

UCLA

Utilization of Curricular Practical Training: Analysis of Support & Barriers 2013-2018

Dashew Center for International Students & Scholars (DCISS) Report

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Executive Summary

The primary purpose of this report is to assess the Dashew Center's first departmental outcome: as a result of interacting with the Dashew Center, international students and scholars will develop the knowledge and skills needed to integrate and thrive at UCLA and in Los Angeles. This report explores the extent to which this departmental outcome is being realized in the realm of Curricular Practical Training (CPT), which speaks to the professional aspect of the international student experience.

Definition and Importance of CPT

CPT is a form of work authorization that allows international students on an F-1 visa to engage in an off-campus academic internship or employment (paid or unpaid) that is required or an integral part of their academic curriculum. This form of work authorization is an essential benefit for international students because it facilitates their career development, provides a legal means to undertake high-impact learning opportunities such as experiential internship experiences throughout Los Angeles, and can provide financial incentives to international students who pay nonresident tuition. For these reasons, CPT plays a critical role in campus-wide initiatives that seek to increase the number of undergraduates with an internship or to ensure that graduate students receive training in non-academic spheres for those who wish to pursue non-academic careers. Therefore, investigating the extent to which the Dashew Center supports the development of students' knowledge and skills when navigating CPT processes will speak to the interest of various stakeholders at UCLA.

Method

Using data from the International Student and Scholars Management (ISSM) system from 9/1/2013 to 8/31/2018, the Dashew Center conducted a multi-year study on awareness, utilization, supports, and barriers to students' use of the CPT benefit. Additionally, three students were interviewed to support findings with qualitative case studies.

Recommendations

Several recommendations for the Dashew Center emerge from the study's quantitative and qualitative analysis, including a mandate for the Dashew Center to serve as a coordinator of CPT education for all stakeholders and as a catalyst for more efficient processes by implementing the following recommendations:

1. enhance communication with students, employers, and campus stakeholders about CPT eligibility and application procedures to reduce the administrative burden and increase utilization of CPT,
2. refer to international students' *eligibility for the CPT benefit* and *CPT as an authorized benefit* with all stakeholders to emphasize aspects of CPT that currently go unnoticed by students and employers,
3. explore early enrollment options and CPT messaging with the Center for Community Learning to attend to lower CPT awareness and utilization by undergraduates in the College of Letters and Science, and
4. collaborate with the Career Center to communicate with employers and academic departments, especially those with low CPT utilization.

More specific information about how the above recommendations will be executed appears in the section titled Key Recommendations.

Guiding Questions, Indicators, and Data Sources

| Guiding Questions | Indicators | Data Sources |
|--|--|--|
| Awareness of the CPT Benefit How many students demonstrate awareness of the CPT benefit? Is this changing over time or by field of study? | <i>Unit of Analysis: Students</i> 1. Unique contact rates 2. Profile of students contacting the Dashew Center about the CPT at higher or lower rates by academic status, field & College of Letters & Science status | ISSM Data |
| Utilization of the CPT Benefit How many students utilize the CPT benefit? Is this changing over time or by field of study? | <i>Unit of Analysis: Students</i> 3. Utilization rates 4. Profile of students utilizing the CPT benefit at higher and lower rates by academic status, field, & College of Letters & Science status | ISSM Data |
| Support & Barriers What factors facilitate or impede international students' utilization of the CPT benefit? Is this changing over time? | <i>Unit of Analysis: Contacts</i> 5. Approval rates and first-contact approval rates 6. Rush rates 7. Qualitative reasons for deferred approval and non-approval <i>Units of Analysis: Students</i> 8. All indicators disaggregated by CLS and Other Colleges 9. Qualitative experiences of students who use the CPT benefit | ISSM Data Case Study Interviews |
| Recommendations How can the Dashew Center enhance CPT experiences for international students so they can optimally integrate and thrive at UCLA when seeking CPT benefits? | <i>Unit of Analysis: Students and Contacts</i> All of the above | All of the above |

See Appendix B for definitions of the indicators.

The study takes students as the unit of analysis for interest and utilization because the outcome of interest is about whether *students* are integrating and thriving. Therefore, we want to understand how many students demonstrate awareness and participate in CPT. Contacts are the unit of analysis used for support and barriers because contacts give insight about the CPT application process and where this process is facilitating or impeding CPT utilization.

CPT utilization is conceptualized as a complex outcome consisting of student awareness, student navigational capital, institutional capacity, and employer capacity (i.e. utilization = student awareness + student navigational capital + institutional capacity + employer capacity). However, some metrics point toward some of these factors more completely than others. The following chart captures our conceptualization of CPT utilization, where a capital X means a metric (left column of the table) represents the concept (column names) in direct ways whereas a lowercase x indicates that a metric represents the concept in smaller or more indirect ways.

| | Student Awareness | Student Navigational Capital | Institutional Capacity | Employer Capacity |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Unique Contact Rate | X | X | x | |
| Unique Utilization Rate | X | X | X | X |
| Average Contacts per Case | | x | X | x |
| Approval Rate | | X | X | X |
| First-contact Approval Rate | | x | X | x |
| Rush Rate | | X | X | x |

Key Findings

The Dashew Center approved over 5,000 applications for CPT during the study period, 2013-2018. Nearly 3,500 students contacted the Dashew Center about CPT, and over 3,000 students utilized the CPT benefit.

Awareness & Utilization in the CPT Benefit

Awareness and utilization of CPT is declining over time for both undergraduates and graduate students. However, a small uptick in awareness and utilization occurred in 2017-2018 for both groups. This may be due to the shift in the political climate in the U.S. around that time, which spurred a number of conversations about work opportunities for those who do not have citizenship in the U.S.

More specifically, during the study period of 2013-2018, for **international undergraduate students**:

- 9-15% of international undergraduates (or 225-383 per year) demonstrate awareness in CPT per year
- 8-13% of international undergraduates (or 198-349 per year) utilize the CPT benefit per year

During the same period, for **international graduate students**:

- 17-27% of international graduate students (or 430-618 per year) demonstrate awareness in CPT per year
- 17-25% of international graduate students (or 409-594 per year) utilize the CPT benefit per year

Nearly everyone demonstrating awareness of CPT utilizes the CPT benefit. This suggests that spreading more awareness may generate more utilization.

| CPT utilization is highest among: | CPT utilization is lowest among: |
|--|--|
| master's students | undergraduate students |
| undergraduates in Engineering, Social Sciences, and the Sciences | undergraduates in the Arts & Humanities and Interdepartmental Programs |
| graduate students in the Sciences, Engineering, and Professional schools | graduate students in the Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences |

Support & Barriers for CPT Utilization: Administrative Burden

A number of metrics provide insight into the extent of the administrative burden experienced by international students and Dashew Center staff when processing CPT requests and applications. These indicators of administrative burden include: approval rates, first-time approval rates, average contacts per case, rush rates, as well as reasons for deferred approval and non-approval.

Most students who apply for CPT get approved. Overall, undergraduate students experience more administrative delays than graduate students. This could be due to differences in navigational capital between undergraduate and graduate students, which points to a need to upgrade how services are provided to meet undergraduate students where they are. Additionally, over time it has taken longer for all students to get approval for CPT, with undergraduates generally needing more time than graduate students. This is due to increased scrutiny by the federal government, which impacts how the Dashew Center approaches CPT processing and approvals. Therefore, reviewing current communication about CPT eligibility and processing could lessen the administrative burden on students and staff.

Top Reasons for Deferred Approval and Non-approval

The reasons for deferred approval and non-approval point to students' active use of their navigational capital as well as the ineffectiveness of information available on the Dashew Center website. 36% of all deferred approvals and 77% of all non-approvals occur because students come for an information inquiry before beginning their application for CPT. Also supporting this conclusion is the fact that 1) 50% of all deferred

approvals occur because students do not have complete materials or course enrollment, and 2) 13% of non-approval occur because of eligibility issues. Together, the two facts above constitute the first and second greatest reasons for deferred approval and non-approval of CPT. These findings reveal a need to revamp communications with students about the CPT process and eligibility criterion.

Support & Barriers for CPT Utilization: Course Enrollment Analysis

When comparing undergraduate students in the College of Letters and Sciences (CLS) and those in other colleges at UCLA, several findings emerge. First, CLS students demonstrate less awareness of CPT when looking at the breadth of students who participate; they also utilize the benefit less often and utilize the benefit less often on a repeat basis. Lastly, they receive approval less often than undergraduate peers in other colleges.

