

Trading spaces

Transferring to Grinnell can be both a frustrating and rewarding experience

by Josh Cooley

"My biggest fear [about transferring] was whether or not I would be able to establish valuable relationships with people halfway through the year. By second semester, most students have settled into seemingly impenetrable groups with which they are comfortable."—Gina Tarullo '06

"There's a negative stigma attached to transferring. You are alienated from the student body because students assume that if there was something wrong with your old school, there is something wrong with you."—Vanessa Gennarelli '05

"My advice to future transfer students? Try your hardest to make friends because nobody's necessarily going to make friends with you."—Jon Bacino '05

Five percent of students did not begin their collegiate experience at Grinnell. They are the 79 transfer students currently enrolled at Grinnell; they blend into the community, yet they have their own unique subculture. Their perceptions of the campus are different from those of other students because they have a reference point with which to compare Grinnell, for better or for worse. These students have lived in different dorms, eaten different dining hall food and attended schools with different class sizes, climates and social atmospheres. They are regular students, but their adjustment to Grinnell is more difficult than that of first-years making the transition from high school to college.

Difficulties associated with transferring

Adjusting to Grinnell academically can pose problems for transfer students. Though the administration is considerate about accepting most of their credits, the rejection of just a few credits can artificially lower a student's class year. Sam Eckstut '05 explained how he faced this problem.

"58 out of about 64 of my credits transferred," he said. One needs 60 credits to be classified as a junior, so Eckstut was classified as a second-semester sophomore. He was fortunate enough to be treated as a junior with regard to housing, but he still had to go through the hassle of applying to graduate early, in order to catch up with his class.

Another problem faced by transfer students is their inability to visit prospective schools once they decide to transfer. There are no prospective weekends for admitted transfer students, and most students are too busy with their college coursework to travel out to the middle of Iowa. Some transfer students like Bacino and Tarullo had the opportunity to visit the campus before transferring to Grinnell, but others like Gennarelli weren't so lucky. "[Once] I decided to transfer," said Gennarelli, "it was difficult to select possible schools [to transfer to]. There's no mechanism for colleges to advertise to transfer students."

A third disadvantage of transferring to Grinnell is that it limits study-abroad options. Study-abroad students are substantially underrepresented in the transfer population; only a small percentage of transfer students study abroad compared to all Grinnell students. "You get screwed because no one tells you that you need to take 12 credits in each division to study abroad," said Gennarelli. "And by the time you start considering the requirements you need to fulfill, it's too late." Students who transfer mid-year have the added problem of trying to adhere to the course requirements necessary for study-abroad because of the limited number of classes available to them.

Students who transfer into Grinnell during the fall semester face the problem of being thrown into New Student Orientation. While this helps them adjust to campus life, it groups them with first-years, which Gennarelli found frustrating. "First-years have different mindsets [than transfers]," she said. "They are way more excited about being at college for the first time than we are."

Bacino also noted that tutorial encourages first-years to form strong social bonds with each other rather than with transfers. Cathy Geddes '07 noted that because she participated in NSO, she was unable to make friends with other students her own age. Her friends became the other first-years who were also looking to make new friends during NSO. Having hundreds of other new students with whom to bond helps Fall transfers adjust socially; those who come to Grinnell in the spring, however, aren't so lucky.

"I felt abandoned by the administration," said Tarullo, who transferred to Grinnell in the last semester. "I can't remember any administrative attempt to check in on me or see how I was adjusting," she said. Aside from a pizza luncheon the Saturday before term begins, spring semester transfers don't have an orientation. There is little time for adjustment, as



When Sam Eckstut '05 transferred to Grinnell, not all of his credits transferred with him. Technically a second semester sophomore, Eckstut must apply for early graduation.
 photo by Marie Tan

their next day is consumed with the hassles of registration and the following day they start classes.

Registration is a nightmare, according to Bacino, because many of the classes are already filled up, since students who were on campus during the first semester have pre-registered for classes. The administration tries to improve this situation by putting transfers at the front of the registration line, but they don't save spots for transfer students on class lists. "[Grinnell] should have a more extensive transfer orientation [for the second semester], like they do during the first semester," he said. "I felt pretty damn lost."

