	1	2	335
Response Rate	27.6%	27.8%	24.1%	26.3%	23.3%	24.1%	30.0%	50.0%	18.2%	26.0%

	Arts & Letters		Business		Engineering & Computer Science		Education		Health & Human Services		Natural Science & Math		Social Sciences		Special Programs		Undecided		Total	
	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean
Academic Characteristics																				
Overall Units	43	137.6	77	133.5	61	138.9	5	133.2	56	135.9	39	142.6	51	140.0	1	121.0	2	144.0	335	137.5
Overall GPA	43	3.1	77	3.1	61	3.0	5	3.0	56	3.1	39	3.0	51	2.9	1	3.8	2	2.7	335	3.0

	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Gender																				
Female	25	58.1%	41	53.2%	17	27.9%	5	100%	39	69.6%	27	69.2%	35	68.6%	1	100%	1	50.0%	191	57.0%
Male	18	41.9%	36	46.8%	44	72.1%			17	30.4%	12	30.8%	16	31.4%			1	50.0%	144	43.0%
Total	43	100%	77	100%	61	100%	5	100%	56	100%	39	100%	51	100%	1	100%	2	100%	335	100%
Ethnicity																				
American Indian	0	0.0%	2	2.6%	2	3.3%	0	0.0%	1	1.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5	1.5%
Asian	1	2.3%	22	28.6%	11	18.0%	3	60.0%	13	23.2%	7	17.9%	10	19.6%	0	0.0%	2	100%	69	20.6%
Black	3	7.0%	7	9.1%	2	3.3%	0	0.0%	4	7.1%	4	10.3%	3	5.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	23	6.9%
Foreign	0	0.0%	2	2.6%	1	1.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	0.9%
Latino	10	23.3%	7	9.1%	6	9.8%	0	0.0%	9	16.1%	4	10.3%	5	9.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	41	12.2%
Multi	2	4.7%	3	3.9%	3	4.9%	0	0.0%	7	12.5%	4	10.3%	8	15.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	27	8.1%
Other	2	4.7%	4	5.2%	5	8.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	5.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	14	4.2%
White	25	58.1%	30	39.0%	31	50.8%	2	40.0%	22	39.3%	20	51.3%	22	43.1%	1	100%	0	0.0%	153	45.7%
Total	43	100%	77	100%	61	100%	5	100%	56	100%	39	100%	51	100%	1	100%	2	100%	335	100%

SURVEY REPORTING DEVELOPMENT

Survey **topics** ranged from unit accumulation, major type, course availability, advising, degree and general education requirements, and transfer unit acceptance.

Survey **findings** were broken out into 6 categories: Units and Time to Degree, Majors, Employment, Course Enrollment, Advising Sources, and Roadblocks to Graduation.

Survey findings were also broken down by native and transfer students.

SURVEY RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

- *58%* of native (N) and **67%** transfers (T) super seniors affirmed that they knew "*the current total number of units you have completed towards your degree*"

- Of those who answered yes, **67%** (N) and **47%** (T) of the respondents stated that they had completed approximately 120-139 units toward their degree.

- *49%* of the native respondents asserted that when they first entered this university, they thought that it would only take them 4 years to earn their degree.

- **52%** of the transfer student respondents asserted that when they first transferred to this university, they thought that it would only take them 2 years to earn their degree.

PRIMARY MAJORS

The top three Primary Majors for **native** super seniors were:

- *Business – 13%*
- *Kinesiology & Health Science – 13%*
- *Mechanical Engineering – 11%*

Native

The top three Primary Majors for **transfer** super seniors were:

- *Business – 23%*
- *Biology – 8%*
- *Kinesiology & Health Science – 7%*

Transfers

MAJORS, MINORS, & MAJOR CHANGES

- **73%** of the native respondents reported that they didn't "*have a second major*"
- *67% stated that they didn't "have a minor."*

- *70%* of the native respondents affirmed that they had changed majors
- **56%** of those respondents indicated that they had only changed majors once.