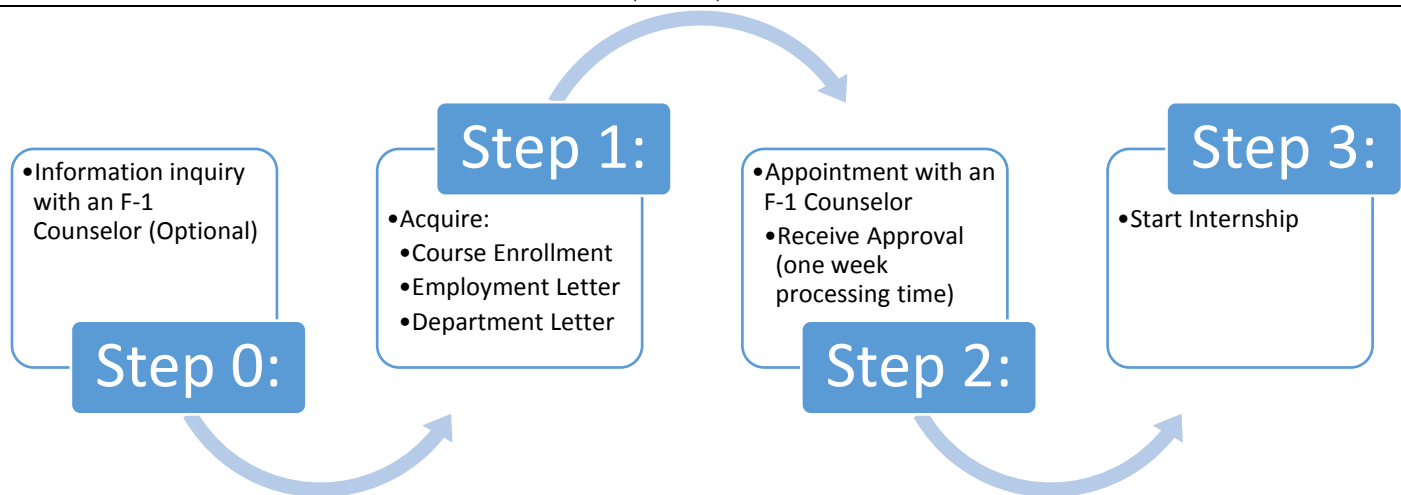
While most indicators of administrative burden for CLS students are statistically no different than the administrative burden experienced by counterparts in other colleges, interviews with case study participants reveal that tight course enrollment timelines for CLS students may prevent more students from seeking out and using the CPT benefit. To contrast, students in other colleges generally have more time to complete all of the actions needed to receive CPT approval.

While an analysis of administrative burden leads to the conclusion that undergraduate students possess less navigational capital than graduate students, the course enrollment analysis pushes back on this finding slightly. Undergraduates from other colleges demonstrate awareness, receive approval, and utilize the CPT benefit at rates comparable to master's students – the highest users of the CPT benefit. Yet, first-time approval rates, contacts per case, and rush rates do not differ statistically between CLS students and those from other colleges. This implies that any difference in navigational capital can be overcome by undergraduates when the conditions are right institutionally. Therefore, it is recommended that the Dashew Center 1) enhances communication about CPT to improve the navigational capital of undergraduate students in particular, and 2) explores early course enrollment options with the Center for Community Learning and other methods of raising awareness about CPT with students in the College of Letters and Science.

Support & Barriers for CPT Utilization: Case Study Analysis

Case study participants reported that various people and processes positively supported their CPT application process, including visa counselors at the Dashew Center, departmental SAOs, an information sheet about CPT and information sessions by the Dashew Center, and Google (the search database).

One undergraduate student cited the short timeline for course enrollment as a barrier to participation. Another student also explained that students in the College of Letters and Science have limited time to enroll in courses. Since the Center for Community Learning accepts course enrollment during Week 8 the quarter before the course begins, it can be difficult to get an appointment on time at the Center for Community Learning and the Dashew Center for the timeline to work optimally. A step-by-step guide for CPT approval appears below for reference:



Additionally, students cited inconsistent institutional knowledge and support as barriers. For example, new SAOs may be unfamiliar with the unique needs of international students when participating in internships, and new staff may inadvertently enroll students in the wrong independent study courses. Another student reported that they encountered an employer who was unaware that they could hire international students. Lastly, one student referred to CPT as a *right*. While this framing does not align completely with the ways in which CPT is defined, the student's comment points to a need to frame CPT more clearly as a *benefit* for which international students *are* eligible.

All students recommend spreading awareness about CPT to prospective employers, students, and staff.

Key Recommendations

How can the Dashew Center enhance CPT experiences for international students so they can optimally integrate and thrive at UCLA when seeking CPT benefits?

The study's findings lead to the following recommendations:

1. Develop an online tool that serves as 1) intake for CPT appointments, 2) education for students on the eligibility requirements for CPT and other CPT-related navigational capital, and 3) assessment of CPT eligibility and navigational capital.
 - a. The tool should include the following question: submit several quotes from your job offer letter and explain how those quotes demonstrate that the internship is relevant to your field of study.
 - b. The tool should include questions about student characteristics that may impact their CPT eligibility or application process. Then the tool should generate tailored information for the student about their next steps with the goal of reducing the administrative burden on students and staff.
2. Create a tailored information sheet for different audiences to coordinate CPT education. This resource should be created in collaboration with the Career Center, Center for Community Learning, and academic departments.
 - a. Include an overview of timelines, the role of each stakeholder, relevant regulatory information, etc.
 - b. Include the following stakeholders: international students, departmental SAOs, Center for Community Learning, Career Center counselors, Career Center employee relations staff, and employers.
 - c. Student information sheets should highlight CPT timelines centered around the quarter in which they hope to participate in CPT (rather than the year in which they are eligible to start). They should also provide specific instructions for those enrolling through the Center for Community Learning vs.

those enrolling through independent study courses in their department vs. those using CPT for an internship required for their degree objective.

- d. Combine requirements for different stakeholders (e.g. the Dashew Center and Center for Community Learning) into one list of requirements so that any stakeholder giving a student an information sheet will impart *all* requirements at once.
3. Reference international students' eligibility for the CPT benefit and CPT as an authorized benefit when speaking or writing about CPT for campus and external stakeholders.
4. Explore the possibility of offering early enrollment options for international students with the Center for Community Learning and/or other ways to enhance international undergraduate navigational capital to meet the demands of the shorter timeline for enrollment.
5. Enhance CPT messaging in partnership with the Center for Community Learning to emphasize the educational aspects of internship experiences that make them high-impact practices.
6. Collaborate with the Career Center to ensure that fields with low utilization know about 1) the CPT application process, 2) internship opportunities in their field that would make them eligible for CPT, and 3) the value of a CPT experience for someone with their degree objective. This same strategy should also be pursued with the Center for Community Learning for students in the College of Letters and Science.

| CPT utilization is lowest among: |
|--|
| undergraduate students |
| undergraduates in the Arts & Humanities and Interdepartmental Programs |
| graduate students in the Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences |

7. Provide more information online about course enrollment and special cases.

Areas for Further Study

After completing this study, several areas for further inquiry emerged:

- What kinds of CPT and internship experience messaging initiatives resonate with undergraduates students? (a qualitative study)
- Why do fields with low utilization (humanities, interdepartmental programs, and the social sciences) use the CPT benefit less than their peers? (a qualitative study)
- What are the reasons for the awareness and utilization trend over time (i.e. declining awareness and utilization and the uptick in both in 2017-2018)? Does this uptick continue or decline?
- To what extent do employers need CPT education? What kinds of education do they need?

Appendix A: Method

Creation of the Dataset

Using the international student database, International Student and Scholar Management (ISSM), we pulled all CPT contact data from 9/1/2013 to 8/31/2018, including advisor notes, students' academic departments, academic status, CPT approval, etc. Note that this dataset does not include J-1 students who participate in Academic Training (AT) which is a comparable benefit for J-1 students, though regulations related to AT are slightly different than those for CPT. Most degree-seeking undergraduates hold an F-1 visa. Therefore, this dataset represents the vast majority of international degree-seeking students who seek information about off-campus internships.

Analysis of the Dataset

Through quantitative analysis (counts, rates, cross-tabulations), we constructed profiles of students who demonstrated interest in CPT, utilized CPT, obtained CPT approval quickly, obtained CPT approval less quickly, and failed to obtain CPT approval. These analyses helped to reveal where support is needed.

Through analysis of advisor notes about each student contact with the Dashew Center, we uncovered the top reasons why students receive slow approval or none at all. From there, we were able to understand how the Dashew Center can enhance support for the CPT application process and, therefore, our students' ability to integrate and thrive in this arena of their UCLA education.

Analysis of Course Enrollment Types

Through quantitative analysis, we compared undergraduate students in the College of Letters and Science (CLS) and undergraduate students in other colleges at UCLA on a variety of indicators. Because students from CLS enroll in internship courses through the Center for Community Learning and those in other colleges enroll through departmental independent study courses, we disaggregated the data to test what outcomes are associated with different course enrollment mechanisms.

Since some CLS departments have internship courses akin to those in other colleges (i.e. Communication Studies, Economics, Mathematics, and Psychology), we moved those departments from the CLS group to the "Other Colleges" group for the purpose of this analysis.

It should also be noted that any difference found between the two groups could also point to larger cultural differences between the different colleges at UCLA: other colleges may be more oriented towards internships compared to CLS and which may be reflected in the infrastructure, support, and information received by students pursuing internships.

Analysis of Qualitative Case Studies

Through qualitative case study analysis, we gained a better understanding of the resources used and difficulties faced when students go through the CPT application process. Ten students who went through the CPT process were chosen randomly and invited to participate in a short interview over the phone with a member of the Dashew Center Research & Special Projects team. Three students from the ten were interviewed for the case studies. We interviewed one undergraduate student, one master's student, and one doctoral student. Participants were told multiple times during the interview that their identity would not be shared outside the research team.

During the interview, the participants were asked:

- How did you prepare for your CPT application process?
- If a student comes to you for advice on the CPT process, what would you tell them?
- What recommendations, if any, do you have to enhance the CPT process at the Dashew Center?

