

Transfer and Articulation

► Paving the Way to Degree Completion

President Obama has declared that community colleges will be critical to achieving his goal for the United States to have the highest college attainment rate in the world by the year 2020. His recently introduced American Graduation Initiative recognizes that community colleges remain the primary access point into postsecondary education for millions of traditionally under-represented populations.

While the President's goal includes both associate degrees and certificates, there is no question that increasing the percentage of Americans with a bachelor's degree will be critical to fill the growing number of jobs requiring a background in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, not to mention other fields that require higher-order thinking and organizational skills.

What's Inside

- Research on the effectiveness of transfer and articulation policies
- Factors that negatively impact successful transfer from a two-year to four-year institution
- Strategies that smooth the transition for community college students into bachelor's degree programs

For those community college students who wish to pursue a bachelor's degree, the process of effectively transferring to a four-year institution will be one of the most significant barriers to their success. While the challenge of transfer and articulation has plagued higher education for years, there is a new urgency to address this challenge as the United States seeks to increase college attainment rates.

This issue of *The Progress of Education Reform* will look at recent research on transfer and articulation in light of the new movement to increase degree attainment by addressing the following three questions:

- Do articulation agreements ease the transfer process and lead to degree attainment?
- What are the factors that facilitate or impede transfer?
- How can four-year, baccalaureate-degree-granting institutions ensure that transfer students succeed?



2010
OCTOBER
Vol. 10, No. 5

THE PROGRESS OF
Education Reform



Education Commission
of the States

Community College Transfer and Articulation Policies

Betheny Gross and Dan Goldhaber, *Center for Reinventing Public Education, 2009.*

The authors examined whether transfer and articulation policies improve student transfer and degree attainment. The study examined longitudinal student data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) from 1988-2000 and from its Postsecondary Transcript Study in states with and without transfer policies. The study considered the “strength” of state policies based on the scope of participating institutions, the level of faculty involvement, the degree of curriculum alignment and whether the state monitors transfer rates.

The study found that:

- ▶ States with transfer/articulation agreements did not see an increase in student transfer or degree attainment among students who enroll in two-year institutions.
- ▶ The strength of the state’s policies did not impact transfer rates.
- ▶ States that included private colleges in their transfer policies saw higher transfer rates.
- ▶ States with a high need for transfer/articulation policies, but weak policies, had lower transfer rates than states with a low need for transfer/articulation policies and no policies.

The authors challenge states to do a better job identifying the factors that impede transfer and improve existing policies to address these factors.

Transfer Between Community Colleges and Four-Year Colleges: The All-American Game.

Linda Serra Hagedorn, Hye Sun Moon, Scott Cypers, William E. Maxwell, Jaime Lester, *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, Vol. 30, 2006. P. 223-242.*

Using baseball as a metaphor for the “bases” that students must touch before transferring to a four-year institution, Hagedorn et. al. analyzed transcripts of students in the Los Angeles Community College District to mark student progress along six course modules outlined in California’s Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC).

The study found that few students complete the IGETC modules, with 50% of students not completing even one module in 10 semesters. Students who completed the transfer modules typically took more than two years to do so.

The authors concluded that many students have no idea which “base” they are on. They may not understand whether they require two or three courses within a given module before being transfer ready. She argues that students take attending a two-year institution too literally by thinking they are entitled to transfer in two years, even if they have not completed the transfer curriculum. She recommends that community college students receive extensive counseling about the transfer process, even when a clear transfer curriculum is in place.



Studying Transfer Students: Part II: Dimensions of Transfer Students' Adjustment

Frankie Santos Laanan, *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, Vol. 31, 2007, p. 37-59.

Santos Laanan examined the academic and social adjustments of transfer students. The study examined institutional factors at both community colleges and universities to determine their impact on the transfer process.

The study, which surveyed 700 students who transferred to a single four-year institution, found that while there are strategies that two-year institutions can employ to prepare students for transfer, the experiences of students at the four-year institution have a greater impact on the adjustment process. Santos Laanan found that many students who experience difficulties with the adjustment process spent many hours studying and engaging counselors about their challenges, often spinning their wheels academically. He argues that what is more important is the quality of student efforts, not the quantity of time dedicated to their academic pursuits. As a result, four-year institutions must provide high-quality experiences that ease transition and build the capacity of students to succeed at the four-year institution. Orientation programs, student-run services or clubs that serve transfer students and productive faculty engagement can mitigate the anxiety related to transfer. Community colleges also can help by having faculty provide a rigorous curriculum that prepares students for transfer and counselors who are familiar with the resources available to transfer students.

Making the Transition to Four-Year Institutions: Academic Preparation and Transfer

Josipa Roksa and Juan Carlos Calcagano, *Community College Research Center, Teachers College at Columbia University, CCRC Working Paper No. 13*, June, 2008.

The study looks at the gap in transfer rates between academically prepared and unprepared community college students and whether intermediate student outcomes, such as completing entry-level math courses or earning a specific number of credits, mitigate any disadvantages that impede successful transfer for underprepared students.

The study examined unit record transcript data for over 20,000 first-time, degree-seeking Florida community college students who enrolled in fall, 1998. The study found that 20% of students who were underprepared transferred within five years, compared to 34% of academically prepared students. Achievement of the intermediate outcomes — particularly completion of a college-level math course and completing 48 semester credits — decreased the gap in transfer rates between underprepared and prepared students, but did not completely eliminate the gap. Notably, earning an associate degree, which guarantees transfer in Florida, did not eliminate the gap in transfer rates.

While intermediate outcomes improved the transfer rate of underprepared students, the authors concluded that postsecondary efforts must be combined with strategies that increase the percentage of students leaving high school prepared for college-level work.