Native

- **89%** of the transfer respondents reported that they didn't "*have a second major*"
- *68% transfers stated that they didn't "have a minor."*

- *30%* of the transfer respondents affirmed that they had changed majors
- **56%** indicated that they had changed majors once.
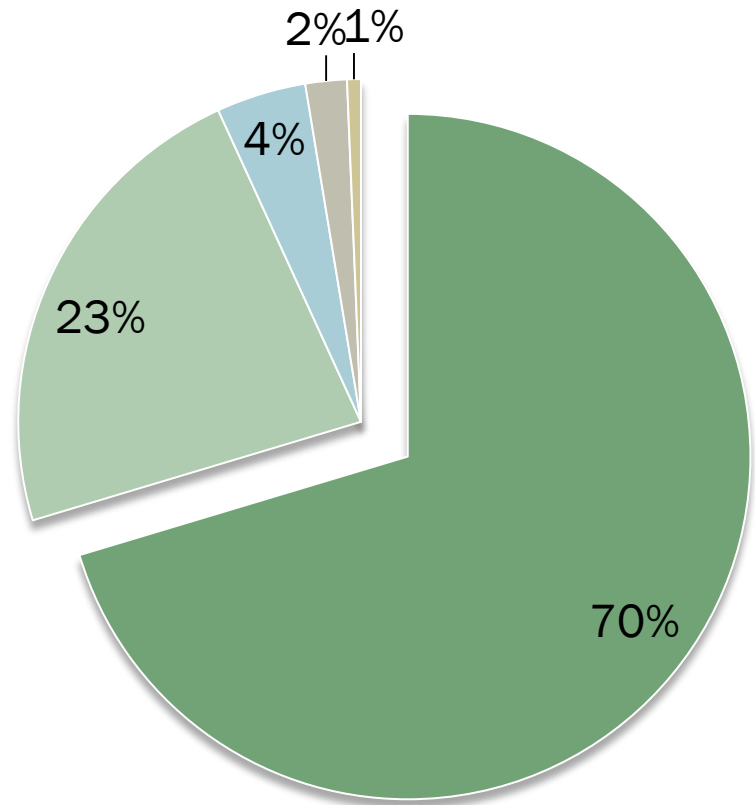
Transfers

