

## Your Ticket to the Forty Acres – The Transfer Guide

**By Kevin Robert Martin**

There are a few reasons why students might attempt a transfer. Some remain committed to the UT dream and want to get there as soon as possible. Others enroll at a great university, but the major they come to love isn't offered there, so they must switch campuses to pursue their new interest. Students sometimes want to stick with their major, but they feel limited by their current environment and that their ceiling for growth is low. They are attracted to UT's extensive opportunities and resources.

Many transfer students are nontraditional. They are mid-career professionals looking to complete their degree or pursue a second bachelor's in a different field. There are veterans who want to take advantage of the GI Bill, which covers most costs. International students, especially from China, South Korea, Taiwan, and India are increasingly enrolling at community colleges before finishing their bachelor's degrees in the United States. The range of transfer applicants is much more extensive than first-time freshmen who are overwhelmingly high school seniors. There is no "typical" transfer student.

Transfers arrive roughly equally from community colleges, four-year universities, and the CAP program. In 2013, UT sent 10,539 CAP offers. Of those, 1,981 applicants took their offer and enrolled at a UT system school, and 773 transferred to Austin after their freshman year. Unlike first-time freshman application numbers, which have steadily increased over the past decade, transfer applications remain relatively static.

Historically, UT had enrolled about 2,500 transfer students each fall. Fall 2018 enrolled 1,581 transfers, a substantial decrease, due to the historically large freshman

class. For Fall 2013 to 2017, the number of transfer applicants ranged from 7,741 for Fall 2012 to 8,515 for Fall 2014. Fall 2015 saw a slight dip in transfer applicants at 8,197 admitting 3,499 students.

Fall 2018 was by far the most competitive ever for transfer. Previously, the transfer admission rate ranged from 36 percent to 45 percent. There were 8,335 prospective transfer applications for 1,993 spaces.

The current average transfer GPA is 3.75 across all majors. Prospective applicants to highly selective majors like Business, Engineering, and Computer Science should consider a minimum 3.9 to be competitive. Students need a minimum GPA of 3.0 to be considered otherwise their application is thrown out.

Much of the advice in this book applies equally to transfer students. However, how does the transfer process differ from first-time freshmen?

The transfer process only considers your college-level coursework. The Office of Admissions does not evaluate your high school grades, rank, or standardized test scores. I have reassured many adults seeking transfer that they don't have to sit for the SAT. Decisions are still made using the Academic and Personal Achievement matrix, but the only academic factor is your college GPA. If you received college credit while enrolled in high school, those grades will factor into your overall transfer GPA.

After graduating from high school, if you take even one college course, you cannot pursue first-time freshman admissions. All grades and credits count toward your GPA. Some universities allow you to retake a course and replace a lesser grade; UT doesn't.

You must submit transcripts from every college attended even if you did not complete a course. I know this can be particularly troublesome for mid-career

professionals or adults who have attended a handful of colleges over the years. If this is the case for you, it is important to begin gathering your transcripts now. You only need to submit your high school transcript after you gain admission to prove that you have a diploma or equivalent.

If it has been more than ten years since you began college, you may qualify for the “Academic Fresh Start.” Under Texas law, some students may be eligible to erase their previous college record. Sometimes, at eighteen or nineteen, you may not have taken your college courses seriously. This law is in effect so that your thirty-five-year-old self isn’t punished by performance in the distant past. If you believe you are eligible for invoking Fresh Start, contact the Office of Admissions to begin the process.

Applicants must have twenty-four hours completed or in progress by the deadline. UT discourages applicants originating from a four-year university who have exceeded ninety hours from attempting to transfer. You need to spend at least two years at UT to earn your degree and three years for some programs, so they prioritize students who are entering as sophomores and juniors. If you claim AP credit at your current institution, and it shows up on your transcript, those credits will count toward the twenty-four-hour minimum requirement but not your GPA.