Before the interview, the registration form also asked participants to rate their CPT experience as very easy, easy, slightly easy, slightly difficult, difficult, and very difficult.

Appendix B: Definitions

Definitions related to counts and rates are explained below. Understanding the definitions related to counts compliments a comprehension of definitions related to rates. Note that indicators reported as rates are more reliable metrics when making comparisons over time and across populations. Raw counts do not capture changes in a population over time (like the increase in the international population over time at UCLA) or differences in counts across different subpopulations (like the difference in the total number of international undergraduate versus international graduate students or difference in the number of international students in different fields of study at UCLA).

Definitions Related to Counts

Unique contacts: Number of unique students who contact the Dashew Center for CPT. Note that this is different than the total number of contacts the Dashew Center fields for CPT. One student may contact the Dashew Center multiple times for one CPT application. In this example, one student would be counted one time when reporting unique contacts. Conceptually, this indicator captures degree of awareness of the CPT benefit by international students at UCLA.

Contacts: Number of contacts the Dashew Center fields for CPT. Note that this is different than number of unique students contacting the Dashew Center about CPT since one student may contact the Dashew Center multiple times for one case. In this instance, one student would be counted multiple times when reporting contacts.

Cases: Number of CPT cases the Dashew Center fields for CPT. Note that one case may include several contacts by the student who started the case. One student may have multiple cases over the course of their education at UCLA. Number of cases is used as the denominator for approval rate, first-contact approval rate, deferred approval rate, and non-approval rate. Cases also represent the sum of approvals and non-approvals.

Approvals: Number of CPT cases approved by the Dashew Center. Note that this is different than the unique number of students approved for CPT. If one student is approved multiple times for CPT, this student would be counted multiple times when reporting approvals. Approvals also represent the sum of first-contact approvals and deferred approvals.

Unique utilization: Number of unique students approved by the Dashew Center for CPT.

First-contact approvals: Number of CPT cases approved the first time a student contacts the Dashew Center for a CPT case.

Deferred approvals: Number of CPT cases approved more slowly than first-contact approvals but that are approved nonetheless. In other words, students contact the Dashew Center more than once before an approval is made.

Non-approvals: Number of CPT cases that do not lead to an approval.

Rushes: Number of cases received from students requesting an expedited approval.

Definitions Related to Rates & Averages

Unique contact rate: Unique contacts divided by the relevant population (population counts are defined as the number of students listed in ISSM for a given population). For example, the unique contact rate for undergraduate students is calculated by taking the number of individual undergraduate students who contacted the Dashew Center during the period in question divided by the total number of active undergraduate students during the same period.

Unique utilization rate: Unique utilization per year divided by the relevant population (population counts are defined as the number of students listed in ISSM for a given population).

Approval rate: Number of approvals divided by number of contacts. The approval rate is akin to a utilization rate, and also represents the sum of the first-contact approval rate and deferred approval rate. As efforts to generate more student awareness, student navigational capital, and institutional capacity increase; approval rates should increase as well.

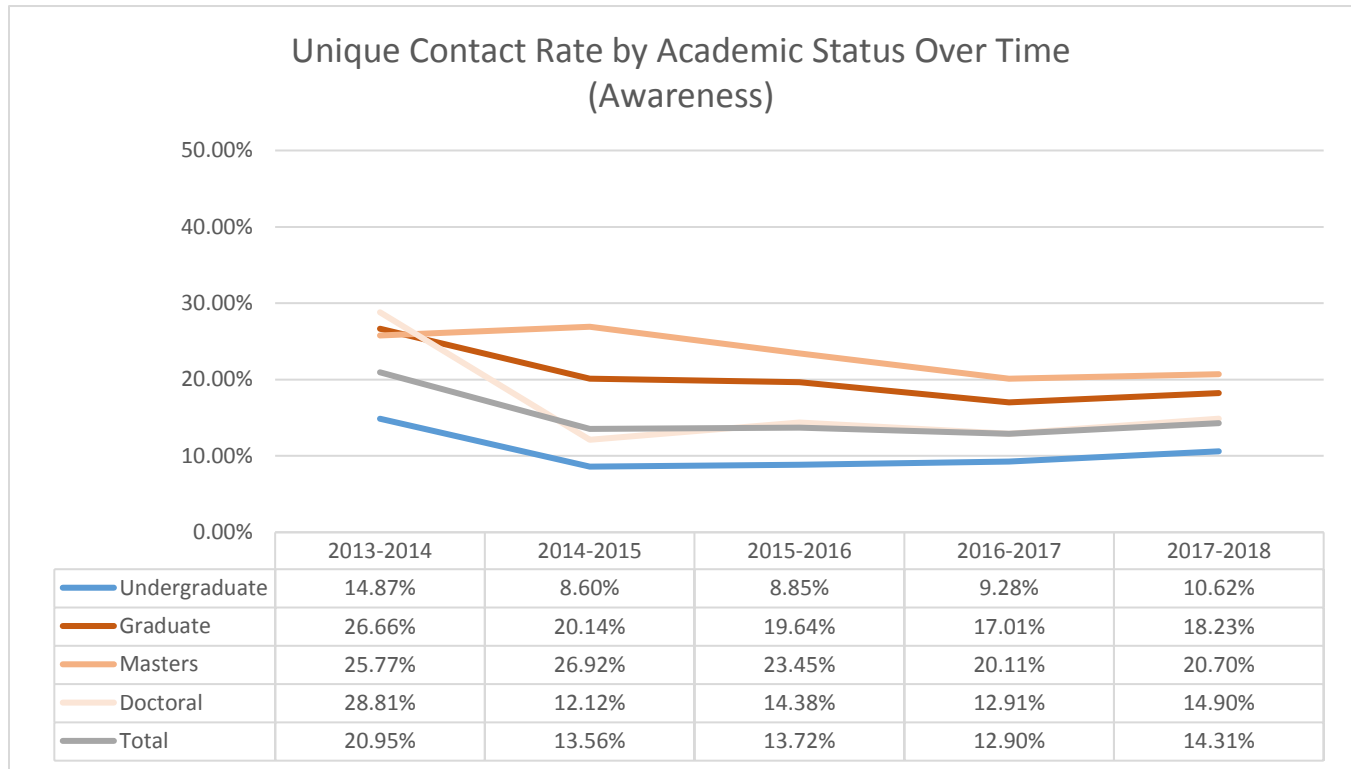
First-contact approval rate: First-contact approvals divided by the number of cases. As student navigational capital increases, services become more efficient, and institutional capacity expands, the first-contact approval rates should increase.

Rush rate: Number of rushes divided by number of approvals. Though rush rates could be an indicator, in part, for student navigational capital, qualitative response from this study suggests it is best conceptualized as an indicator for institutional capacity to support the CPT application process. As institutional barriers are resolved, the rush rate should decrease over time.

Average contacts per case: Reveals extent of administrative burden for students and staff as CPT is approved.

Average cases per student: Reveals how often students act as repeat users of the CPT benefit, which gets at student interest in using the benefit.