CHANGING MAJORS

Native

- Never changed
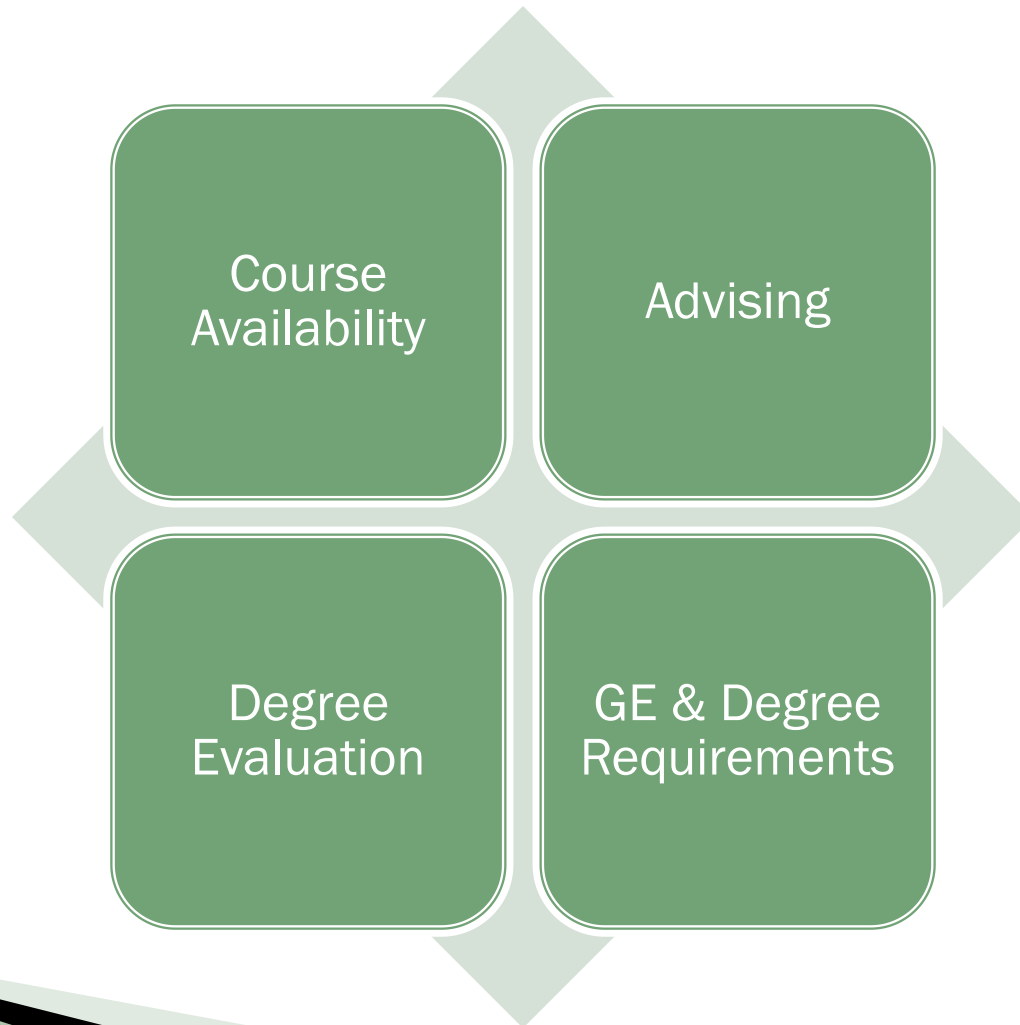- Changed twice
- Changed once
- Changed 3 times
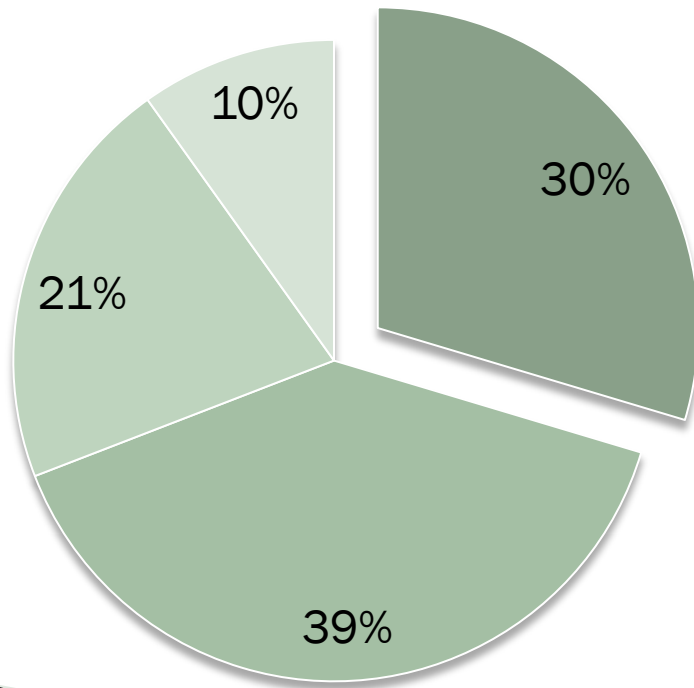
Transfers

- Never changed
- Changed twice
- Changed 4 times
- Changed once
- Changed 3 times