Applicants can apply for either the fall or the spring semester. Around eight thousand applicants apply for fall while only a few hundred seek spring transfer. Spring admissions is limited only to majors in Liberal Arts, Natural Sciences, Education, and Social Work. Admission for spring depends more on the needs of the university to fill spaces rather than the merits of an applicant. The deadline for spring admissions is October 1. Fall applicants must submit Apply Texas by March 1.

It is necessary to research any prerequisite courses that you need. Business, Engineering, Geosciences, Nursing, Environmental Science, and Economics all have a few required courses. These courses must appear on your transcript by the deadline; you cannot take them in winter or summer sessions. Other majors “recommend” courses, but they are not prerequisites for eligibility.

It is important to reference UT’s “Transfer Guides” and the “Automated Transfer Equivalency” system to see what may be required and how your credits will transfer to UT. All regionally accredited Texas universities have credit equivalency agreements. For out-of-state students, any courses that are part of your college’s core curriculum should transfer without issue. Non-Texas college transcripts are evaluated by hand and accreditation granted on a case-by-case basis.

Transfer applicants must submit different essays from first-time freshmen. The required Essay A reads:

The statement of purpose will provide an opportunity to explain any extenuating circumstances that you feel could add value to your application. You may also want to explain unique aspects of your academic background or valued experiences you may have had that relate to your academic discipline. The statement of purpose is not meant to be a listing of accomplishments in high school or a record of your participation in school-related activities. Rather, this is your opportunity to address the admission committee directly and to let us know more about you as an individual, in a manner that your transcripts and the other application information cannot convey.

Much of the advice I provide in chapter 11 about crafting compelling essays applies to transfers. UT wants you to demonstrate why you deserve a space in your desired major. There are, however, a few key differences. Reviewers have higher expectations for transfer students. Since you are at least one year removed from high school, your essays should reflect those additional experiences.

As a transfer applicant, you should have a clearer vision of where you come from, where you currently are, and where you want to go. You should ask yourself these questions to help craft your statement of purpose:

- What reasons have you identified that make your current situation less than ideal?
- Is it the cost of attendance, lack of access to needed coursework, have you outgrown your environment, or are there things going on at home?
- What were your expectations before enrolling and how did those differ once you arrived?
- Does your decision to transfer go back further than the past few years?
- What experiences did you have growing up at home or in high school that help tell the story of where you currently are?
- If you attended a community college immediately after high school, what were the circumstances surrounding that decision?
- Did you want to attend a university closer to home or do you want to save money?
- Did you not feel quite ready to jump feet first into a four-year degree?
- Was there a particular program or set of courses offered at your college that appealed to you?

UT admissions reviewers expect you to identify resources on campus and in the city of Austin that appeal to your specific goals and ambitions. You can easily find this

information online. It is critical to demonstrate that you have done research before applying. Since you have already taken at least some college-level courses, it may be helpful to identify and describe a few that inform your chosen major. You should also discuss what differentiates UT from other universities and how it is the right fit for you.

I suggest avoiding vague statements like “Austin is the Live Music Capitol of the world” or “I want to research and study abroad and I believe UT is a great place to do this.” Be as specific as possible. Consider this example:

I am intrigued by the Humanities Honors Program in the College of Liberal Arts because I have a variety of interests: education access, child development, and the political economy of poverty. UT is one of the only Texas universities that has a self-designed interdisciplinary curriculum where I can create my own major. I am from the Rio Grande Valley and I am the first in my family to attend college. I am interested in researching education access in Mexican-American communities, and I am excited to conduct research at the Benson Latin American Collection.

I want to work with Dr. Robert Crosnoe in the Department of Sociology. He investigates the complex web of poverty, education, and human development. I am also interested in pursuing a Children and Society certificate in Bridging Disciplines. I am fluent in Spanish, and I am interested in spending a summer in Guatemala working with indigenous elementary school students through UT’s School of Social Work Maymester Abroad. Eventually, I want to work as a college adviser at a

low-income school in the Valley to share my knowledge and story with future college students.