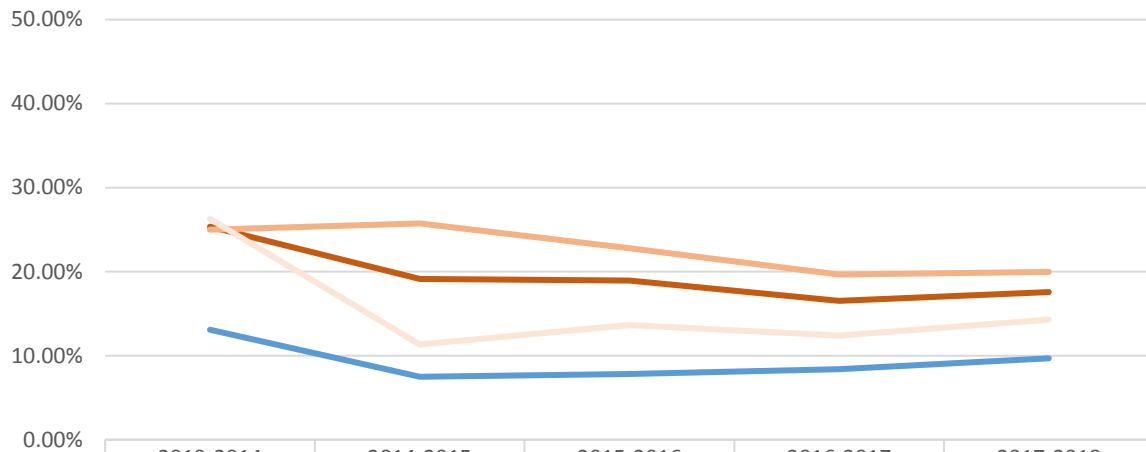
Appendix C: Charts & Graphs



Unique Utilization by Academic Status Over Time

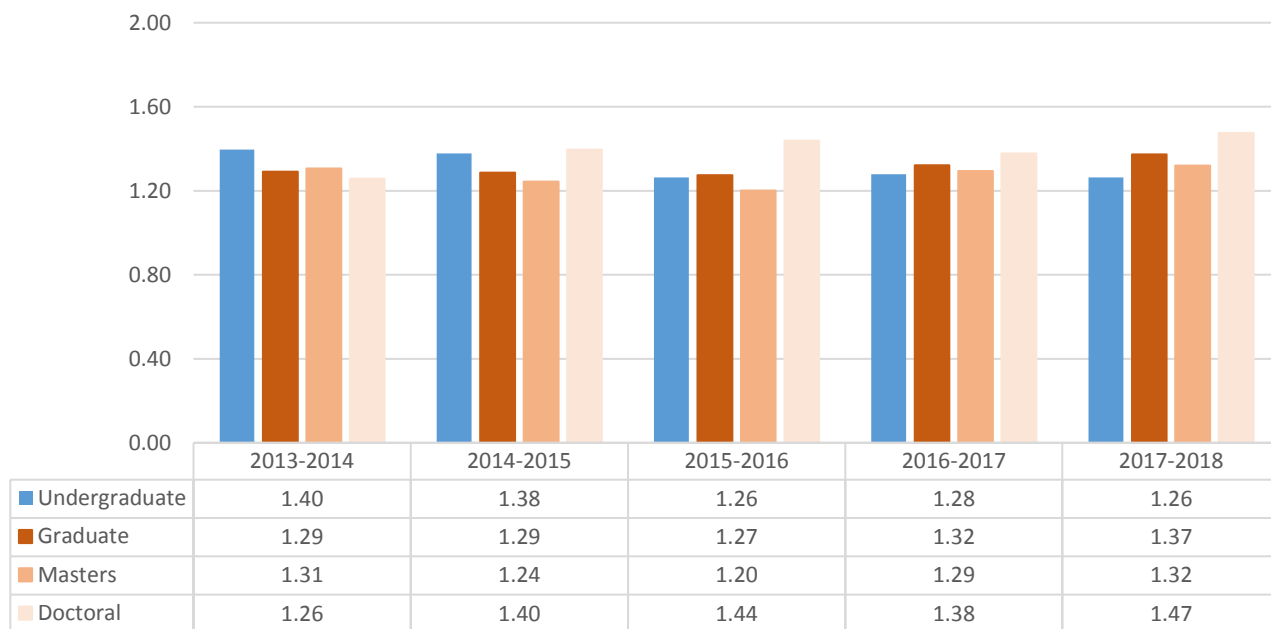
| | 2013-2014 | 2014-2015 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Undergraduate Students | 198 | 249 | 272 | 295 | 349 |
| Graduate Students | 409 | 479 | 542 | 511 | 595 |
| Masters | 285 | 349 | 378 | 346 | 389 |
| Doctoral | 124 | 130 | 164 | 165 | 206 |

Unique Utilization Rate by Academic Status Over Time
(Utilization)

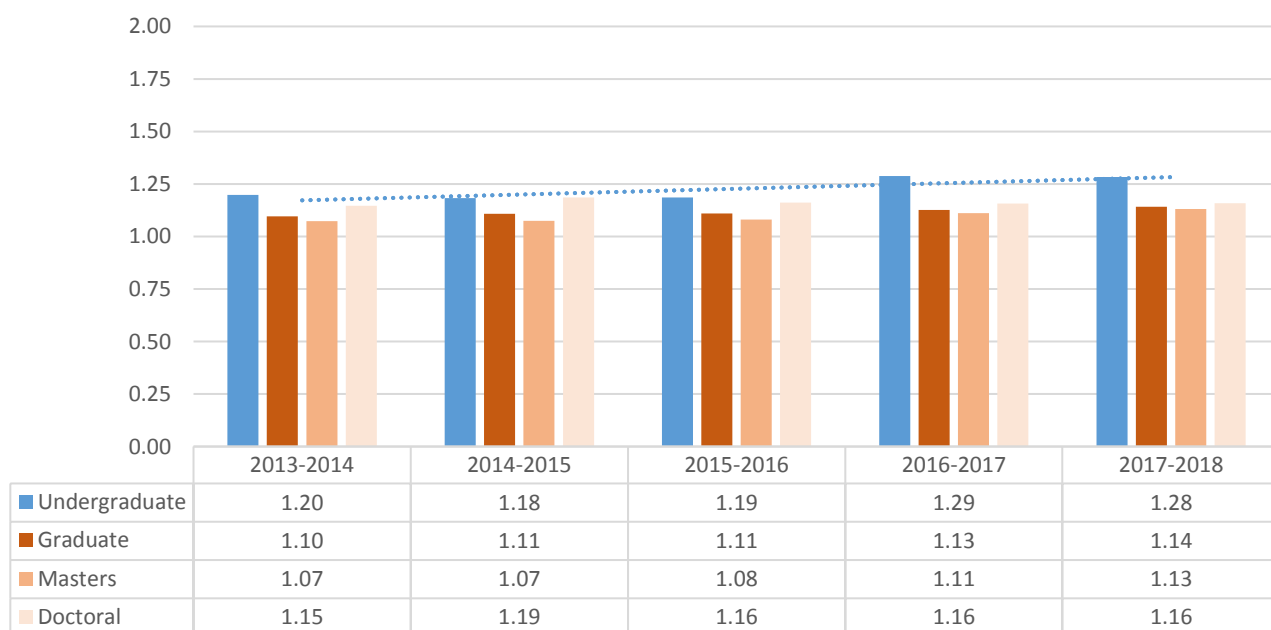


| | 2013-2014 | 2014-2015 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Undergraduate | 13.09% | 7.49% | 7.82% | 8.40% | 9.68% |
| Graduate | 25.36% | 19.14% | 18.94% | 16.53% | 17.55% |
| Masters | 24.98% | 25.74% | 22.78% | 19.66% | 19.98% |
| Doctoral | 26.27% | 11.33% | 13.63% | 12.39% | 14.28% |

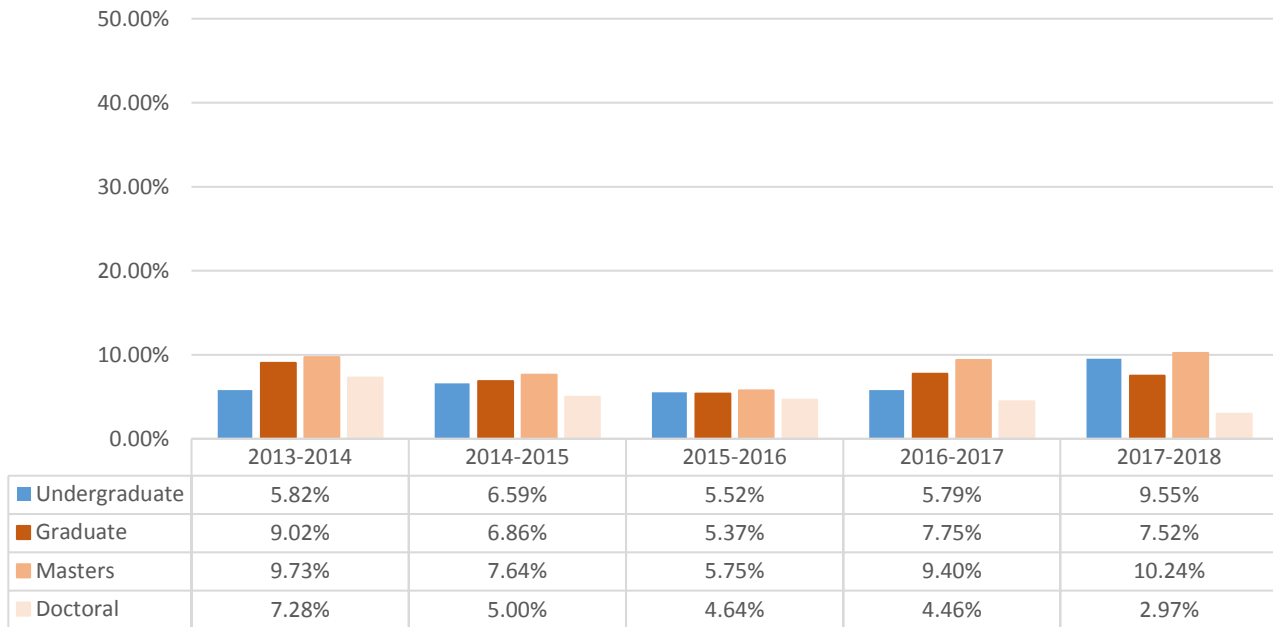
Average Cases per Student by Academic Status Over time
 (Repeat Users)