Native: 30%, 39%, 21%, 10%

Transfers: 70%, 23%, 4%, 2%, 1%

FOUR MAIN AREAS

Identified as Roadblocks to Graduation

Course Availability

Advising

Degree Evaluation

GE & Degree Requirements

COURSE AVAILABILITY

When asking super seniors to identify roadblocks which may have impacted their ability to graduate, **Course Availability had the highest degree** of impact among the four areas.
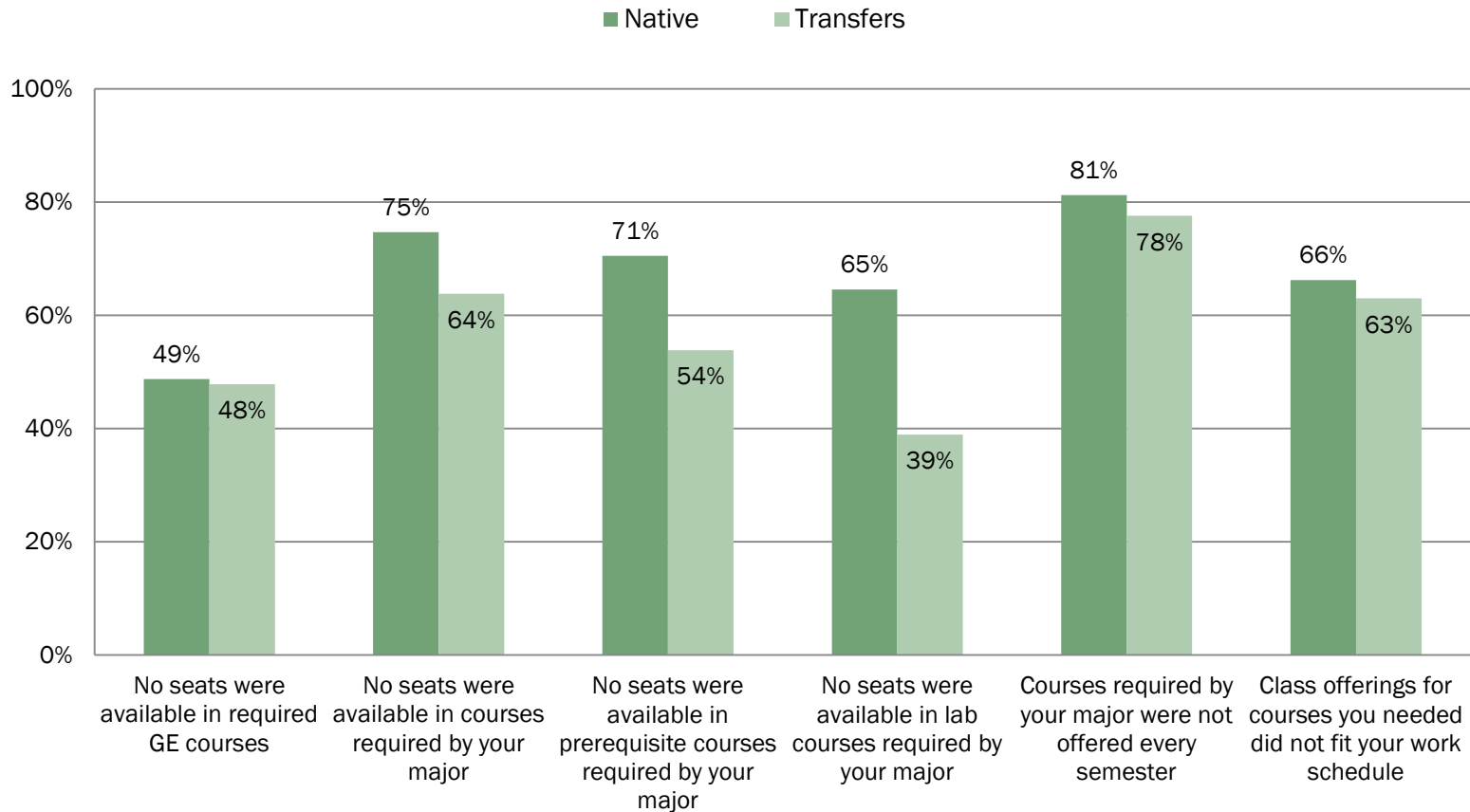
Top 2 factors within Course Availability which impacted student progress towards graduation

- *81% (N), 78% (T) – Courses required by your major were not offered every semester*
- *75% (N), 64% (T) – No seats were available in courses required by your major*

The 3rd top factor was different for Natives and Transfers

- *71% (N) – No seats were available in prerequisite courses required by your major*
- *63% (T) – Class offerings for courses you needed did not fit your work schedule*

ROADBLOCKS: COURSE AVAILABILITY

Native ■ Transfers

| Category	Native	Transfers
No seats were available in required GE courses	49%	48%
No seats were available in courses required by your major	75%	64%
No seats were available in prerequisite courses required by your major	71%	54%
No seats were available in lab courses required by your major	65%	39%
Courses required by your major were not offered every semester	81%	78%
Class offerings for courses you needed did not fit your work schedule	66%	63%

*These percentages reflect the selections from respondents who chose "Very much" or "Somewhat ".
Other response options were "Very little" and "Not at all".

