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Kurt Ellison

Student Jamilah Vittor, left, confers with Donna Mekis at Cabrillo Transfer Center.

## Program designed to help Cabrillo students advance

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Cabrillo College students planning to transfer to a four-year institution now have an office on campus designed to make the often confusing and difficult transition smoother and easier.

This fall, Cabrillo opened the doors to its Transfer Center, where students can browse through a pool of information that includes catalogs from every four-year college in the United States. Students can attend workshops on how to transfer to those colleges, have a chance to meet with university representatives from all over the state, and can choose from a library of videos of campus tours produced by universities.

There are lists of Cabrillo courses that qualify for university credit and students can set up an appointment to talk to a staff member about transfer policies and procedures.

While the center is designed to help all of Cabrillo's nearly 13,000 students, it aims to target minority students since they have historically had a lower transfer rate from community colleges to four-year schools than Anglo students, said Donna Mekis, the center's director.

Each year between 400 and 500 Cabrillo students transfer to either the University of California or the California State University system, Mekis said. Last fall, 513 students transferred to either UC or CSU schools, 12

percent of which were minorities. Cabrillo's minority population is about 15 percent, but that figure is expected to steadily increase, Mekis said.

Mekis thinks Cabrillo's transfer rate of 12 percent, which is sixth in the state, could improve if students have access to accurate and current information on how to transfer. Mekis, who worked at the UC-Santa Cruz admissions office for seven years before moving to Cabrillo, said before the center opened students went to the school's counseling staff.

While she praised the counselors' efforts to help students with questions about transferring, they did not always have correct or current information about universities' transfer policies, nor did they have the time to update their files.

"They were pretty much on their own," she said. "Some of them went the extra mile, others didn't."

Mekis is in the process of setting up a data base that will have the names of minority students eligible to transfer to universities. Those students will be mailed a newsletter Mekis is putting together that will include information about events at the center. The newsletter will also be distributed on campus to the general student population.

Mekis, whose master's thesis addressed the difficulties confronted by ethnic groups in transferring to four-year institutions, said minorities have his-

torically been under-represented at the state's universities.

One of the biggest barriers minorities have to overcome is one of self-perception, she said. If students don't see themselves as college students, they lack the motivation to pursue a college education. If there are few examples of minorities going to college from their community, this perception is perpetuated. Sometimes they think of themselves as "not smart enough" to attend college, Mekis said.

She said part of her job is to "help students believe in themselves."

She added, "I really don't believe there are dumb people or smart people." But, she said, "some students don't see themselves as being students."

Mekis, 36, said she draws a lot of her motivation and dedication to helping students from her experience as a student. At 26, a single mother with a 10-month-old baby, she started classes at Cabrillo.

"I was absolutely terrified of Cabrillo," She said. "What if I fail every class?" I thought."

But she conquered those fears and went on to UCSC, where she got an undergraduate degree in anthropology and a master's degree in education.

The Transfer Center will have an open house Friday from 4 to 6 p.m. in Room 807.

For more information, call 479-6385 or 688-2075, ext. 385.