ECS Resources

Community College Policy Center

The Education Commission of the States, Iowa State University and Academy for Educational Development (AED), have joined forces to reconstitute the Community College Policy Center, a national policy clearinghouse that will provide critical support to state and federal policymakers and community college leaders as a one-stop resource for information and policy research focused on how states can fully leverage their community colleges as engines of economic development and educational opportunity. Linda Serra Hagedorn and Frankie Santos Laanan, who are featured in this month's issue, are two of the faculty from Iowa State University who will be engaged in academic research through the center.

For more information contact Katherine Boswell, Executive Director, at 801.278.0713 or kboswell@aed.org.

Recent State Policies on Transfer and Articulation

The Education Commission of the States State Policy Database tracks hundreds of state education policies every year. See the following listing of recent state policies related to transfer and articulation: www.ecs.org/transfer-policies.

Other Resources

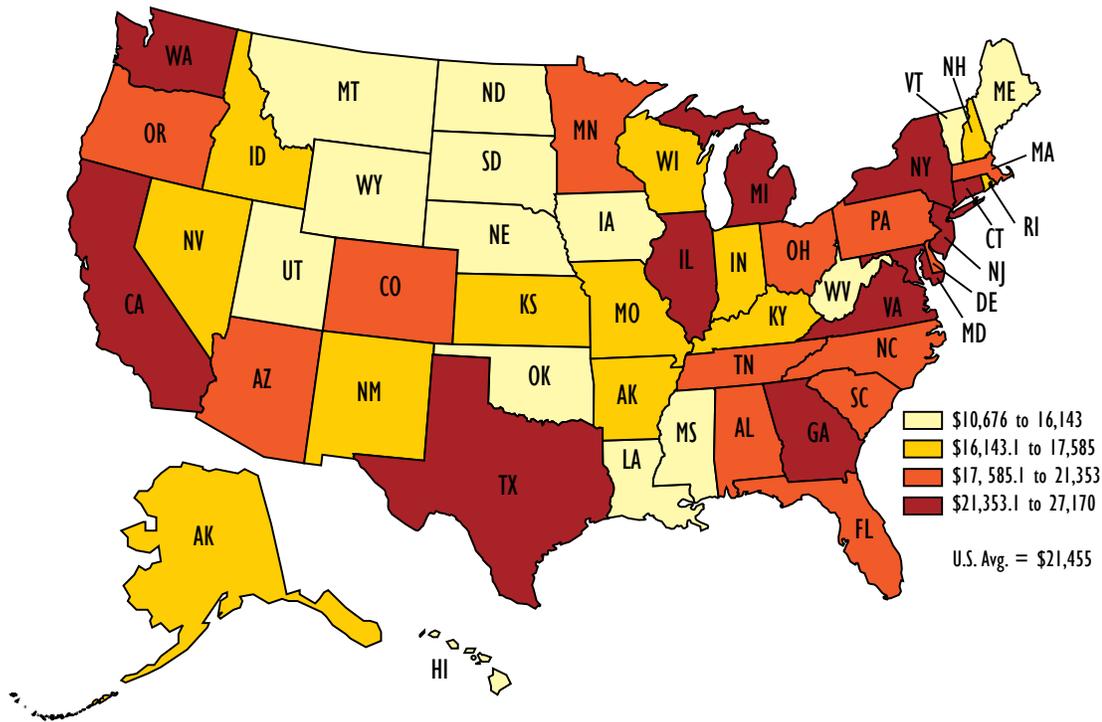
Best Practices in Articulation and Transfer

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and Hezel Associates have received funding from Lumina Foundation for Education to identify state policies and practices that contribute to successful transfer between community colleges and four-year institutions. The project will complete an inventory of transfer and articulation policies and programs implemented by states and systems. For more information, visit the project Web site at: www2.wiche.edu/stas.

Tuning USA

Lumina Foundation for Education has funded three states to engage in faculty-led pilot projects designed to define what students must know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completing a degree in a specific field. Tuning USA methodology is based on similar work to increase the transparency around what a degree represents under Europe's Bologna Process (www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/). Minnesota, one of the participating states in the project, is using the tuning process to improve the quality of transfer and articulation into specific degree programs. For more information on the project, visit: www.luminafoundation.org/our_work/tuning.

Difference in Median Earnings Between a High School Diploma and a Bachelor's Degree, 25- to 64-Year-Olds – 2007



From: Higherinfo.org, produced by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (Public Use Microdata Samples).

Policy Recommendations

These four studies illustrate that the transfer process is far more complicated than simply creating articulation agreements between two-year and four-year institutions. The seeds of successful transfer are planted in high school with students taking a rigorous college preparatory curriculum. Community colleges need to be more explicit about their transfer mission by properly advising students of the steps to successful transfer. In addition, institutions should ask faculty to be engaged in the transfer mission by providing a rigorous curriculum that adequately prepares students for four-year institutions. Finally, four-year institutions must make it a priority to effectively transition transfer students into their institutions. Academic workshops, orientation programs and student activities directed at transfer students all can improve the success of transfer students.

Finally, a focus on student academic competencies rather than courses can better prepare students for transfer. Strategies such as “tuning” protocols between two-year and four-year institutions take articulation to a new level by better outlining the competencies that students must possess to be successful in various academic disciplines.

The transfer process will become increasingly important as policymakers look to the community college as the primary access point to the training required to access high-paying jobs in the 21st century economy.

This issue of *The Progress of Education Reform* was made possible by a grant from the GE Foundation. If you have any questions regarding this or other postsecondary issues, please contact Bruce Vandal, Director, ECS Postsecondary and Workforce Development Institute, at 303.299.3611 or bvandal@ecs.org.



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