ADVISING SOURCES

The top three Advising Sources for super seniors seeking advice about selecting courses for their majors were:

- *89% (N), 80% (T)– The University Catalog (paper or online)*
- *82% (N), 72% (T)– Various faculty members in your major department*
- *80% (N), 80% (T)– Your assigned advisor in your major department*

IMPORTANCE OF ADVISING SOURCES
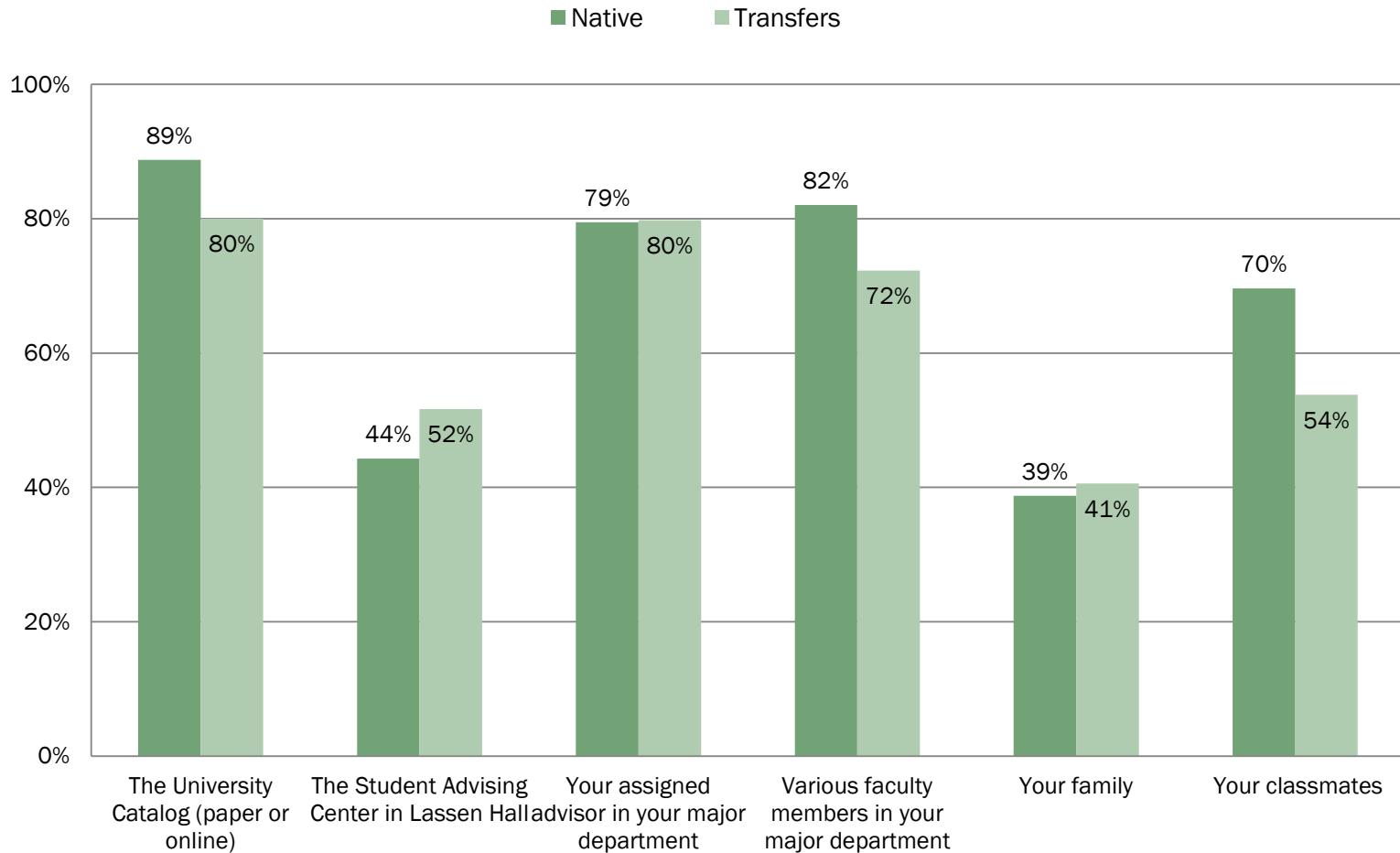
*These percentages reflect the selections from respondents who chose "Very important" or "Somewhat important ".
Other response options were "Slightly important" and "Not at all important".

