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On campus beat: One-third of college students transfer

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Today's college students are a mobile bunch.

One-third of college students switch schools at least once before earning a degree, a new study by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center shows. Nearly half of those transfers brought students to public two-year colleges. More than a third occurred during a student's second year. About a quarter crossed state lines.

The report, "Transfer and Mobility: A National View of Pre-Degree Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions," is groundbreaking in its ability to track students from one institution to another. It examined 2.8 million full- and part-time students from 2006 to 2011.

"Increasingly more students attend multiple institutions, transferring once, twice, or even three times before earning a degree," the report begins.

The numbers track with ones from the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, where the number of transfers has grown in recent years.

"We use the term 'swirl,'" said Doug Knowlton, vice chancellor for academic and student affairs. "Students today by and large just don't have that same sense of, 'I'm going to go to this campus for four years.'"

LaToya Ross-Sullivan started at Southwest Minnesota State University as an education major. For three years, she commuted from Granite Falls 40 miles to school. That "started to get really expensive," and she questioned whether she wanted to be a teacher. "I realized I was skipping school and my grades were dropping," she said. "It was not the place for me."

So she took time off, saved some money and later enrolled in Central Lakes College in Staples. There, she got great grades and quickly earned a two-year degree in graphic design. Now, she's about to earn a second degree in videography.

"For me, the smaller classes, the more direct courses, they were what I needed," Ross-Sullivan said.

She's not alone. The 28-year-old guesses that among her group of 10 friends, seven transferred to Central Lakes from another school.

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