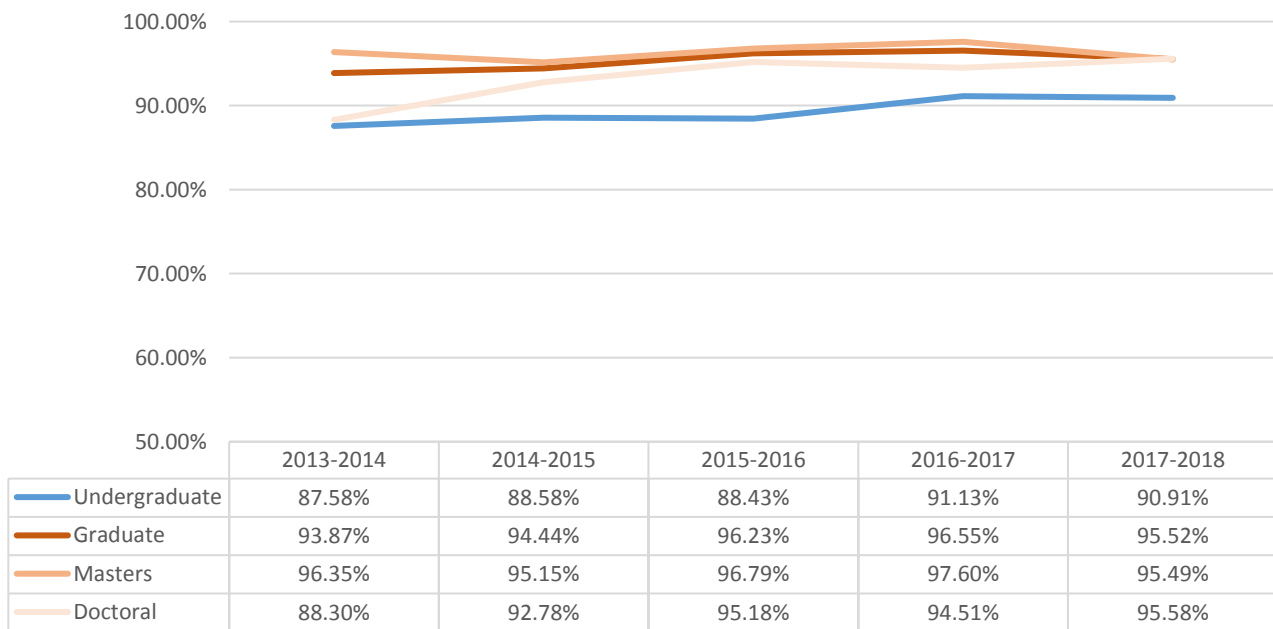
Average Contacts per Case by Academic Status Over Time
 (Navigational Capital & Administrative Burden)



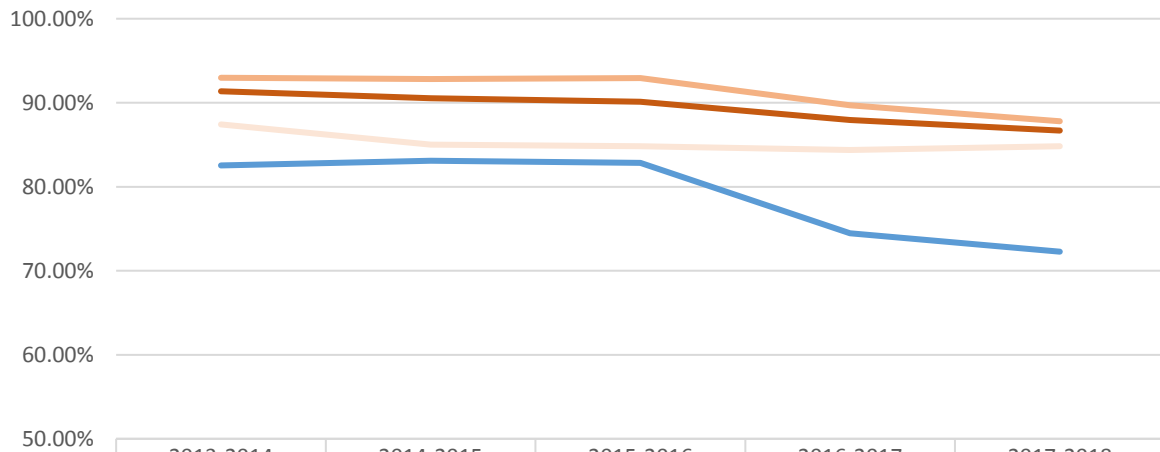
Rush Rates by Academic Status Over Time (Navigational Capital & Administrative Burden)



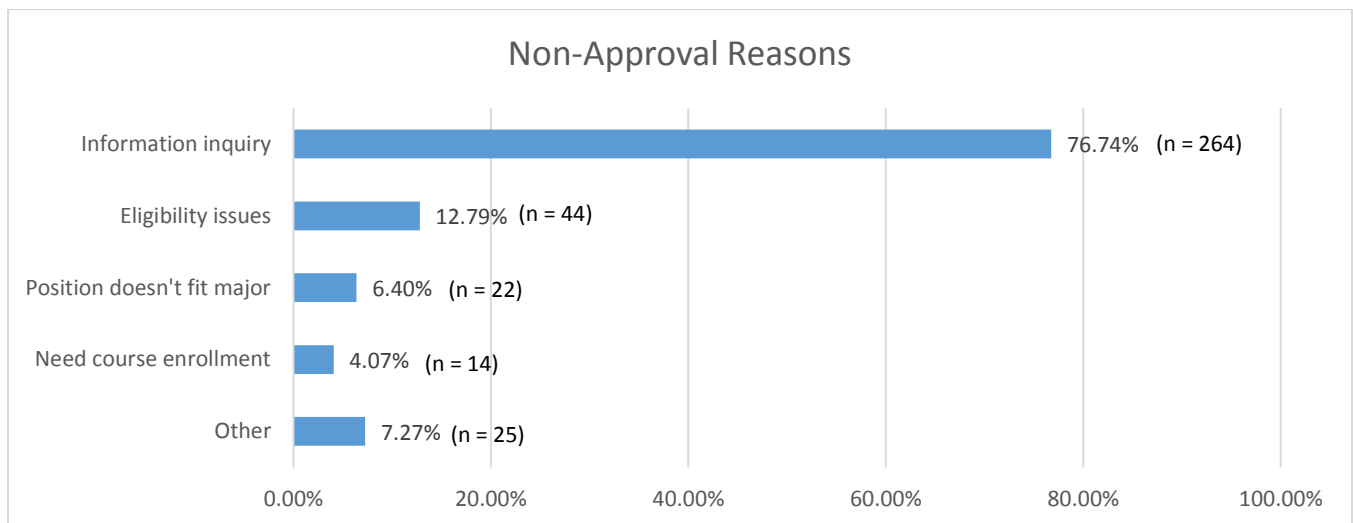
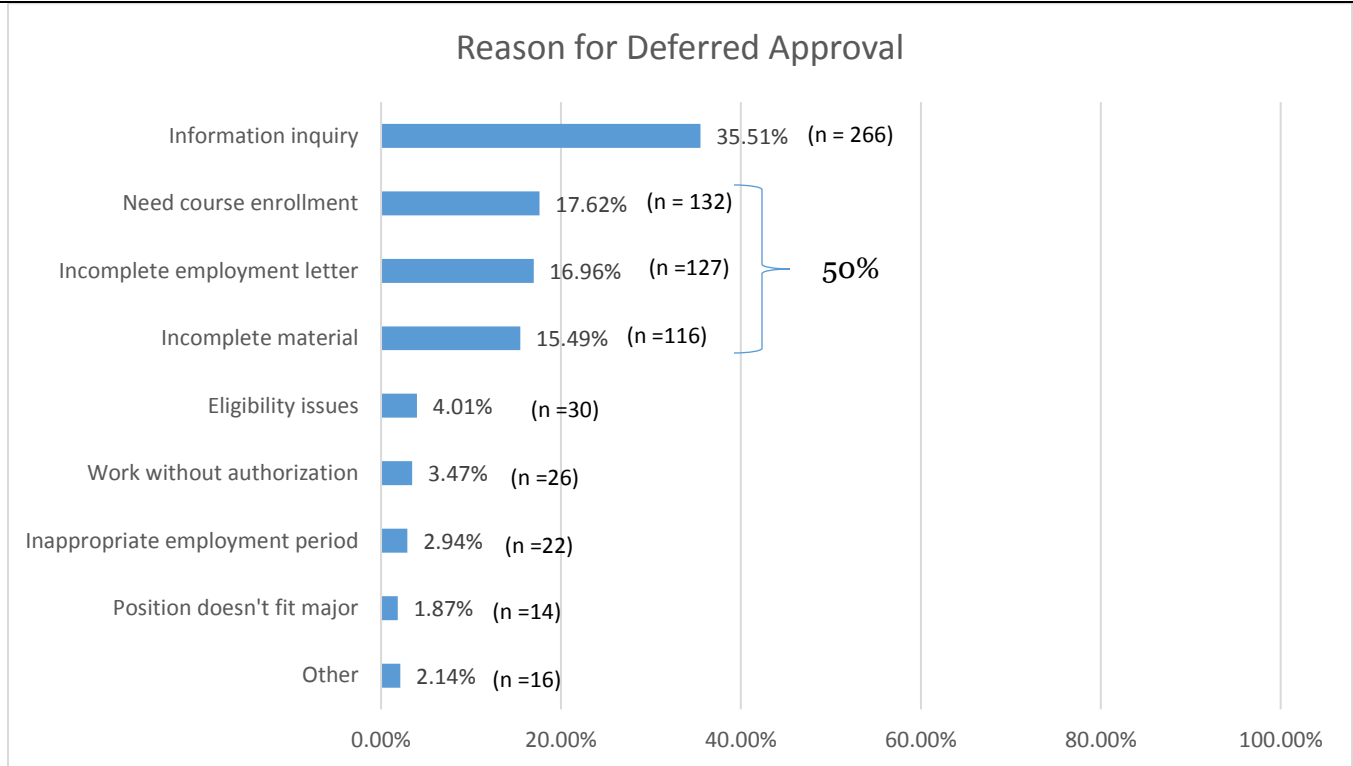
Approval Rate by Academic Status Over Time (Administrative Burden)