ADDITIONAL ADVISING SOURCES UTILIZED
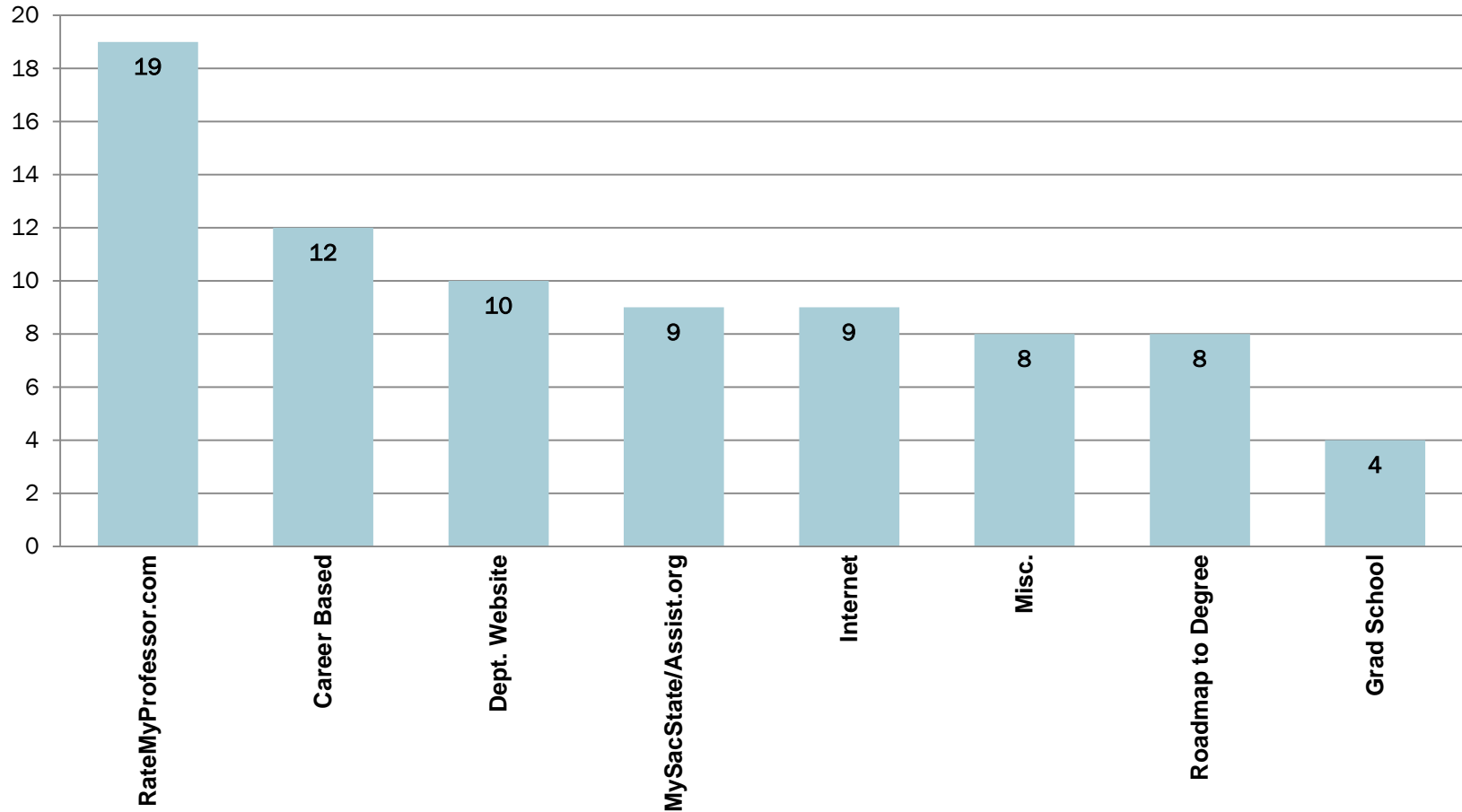
*These figures are based on the frequency of occurrence within specific comment categories. Numbers include both Native and Transfer Students.