Faced with the above difficulties, many transfer students have considered another move. "Many of my friends who are transfer students have at least thought about transferring out of Grinnell," said Bacino, "if they haven't actually tried doing so." Transfer students find it easier to consider leaving Grinnell because they are already familiar with the transfer process. As they've already written the essays, the application is easier to fill out the second time around. They are less intimidated by the prospect of adjusting to a new social atmosphere than other students are since they have already gone through the experience of having to make friends at a new school.

Due to their status as transfer students, however, they often feel trapped at Grinnell. "I thought about transferring [out of Grinnell]," said Bacino. "But I realized that if I transferred again, the largest time I will have spent in one school won't even be the majority of my college career." Transfer students also feel obligated to stay at Grinnell because graduate schools look down on students who have transferred multiple times during their college careers.

Bureaucratic tape

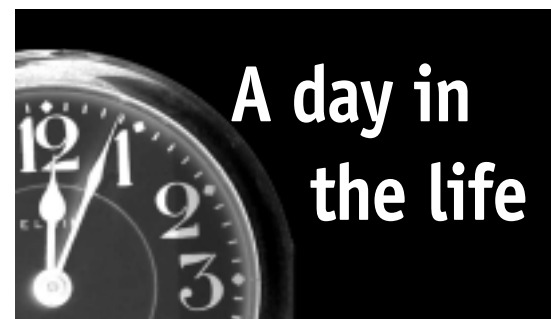
Many transfer students felt there was an implicit bond among themselves. "I used to think transferring was a rare occurrence," said Bacino, despite the fact that both of his parents were also transfer students. "But now it seems like the rule rather than the exception. Almost half of my friends are transfer students." Because of this bond, transfers feel that Grinnell should try to matriculate a larger number of transfers.

Assistant Dean of Admissions Misty Huacuja works with transfer students, and says that Grinnell wants to enroll transfer students. "[They] are important in the diversity of viewpoints that they bring to the college," she said. However, she acknowledged that Grinnell only accepts between ten and twenty percent of these applicants—substantially less than its overall acceptance rate of about percent for students applying from high school.

Acceptance rates can vary widely. Students transferring during the spring semester have seen rates reach as high as 63 percent in 1999, though the rate was only 11 percent ten years earlier. "The number of transfer students we accept is associated with the number of available beds on campus," said Huacuja.

Grinnell matriculates many transfer students each year by offering better financial aid packages than other colleges and universities. Gennarelli believes that financial aid is more of an issue for transfer students than it is for first-years, because transfer students are shortchanged by the aid process. Admissions does not consider transfer students' applications until they have made decisions on all first-year applicants. Since these applicants are accepted on a need-blind basis, the aid given to the first-year class

Transfers, cont. on p.12



Adam Booth '04

5:00 p.m. Boulder in the matroom with Beals and Danny.

5:30 p.m. Switch to flipping out on a punching bag because of lack of patience and control (runners turn into emotionally unstable ninjas when not running).

6:00 p.m. Enjoy hot steamy PEC shower, dry off, NOT put on clothes before going to cowles.

6:30 p.m. "Dinner in a PEC towel" night at Cowles. At least I can use my hands today.

7:30 p.m. Set up camp in Burling with a backpack full of beer and Marlboros, in addition to the usual books. Take several beer and smoke breaks throughout the evening.

10:30 p.m. Ambushed by other stupid people with snowballs while taking said break.

12:00 a.m. Return to \$lum, eat big cookie to kick off cookie day. Drink five beers so I can call it a binge drinking night if someone happens to ask me to fill out a survey.

2:00 a.m. Finally chilled out enough to go to bed.

7:50 a.m. Wake up, ride bike to campus, start eating big cookie during class.

10:00 a.m. Suffer first cookie coma of day.

10:50 a.m. Come to just in time for next class.