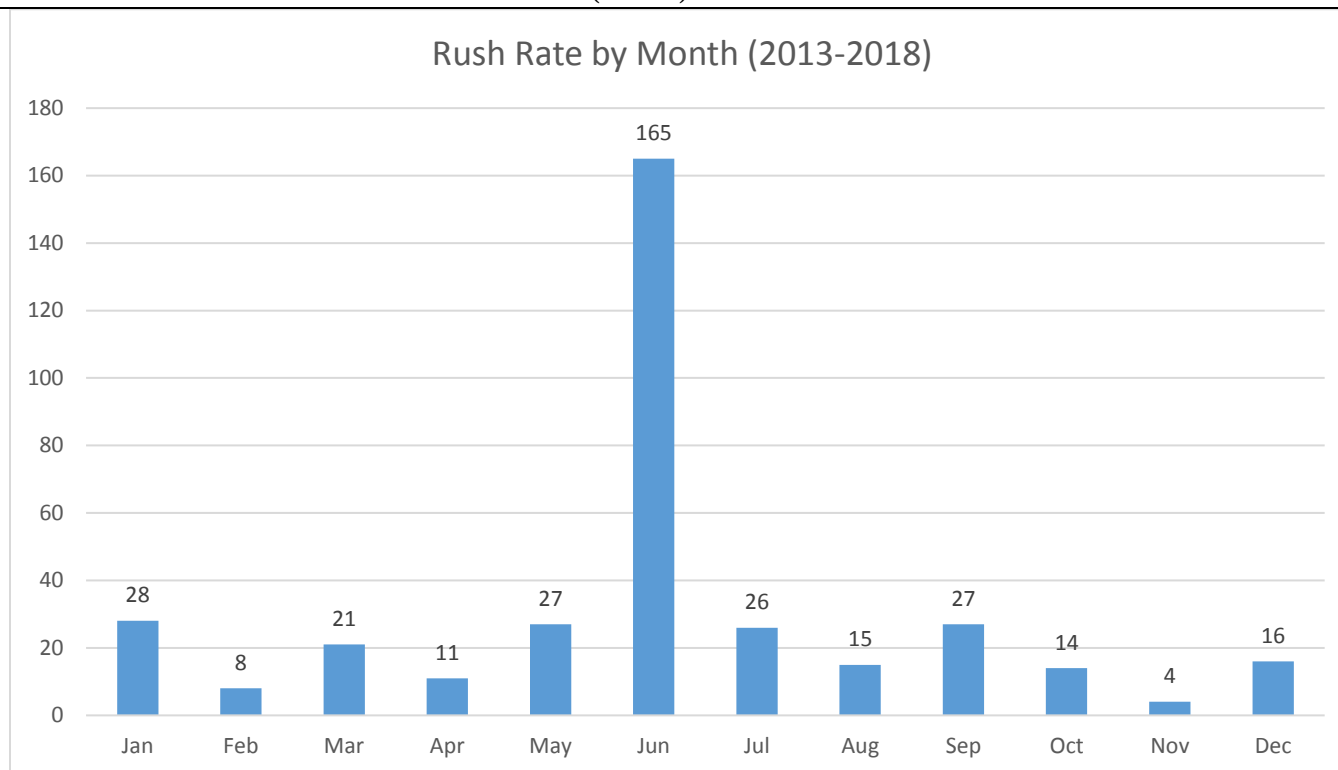


First-time Approval Rate by Academic Status Over Time
 (Navigational Capital & Administrative Burden)



| | 2013-2014 | 2014-2015 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Undergraduate | 82.55% | 83.09% | 82.85% | 74.47% | 72.27% |
| Graduate | 91.36% | 90.52% | 90.13% | 87.93% | 86.68% |
| Masters | 92.97% | 92.82% | 92.92% | 89.71% | 87.80% |
| Doctoral | 87.42% | 85.00% | 84.81% | 84.38% | 84.82% |





June rushes account for 46% of all rushes in the study.

Course Enrollment Analysis

Unique Utilization Counts by College of Letters and Science Status Over Time

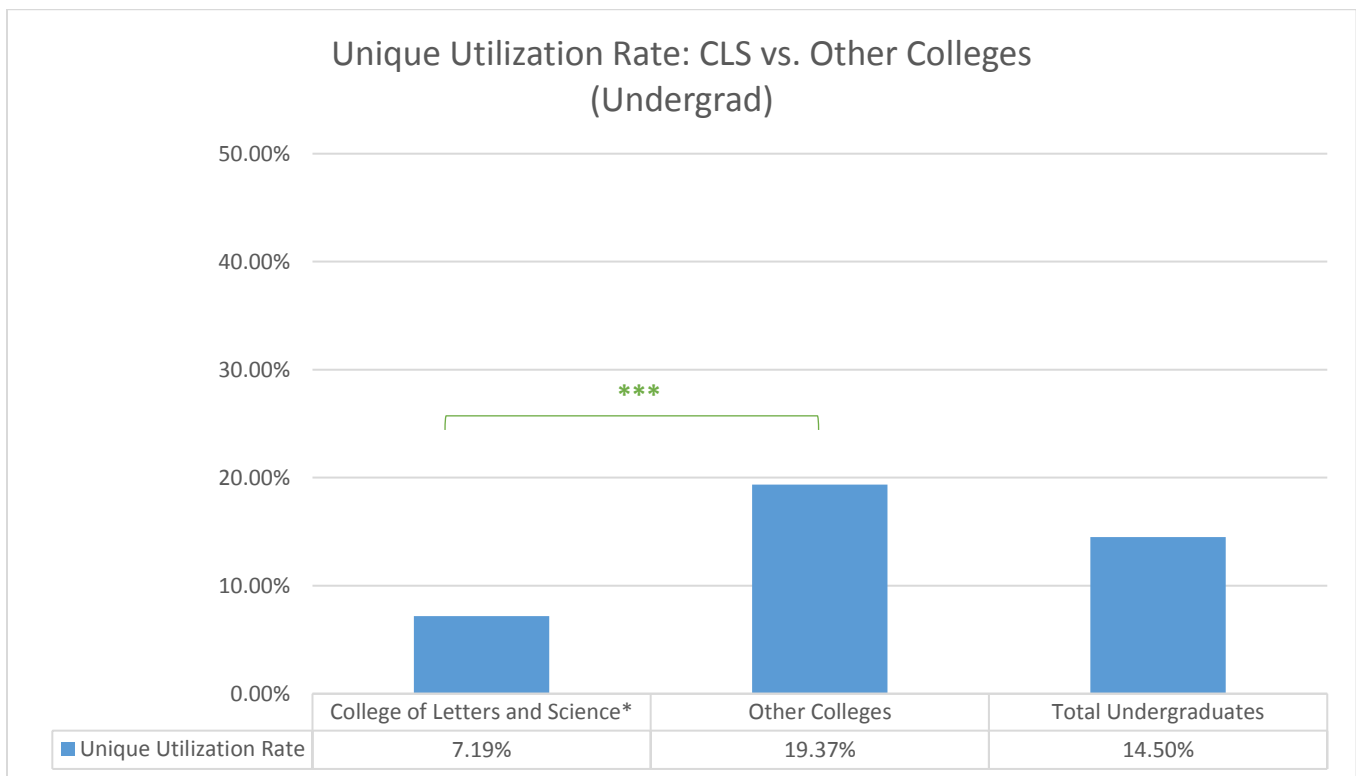
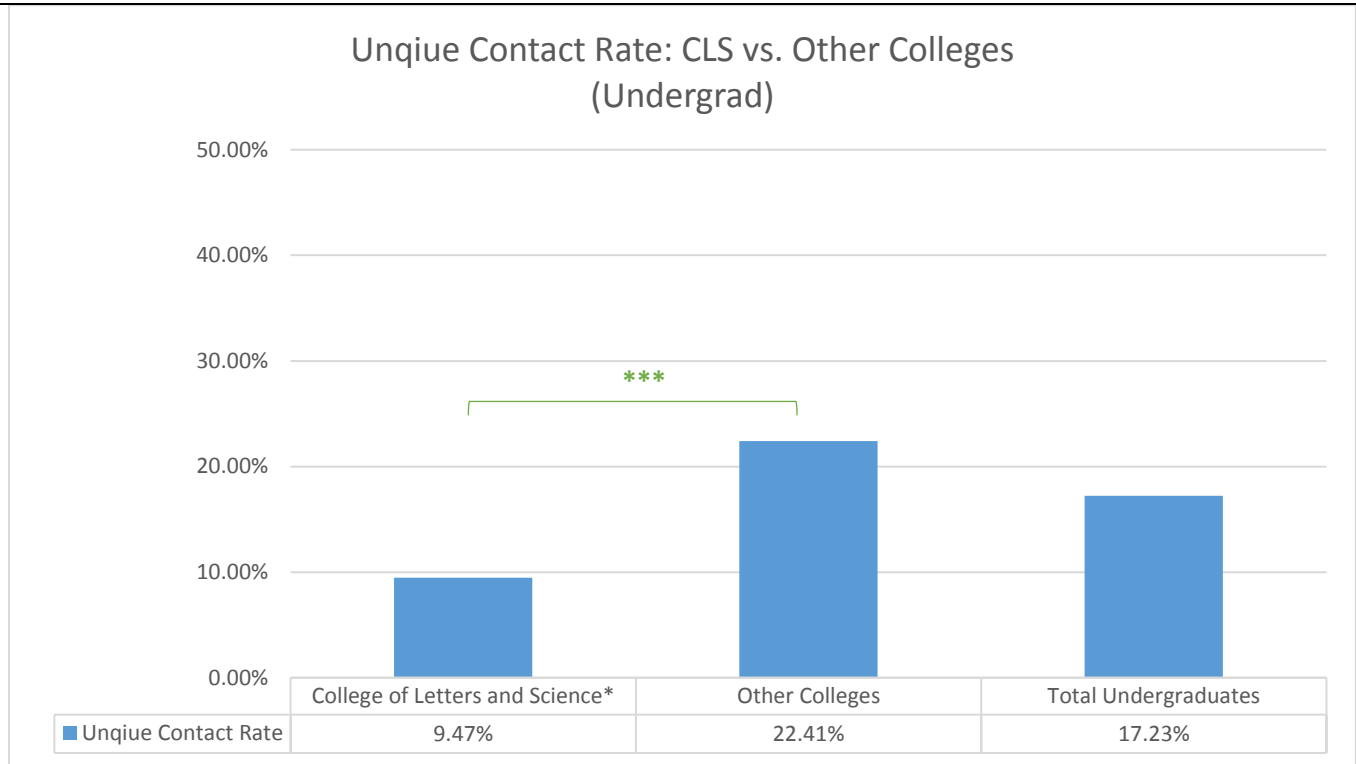
| Unique Utilization Counts | 2013-2014 | 2014-2015 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| College of Letters and Science* | 37 | 32 | 45 | 42 | 52 |
| Other Colleges | 150 | 159 | 154 | 183 | 195 |
| Total | 187 | 191 | 199 | 225 | 247 |