ADVISING ISSUES

When asking super seniors to identify attributes of Advising which may have impacted their ability to graduate, the following had the highest rated degree of impact:

▸ *50% (N), 32% (T) – I was confused by different/conflicting advice that I received from my major advisor, the Student Advising Center, and/or the Degree Evaluation Office*

▸ *33% (N), 35% (T) – The separation of advising services provided by major advisors, the Student Advising Center, and the Degree Evaluation Office is not clearly defined*

The 3rd top factor was different for Natives and Transfers

▸ *58% (N) – I sought help from the Student Advising Center but I did not receive clear information regarding General Education requirements and took extra courses as a result*

▸ *27% (T) – I sought help from my major advisor but did not receive clear information regarding major course requirements and took extra courses as a result*

DEGREE EVALUATION

When asking super seniors to identify attributes of Degree Evaluation which may have impacted their ability to graduate, the following had the highest rated degree of impact:

- *30% (N), 21% (T) – I did not realize that I was close to graduation*
- *30% (N), 27% (T) – I did not know the deadline for applying for graduation*
- *23% (N) – I applied for graduation without seeking assistance or advising*
- *25% (T) – I was recently informed that I needed 1 or 2 additional courses in order to graduate*

GENERAL EDUCATION AND DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

- **23% (N), 37% (T)** of respondents felt that unclear General Education requirements had an impact on their ability to graduate

- **14% (N), 23% (T)** felt that unclear Degree requirements had an impact.

Additional Topics Outside the Four Common Areas of Student Concern

TRANSFERRING UNITS (NATIVE)

Contrary to popular belief, many native students do in fact attempt to transfer college units to Sacramento State at some point in their college careers.

Some of these students take courses at community colleges over the summer or at other colleges to take advantage of lower fees.