Notice the explicit link between their biography, academic goals, and professional aspirations. This applicant minimizes vagueness by citing concrete examples unique to UT. They have demonstrated at least some prior research and offer a level of maturity more than one would expect from a high school senior.

You should also highlight characteristics or your personal story that may set you apart from other applicants. Since there are no standardized exams or a class rank to compare you to other applicants quantitatively, it is particularly important to use your personal statement as an opportunity to stand out from the pack.

Applicants must submit one additional essay. They can submit the “special circumstances” Essay C prompt or Essay E “issue of importance.”

Choose an issue of importance to you—it could be personal, school-related, local, political or international in scope—and write an essay in which you explain the significance of that issue to yourself, your family, your community or your generation.

Some students stumble over this essay because they want to choose the “correct” topic that reviewers “want to see.” As I discuss in chapter 11, almost any topic is fair game. Choose something that personally influences your life or way of thinking. This topic is much more about how you write and communicate rather than your topic.

One approach is to connect your issue of importance to your desired major. Your Essay E could complement your Essay A. Another approach is to write about something entirely separate from your intended area of study. Is there an issue or problem at your workplace? Do you volunteer or commit to an activity outside of the classroom that is important to you?

Use Essay E to highlight and expand upon an important aspect of your resume. Unlike for first-time freshmen, UT requires all transfer applicants to submit a paper resume. UT recommends including the past five years of experiences. For recent high school graduates, this means you should include your information from high school.

For mid-career professionals, veterans, or adults returning to school, you should include your relevant experience since high school. One piece of advice, particularly for nontraditional applicants, is not to get so caught up on whether you have enough volunteer or extracurricular activities. If you are working full time, there is no expectation that you have a similar profile to a full-time student.

I once spoke with a stressed applicant who was the father of two kids. He worried about whether he had enough leadership activities. I told him, “You’re a father of two young kids! And you have a full-time job! That’s about as much of a leader as it can get.” The same applies to veterans concerned about whether their application looks like the “typical” student. There is no typical transfer.

For transfers, integrating your application components is of particular importance. Since reviewers only have one academic data point to assess—your college GPA—your essays and resume become more critical. What factors went into your initial college choice? Are you working, and if so, what is your workplace like? Has it been a while since you have taken college courses?

Talk about it!

Particularly for military veterans, your reviewer may not fully understand your experiences. Though there are similarities between veteran applications, talk specifically about how you view your service and deployment. The essays are an excellent opportunity to illustrate your resume, especially if you oversaw equipment or people. What may be evident to you may not be evident to your reviewer. If there are gaps in your resume, consider clarifying them in your essays.

You can submit recommendation letters if you want to introduce an outside perspective to your employment history or habits in the classroom. Recommendation letters for transfer applicants can be useful, especially if you have worked a full-time job or served in the military. A reference letter from your boss or commanding officer can help provide context to your roles and responsibilities. A letter can be an effective way to set you apart from applicants with similar experiences. Let these questions guide whether you should submit a recommendation letter:

- Is there something specific you want them to discuss or emphasize?
- Is there an accomplishment you are proud of that sounds better coming from someone else rather than you writing it in an essay?
- Can your writer speak on how you would do in your desired major?

Once you have completed your application by the deadline, the waiting game begins. Since no GPA guarantees admission, all transfer applicants receive a holistic review. If you have applied for spring admission, and you have completed thirty hours by the October 1 deadline, you should find out by mid-November.

The same applies for fall admission. If you have thirty or more hours completed by March 1, you should hear back no later than mid-April. If you have thirty hours in progress that you complete in the spring, you will have a week or two to submit your final transcript. You should receive your decision no later than June 15. Transfer applicants typically receive their decision on a rolling basis.

If you did not find success transferring, it is important to consider your other options. It is not likely worth it to wait for another year to apply unless your grades significantly improve. I sometimes saw applicants applying four and five times. I found this hard to understand. There may come the point where you need to complete your degree elsewhere and consider UT for graduate school.