

## Major dilemma: Time to transfer?

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College freshmen take finals soon and look forward to a large break from first-semester studies. But for many of those freshmen, they might be bringing more home than just dirty laundry for their parents to process.

According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling, a third of first-semester freshmen will consider changing schools. That leaves parents asking the question, "Why?"

This dilemma is not uncommon in the tri-states, according to three area college admissions officials.

"Students need to legitimize their reason for transferring to another college or university," said Megan Stull, assistant director of admissions at Clarke University.

The first year is an emotional investment between student and parents, Stull said. Parents are looking for answers.

"Mom and Dad know their sons and daughters, and they need to ask their student where they want to be after four years of college," she said.

University of Dubuque junior Marcus Prull, 20, of Monticello, Iowa, said his parents questioned his selection of Upper Iowa University in Fayette, Iowa, after high school graduation, but supported his decision.

"I decided to go to UI on the spur of the moment," Prull said.

He also was attracted to the football scholarship offered to him freshmen year. By December of his first semester, Prull knew he wanted to transfer to another college.

"The college was too small for me" Prull said, and he wanted to concentrate on academics rather than sports.

"When I was trying to decide to transfer, I sat down and wrote a chart on the good and bad of transferring," Prull said. "The good won."

His decision was final by February, and Prull's father immediately called UD about how to transfer his son.

Prull admits he had some ups and downs his first year, but he said his move to UD made him less dependent on others and more of an initiator or "go-getter" in college. He is studying environmental science and hopes to become a fishing biologist at Kentucky Lake, a 25-acre state-owned lake in eastern Kentucky.

"Many students have a glamorized sense of the college experience, and if that is not met immediately, they are devastated," Stull said. "Students today have higher expectations and may have never dealt with disappointment."

Stull said Clarke has two full-time counselors and is booked solid with student appointments dealing with the pressures of college, which begin as early as the first year of high school as students start to think of their "right" college.

"Students are pressured to know right away," said Brad Richardson, assistant director of Enrollment Services at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. "We see students as early as their sophomore year in high school visiting colleges to see what a campus looks like."

On the other hand, Richardson said, "Students are being proactive in ownership of their education" by understanding academic requirements, college costs and financial responsibilities.

"We know there is a changing environment with the economy and the way students and parents are more realistic -- are looking at colleges closer to home," Richardson said.

He said an advantage for UW-P is many rural school districts see the university as smaller and closer to home.

Marissa Droessler, 21, a senior at UW-P, said her journey through a college transfer was a road from teenage life to adulthood. She chose Edgewood College in Madison, Wis., to study biology after graduating from Southwestern High School in Hazel Green, Wis., in 2008.

"I was very immature (as a freshman) and wasn't thinking in the long run, what college offered -- the pros and cons," she said. "I was shortsighted and was not thinking super-academically."

Droessler said many of her friends from high school were going to be in Madison.

"I didn't want to go to college so close to high school," she said. "Looking back, I didn't do much research on where I wanted to go."

Droessler became homesick and had a hard adjustment leaving home and living on her own.

Droessler decided to leave Edgewood at the end of her second semester and transfer to UW-P. She is majoring in business administration with emphasis on sales and marketing. After graduation, her goal is to work full time at a bridal shop owned by a family member in Madison and someday open her own shop.

"If you are miserable and you hate your classes, you need to ask yourself if you are going to love where you are for the next four years," Droessler said.

If freshmen do contemplate transfer, are they ready for such a decision-making process?

"A student needs to reach back to the college's staff," said Jesse James, dean of Admissions at UD.

During the process, it is understood the student and the college are responsible if the student has problems, James said, "and parents need to ask why the student is not involved in campus life -- to look for the signs why it is not happening."

James said UD supports the concept of "intentional intrusiveness" to address class attendance, student expectations and how the university can support the student.

A recent study by the College Admissions Partners concludes: "Often times students want to change colleges simply because they haven't socially made the transition to college life. Giving college more time and getting involved in college life may make all the difference in how the student feels about the current college."

The study concluded that most problems related to social life resolve themselves in the second term for most students.

A small portion of enrolled students have a main focus only on academics, but for most collegians, studies and campus life is a winning combination for a freshman as long as it is balanced. James said he believes there is a great difference between getting a college degree and getting a college education.

"The number one indicator (to transfer) is the level of engagement and involvement into the campus community," James said. "It can be a real issue."

Elgin, Ill., native Chante Wilson, 19, a junior at UD, was a young freshmen at age 16.

"As a young student, I was seen as a liability to many colleges and universities," Wilson said. "I mean, I still had to get my vaccination shots while I went to the community college."

Entering Elgin Community College directly after high school, she said it felt like it was a continuation of her high school experience with very few campus activities offered. She also enrolled with a boyfriend.

By her second year, she decided she wanted to leave Illinois.

"I wanted to go far, but not too far," Wilson said.

So, in tandem with her boyfriend, she transferred to UD to major in marketing.

"I was excited coming to UD, until my mom pulled off from the residence hall," Wilson said. "I missed my mom and grandmother" and the home-cooked meals.

A grandmother's struggles with lung cancer made it more difficult for Wilson to be away at college.

Later, the relationship with her boyfriend ended and he returned to Elgin Community College.

"I matured a lot. I had to get away to mature," Wilson said.

She advises freshmen to trust their instincts and not to allow peer pressures to influence decisions. Wilson is a UD cheerleader, a

university student ambassador and secretary of the Young Women's Association at UD. She accepted an internship in Chicago this summer at a production company scouting new talent and models.

"If you want to transfer, start early because you never know what might happen," Wilson said.

Brook Essington, 22, a senior at UD, started her transfer after ending an engagement.

"I was more in lust than in love," said the former Rockford, Ill., resident. "I had tunnel vision."

She said moving to Dubuque was the next chapter in her life and she was proud of doing it on her own. Transferring from Rock Valley Community College, Essington said she needed to put the relationship aside and factor it out.

To some students, having a bad roommate might also be a deal breaker. Essington said she did not connect with her campus roommates when she arrived but has found contentment living off campus and continues to be active in her sorority, Delta Phi Sigma, and her job as a student ambassador. Essington also works full time at Dubuque's Blockbuster.

"At a university, you find a place; you find a home," she said.

Even if a transfer is in the future, Stull said students should give their college an honest try and endure the first academic year if possible.

"Make good decisions and be true to yourself," Stull said.