- **51% (N)** respondents indicated that they had attempted to *"transfer units from another college to Sacramento State"*
- **90% (N)** *of those who had* attempted to transfer units responded that all of the units that they had attempted to transfer were accepted for credit at Sacramento State.
- **75% (N)** of the respondents felt that taking courses at another college which did not transfer as credit for *General Education* at Sacramento State was a factor which impacted their ability to graduate as they had planned.
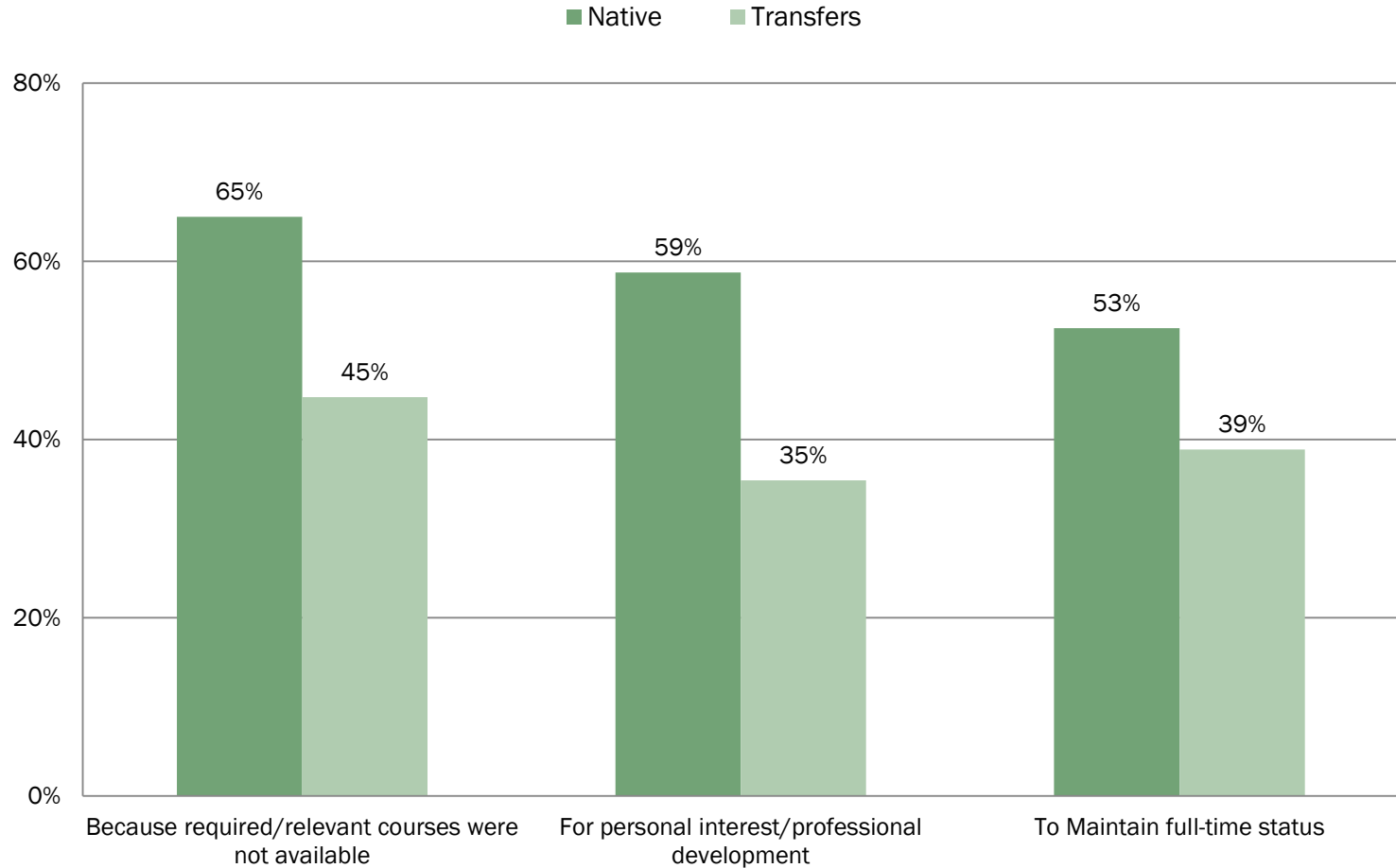
TRANSFERRING UNITS (TRANSFERS)

44% (T) of those who had attempted to transfer units responded that all of the units that they had attempted to transfer were accepted for credit at Sac State

54% (T) stated that taking courses at a community college which weren't accepted for credit at Sac State was a relevant factor impacting their ability to graduate.

40% (T) indicated that taking courses at other 4 year colleges that weren't accepted at Sac State was a factor.

TOOK COURSES THAT WERE NOT REQUIRED

Legend: ■ Native ■ Transfers

Category	Native	Transfers
Because required/relevant courses were not available	65%	45%
For personal interest/professional development	59%	35%
To Maintain full-time status	53%	39%

REPEATING COURSES

- **70% (N)** of the respondents stated that they had "*repeated a course at Sacramento State*"

- **78% (N)** *responding that they had repeated between 1 and* 4 courses.

- **58% (T)** of the respondents stated that they <u>had never</u> "*repeated a course at Sacramento State*"

- **100% (T)** *of those who had repeated a course stated that they had only repeated a single course*

EMPLOYMENT

In relation to working while enrolled, **89% (N), 73% (T)** of the respondents indicated that they had *"been employed while taking classes."*

53% (N), 34% (T) of those who were employed stated that they had worked approximately 11-20 hours per week while enrolled.

The Non-Graduating Senior Survey Report (which also contains a complete listing of the student comments collected during the focus groups) can be found online at the following location:

www.csus.edu/oir/Reports/Non_Graduating_Senior_Survey_2013.pdf

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