**Students from communication studies, economics, mathematics, and psychology departments are excluded from the College of Letters and Science and combined with "Other Colleges" for the analysis.*

Approved Case Counts by College of Letters and Science Status Over Time

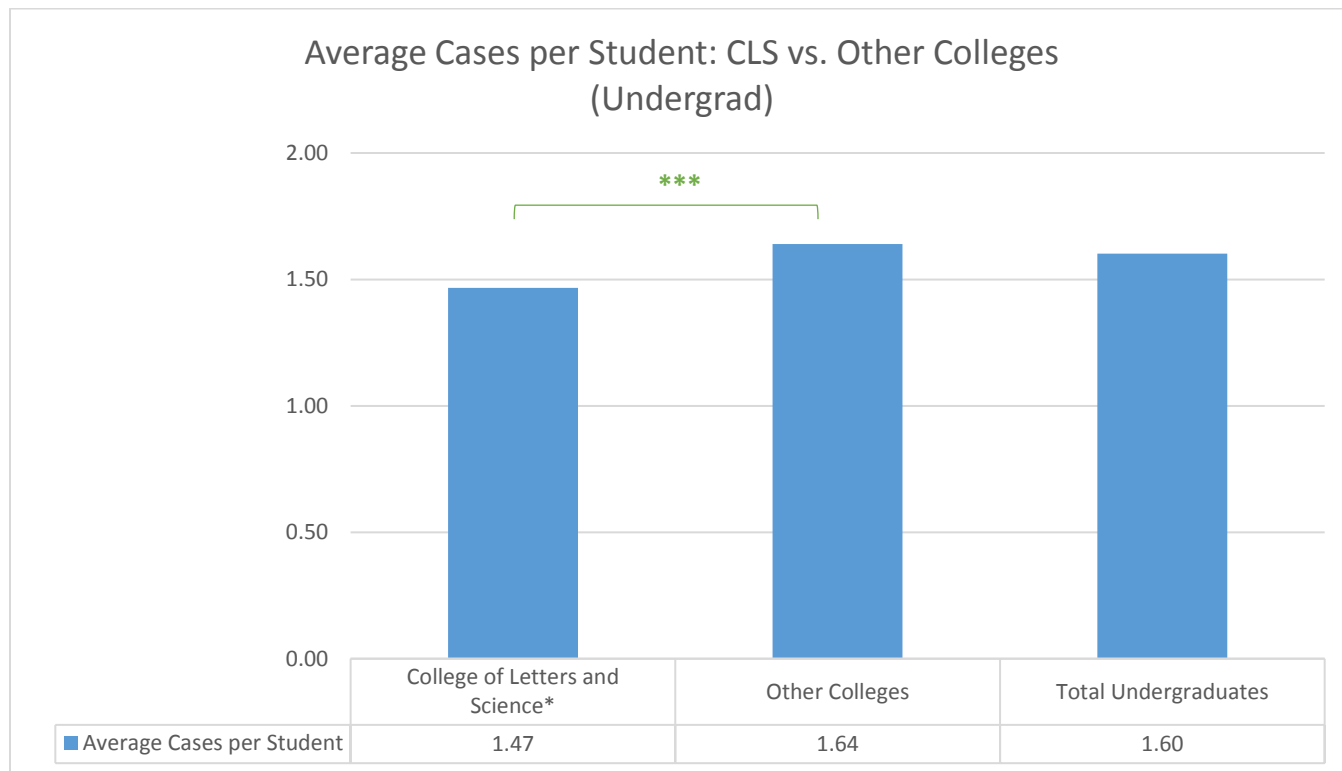
| Approved Case Counts | 2013-2014 | 2014-2015 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| College of Letters and Science* | 51 | 64 | 64 | 66 | 90 |
| Other Colleges | 224 | 285 | 280 | 314 | 350 |
| Total | 275 | 349 | 344 | 380 | 440 |

**Students from communication studies, economics, mathematics, and psychology departments are excluded from the College of Letters and Science and combined with "Other Colleges" for the analysis.*



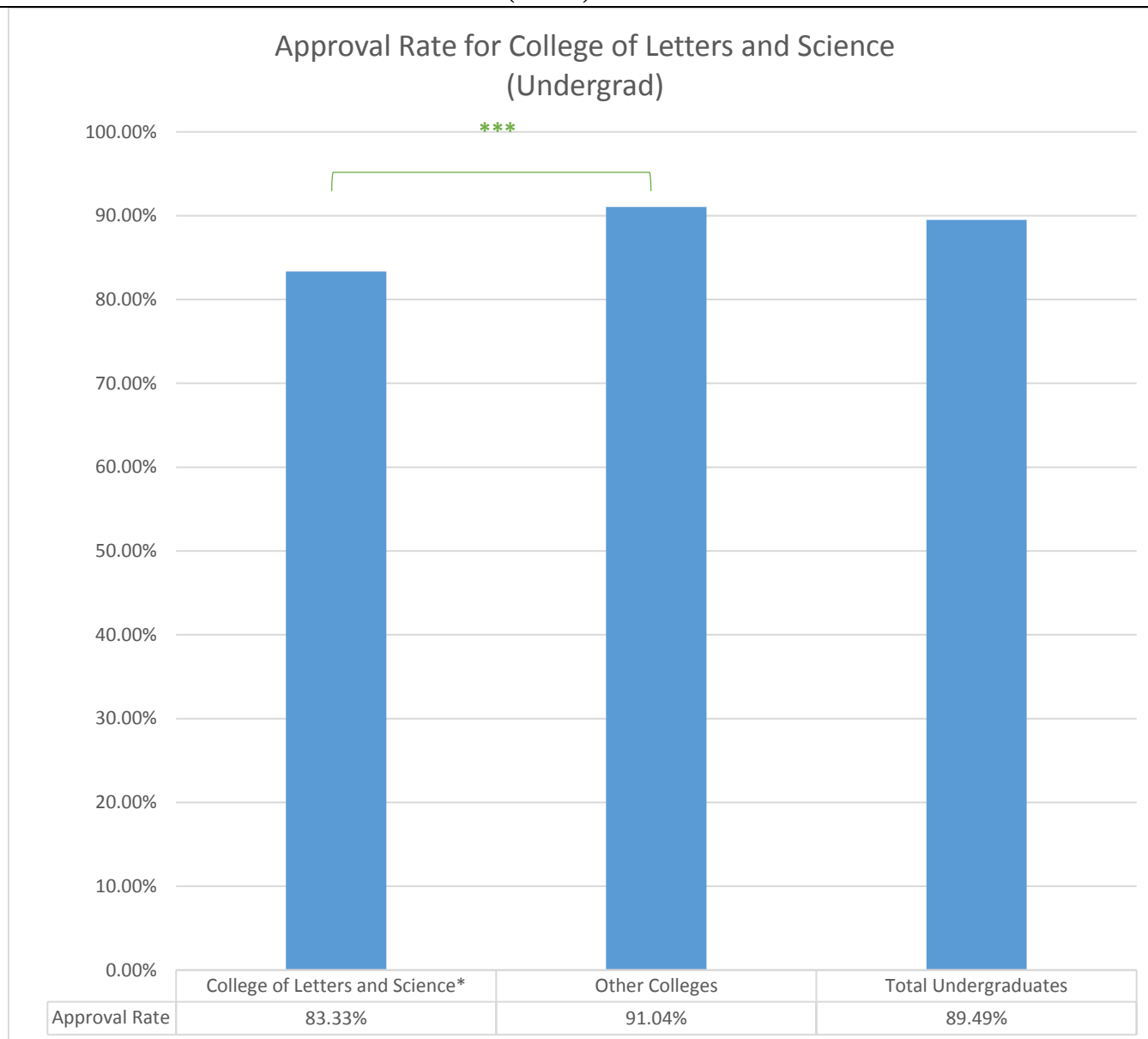
Sig. Level: 0.001 ***, 0.01 **, 0.05 *

*Students from communication studies, economics, mathematics, and psychology departments are excluded from the College of Letters and Science for the analysis since students from these majors typically take courses in their departments like students from "Other Colleges."