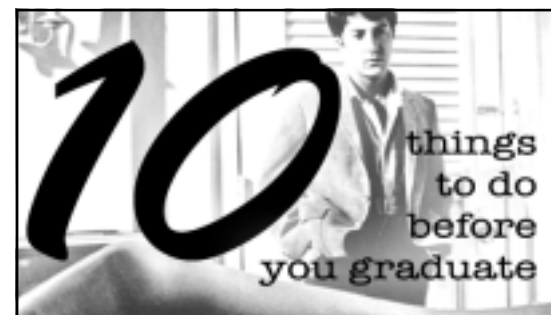
12:00 p.m. Big fat plateful of cookies at Quad for lunch. Chicken fingers have never looked so finger-lickin' good.

1:15 p.m. Sleep all afternoon, if by sleep all afternoon I mean suffer through an excruciatingly long Intro Chem lab.

4:30 p.m. Man the Kenya study abroad table in the Forum, visited by a grand total of one person. Cannot enjoy refreshments due to lack of cookies.

5:00 p.m. Wheezer classic b-ball game, the worst balling you will ever see on campus. And it just keeps going...

—Meghan Kirkwood



Hell Week!!

10. Avoid emotional breakdowns at Waltz.

9. Avoid ex-boyfriends or girlfriends at Waltz. They increase the chances that aforementioned "emotional breakdowns" will occur.

8. Take some time to hang out with your firends. Over break you'll realize you miss them while cursing the existence of most of your relatives.

7. Beer. Paper. Beer. Paper. Beer. Take-home. Beer. Paper. Beer. Presentation.

6. The bakery. It opens at 2 a.m. Perfect for procrastination breaks.

5. Take up speed reading.

4. Memorize the Stalker Guide. You've got nothing better to be doing, really.

3. Take the time to appreciate how good a cup of coffee tastes at 3:18 a.m.

2. Employ hired goons to write your paper. They'd probably do a better job.

1. Remember that work is sin—keep away as long as possible.

—Jess Ward



Pros and cons of transferring to Grinnell

Transfers, cont. from p.11

cannot be predetermined, and consequently transfers end up getting the "leftover" aid, the money that was not allocated to first-years. Grinnell's large endowment, however, has allowed it to provide substantial grant money to incoming transfer students. According to several transfer students, the college does a better job than its peer institutions in bridging the gap between aid given to first-years and aid given to transfers.

Financial aid also plays an important role in a student's decision to attend a particular college because rankings don't matter. A school's acceptance rate for transfer applicants can vary greatly from its first-year acceptance rate, so schools that are easier to get into coming out of high school can be much more difficult to transfer into and vice-versa. Furthermore, a school can be more or less competitive from year to year, depending upon the ratio of applicants to available spots. The number of available spots for transfer students is based on the ability to house these students, so the maximum number of transfer students a school can admit is less flexible than the number of first-years it can choose to accept. By not setting a cap on the number of transfer students it accepts each year, Grinnell maintains an advantage over several of its peer institutions.

The upsides of transferring

"We can objectively look at Grinnell and realize how good we've got it." — Electra Allen-Tonar '06

"I'm grateful for the computer labs, the free printing, the large number of places to study, the library.... because I transferred to Grinnell." —Bacino

"Sitting down with people randomly at meals and ending up having an hour-long conversation with them ... it's something that doesn't happen everywhere." —Tarullo

Aside from the fact that they never had to wake up for an 8 a.m. tutorial, transfer students have several advantages over their peers. As they can compare Grinnell's strengths to the weaknesses of their own school, transfer students are more appreciative of certain aspects of Grinnell.

Gennarelli is grateful for Grinnell's sense of community and its safety. "My old school was spread out over the

city, so there was no forum where kids could gather," she said. After coming from the urban sprawl of Paris, where crime was an issue, Gennarelli was happy to move to a small town where she could walk alone at night without fear and see familiar faces.