Sig. Level: 0.001 ***, 0.01 **, 0.05 *

*Students from communication studies, economics, mathematics, and psychology departments are excluded from the College of Letters and Science for the analysis since students from these majors typically take courses in their departments like students from "Other Colleges."



Sig. Level: 0.001 ***, 0.01 **, 0.05 *

*Students from communication studies, economics, mathematics, and psychology departments are excluded from the College of Letters and Science for the analysis since students from these majors typically take courses in their departments like students from "Other Colleges."

Appendix D: Analysis of Case Studies

Though qualitative analysis is not intended to lead to generalizable conclusions, it is worth noting that international undergraduate students and graduate students interviewed provided consistent information regarding their experience utilizing the Dashew Center for CPT approval. All students spoke positively about their experiences with the Dashew Center, and all students provided similar recommendations. This implies that although graduate students appear to have less trouble getting through the CPT approval process, they may still see the ways in which the process can be improved.

CPT Application Resources Used

The undergraduate, masters, and doctoral students reported using the following resources:

- As first steps: searching online, asking friends, and asking colleagues
- The Dashew Center website
- The information sheet received from the Dashew Center front desk during an in-person visit was deemed “extremely helpful” by the doctoral student

The doctorate student and undergraduate student knew they needed CPT to work off campus before they joined UCLA. The master student was informed about CPT by an international student friend.

Notably, no student explicitly mentioned departmental staff and faculty or the Career Center as resources for the CPT application process when asked about resources used. However, during a different part of the interview, the doctoral student told a story about the importance of having an experienced departmental SAO, which implies SAOs certainly act as resources when they are aware of the CPT process. The undergraduate student suggested that the Career Center rarely has services suitable for international students and reported that no international student they knew used the Career Center. Yet, the Dashew Center knows from conversations with Career Center colleagues and data sharing that international students are some of the highest and earliest users of Career Center services. Both of these examples point to an opportunity to enhance messaging around international student support by SAOs and the Career Center as well as to explore enhanced services where appropriate.

Ease Facilitated by Visa Counselors, SAOs, Info Sessions, Info Sheet, & Google

In the pre-interview registration form, all students rated their CPT application experience as “easy” or “very easy” when given the following options: Very easy, Easy, Slightly easy, Slightly difficult, Difficult, Very difficult. The masters student voluntarily rated their CPT application experience at 5, “1 being horrible and 5 being excellent” during the interview.

Though participants were told multiple times that their identity will not be shared with anyone outside the Research & Special Projects team, no student explicitly complained about the CPT application process with the Dashew Center. The doctoral student and the master’s students both reported that their Dashew Center visa counselors were very helpful and transparent about the application process, which made it much easier for them to submit their application. All students suggested that the workshop and info sessions by the Dashew Center were helpful.

The doctoral student reported multiple times during the interview that the info sheet from the front desk was helpful, and the undergraduate student suggested that some students did not put enough effort in their CPT applications e.g. “whatever happened was not UCLA (Dashew Center)’s fault, if you don’t even know how to Google then there is nothing others can do to help you.” This quote also speaks to the resourcefulness of

UCLA's international population to build their own navigational capital as a complement to institutional support.

One student highlighted the importance of having an experienced departmental SAO who knows the CPT application process. This doctoral student contrasted their first CPT application with their second. During their first application process, their SAO knew the CPT process and completed their portion of the application materials in a timely manner. During their second application, the doctoral student brought the Dashew Center info sheet to their SAO to guide them through writing the departmental letter. This example speaks to the importance of building capacity of SAOs as well as the resourcefulness of UCLA's international students to help UCLA build capacity to serve their own needs.

At the same time, arguably, international students should not have to fill this role in order to get what they need to use the CPT benefit. This example highlights an opportunity for the Dashew Center to fill this role by providing a tailored information sheet for all SAOs that includes an overview of the CPT process, the SAO's role, timelines, etc.

Difficulty Due to Challenges with Timeline, Course Enrollment, & Institutional Capacity

Though students provided various positive examples about the Dashew Center and others supporting their CPT application process, they talked most intensely and at length about difficulties associated with misaligned timelines for relevant units as well as challenges enrolling in the right courses. Both of these challenges force students to spend extra time and energy directing the CPT application process – time and energy that could be used on their job applications, enhancing interview skills, attending to academics, or participating in other aspects of student life.

When asked, “if a student comes and asks for advice on their CPT application, based on your own experience or your friends’ experience, what would you tell them?” all of the interviewees recommended that the student start as early as possible in order to be on top of the CPT application process at every stage.

The undergraduate student shared how difficult it was for their friends to enroll in the course housed at the Center for Community Learning, schedule an appointment with an F-1 counselor during week 3, and start an internship in week 4. Getting all the appointments needed to line up on a timeline that works for the internship start date can be challenging. One student without a faculty member for their independent study course was told by a Dashew Center counselor to come back after enrolling in an independent course with a clear faculty sponsor.

Another undergraduate student shared her friends’ experiences enrolling in an independent study course. For some science department programs, independent study courses are only offered within a limited time period and often only really close to summer break. Therefore, students must tend to final exams, (possibly) moving out of university housing, arrange CPT application materials, and apply for the CPT internship within a very short time frame. In addition, the student explained, because (at the time of her story) students must wait to apply for CPT until after they are enrolled in the relevant course, they end up requesting a rush on their application materials or stop trying to look for internship opportunities altogether.

The master's student and doctoral student reported similar delays due to institutional errors or capacity. The master's student encountered difficulty with their CPT application when their registration office enrolled them in the wrong course, which delayed their application for a week. The doctoral student experienced delays with their departmental letter when they worked with a new SAO in their department. As reported above, the Dashew Center information sheet helped to expedite the process.

Quantitative data and rush rates in June support these qualitative accounts of the difficulties with timelines and course enrollment, especially before the summer quarter begins. It should be noted, however, that the

Dashew Center recently implemented a new agreement that is expected to ease the process: students can now get CPT approval for internship start dates outside of enrollment periods. However, to do so, they must sign a release of liability and statement verifying that they understand the Dashew Center is unsure of the consequences of such an action on visa and immigration matters. This new agreement may facilitate the processes for international students as students become more aware of it.

Need for More Awareness Among Staff, International Students, and Prospective Employers

All students mentioned the need for more awareness about CPT eligibility and the CPT process among various stakeholders. The undergraduate student mentioned that some of their international friends do not know that they can apply for CPT and receive eligibility to work in the U.S. The student went on to explain that many of their peers assume they cannot work while in the United States. Additionally, employers carry this misunderstanding as well. The doctoral student mentioned an incident when a friend nearly lost their internship opportunity because the employer was not familiar with the CPT benefit.

Immigration debates in the U.S. certainly contribute to these misunderstandings among students and employers since these debates often lack information about which benefits international students are eligible for.

Interestingly, the doctoral student explicitly framed CPT as their right: “Before I came I knew that I have the right to apply for CPT and work in America...” As note previously, while this framing does not align completely with the ways in which CPT is defined, it does point to a need to frame CPT more clearly to ensure that 1) students do not believe they are entitled to something without going through the proper authorization channels, and 2) students know they are eligible for this benefit; and therefore, can go through a process to participate in a CPT experience. Using the language of CPT as *an authorized benefit* and an international student’s *eligibility for an CPT as an authorized benefit*, among all stakeholders, may help to inspire more interest among students, a more robust coordinated effort among various university offices, and employers who will readily hire international students for a CPT internship without hesitation.

A final note about the ways in which students talked about the CPT experience: for many, it’s a job. While this reduction may not be surprising given the financial burden associated with nonresident tuition, messaging around CPT should emphasize the education-enhancing aspects of internship experiences.

Student Recommendations

All students recommended that the Dashew Center have more and better placed CPT information on the website. This finding is consistent with findings from a recent URPI SAIRO-Dashew Center collaboration to investigate website communication, which recommended the addition of the following to the website:

- A CPT Info Sheet
- A CPT FAQ including special cases (e.g. the master’s student had difficulty filling out the application form when they were hired by a company through a staffing agency)
- Information about course enrollment, timelines, and related links (i.e. Center for Community Learning)

Conclusions & Recommendations from Case Studies

While these case studies point to many things that are going well with the CPT application process, the cases highlight an opportunity for the Dashew Center to serve as a coordinator of CPT education for all stakeholders and as a catalyst for a more efficient process. This coordination could take the form of tailored info sheets for different audiences with relevant information for each audience, including international students, departmental SAOs, faculty, Career Center counselors, and Career Center employee relations staff.