Eckstut mentioned that his transfer experience has made him more sympathetic toward Grinnell's administration. Tarullo noted that her transfer experience has made her especially thankful for both the strong value Grinnell places in the arts and the social activism present on campus. She is grateful that she can major in Theater, as that was not a possible major at her old school. "[Both] resource-wise and faculty-wise, I have found the theater program to be much better," she said, noting that her old school's only stage was smaller than that of the Wall Performance Lab.

Several transfers also noted that attending two different colleges has made them well-rounded, which will give them an extra edge when applying to graduate schools. Allen-Tonar believes that because her college experience includes studying outside of a liberal arts institution, she has found it easier to plan a career path. Tarullo believes her status as a transfer student indicates her "willingness to accept change."

Transfer students also appreciate their ability to easily immerse themselves in the community and explore opportunities that didn't exist at their old schools. Tarullo became a tour guide and joined Poverty Action Now, while Allen-Tonar joined the Student Alumni Association after finding it unique to Grinnell. Gennarelli found solace in the literary community at Grinnell. Rather than having to seek an internship with a local literary magazine as she would have had to do in order to pursue her interest in creative writing at her old school, she joined the Grinnell Review. This year as co-editor, her transfer-student identity has helped her use her experiences at her old school in Paris to give the magazine what she calls an "international flair."

Tarullo believes that she and her fellow students also have an increased awareness of their surroundings, a heightened sensitivity that stems from their appreciation for Grinnell. "I tend to live more for the present than anything,"

she said, "and I constantly assess where I am at the moment ... more than [where I will be in] the future, at least."

Transfer students also post other advantages over the general student body. With only one transfer student currently on academic probation, they are underrepresented on this list. Also, for the past three years Grinnell's retention rate of transfer students has been higher than its overall retention rate of first-years and sophomores.

In spite of the problems they may face, the majority of transfer students noted that their overall experience at Grinnell is better than that of their old school. Tonar-Allen believes that transfer students' gratefulness for the opportunities provided by Grinnell sets them apart from other students. "If I hadn't transferred here, I'd be surviving but not really happy" said Geddes. "And I never would have found out how incredibly beautiful Iowa is. Now when my friends ask 'Why Iowa? What's there?' I say, 'Corn fields. That's pretty much it. But you don't know what you're missing.'"

Looking forward

When second semester rolls around, there will be approximately 10 new transfer students on campus, according to Huacuja. Thrust into a new environment, these students will feel lost, overwhelmed and frustrated at being thrown into a community of students who have already had at least a semester to adjust to campus life. Some will have no trouble adjusting to their new social atmosphere, but others will be intimidated by the well-adjusted, poised nature of current students and will see friendship circles as unbreakable. They will have missed out on the tales of jello wrestling on Mac Field, the memories of tutorial and a semester's worth of inside-jokes.

According to Tarullo, the extent to which current students reach out to these transfer students during their initial days on campus can set the tone for the rest of their college experience. She attributes the success of her social adjustment as a transfer student to the kindness of Grinnellians. "Students offered me places to sit at meals, asked me how things were going, gave me advice on registration and classes and invited me out on the weekends," she said. "My first week at Grinnell was admittedly the hardest time of my life to date. But I was lucky enough to find many kind and accepting faces. I would relive that week again and again if I knew it would bring me the friendships I have today."

Transfer Student Club?

"I would love to see a Transfer Student Association," said Hannah Armstrong, who directs the transfer student orientation, "but it would be inappropriate for me to enforce it."

The administration does not enforce transfer student bonding. "We don't want people to become cliquish," said Armstrong. Rather, Armstrong selects a group of mentors to pair with the transfer students. These mentors, all transfer students themselves, are paired with anywhere from two to seven students. They plan a pizza-luncheon and contact their students before the beginning of the term. Armstrong checks up on new transfer students via e-mail during the third week of the semester and asks them if they want to plan a group activity, but she says that most are unresponsive. "This is good because it means they have gotten involved in the campus," she said.

One transfer student tried to organize a bowling trip for her fellow transfer students this year, but the plan fell through due to a lack of participants. Armstrong, nevertheless, will help organize a transfer student group if interest merits. "I always put it on the table as an option. It could happen if students initiated it," she said.

