

Report on the Progress of Transfer Student Success in Michigan

SUBMITTED BY THE MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF STATE UNIVERSITIES AND THE
MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE ASSOCIATION

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Contents

Introduction	2
Implementation of the Michigan Transfer Agreement.....	3
Improvements to Articulation and Credit Transfer Policies	3
Policies and Practices Developed by Other States.....	3
Specific pathways, where advisable, that meet program requirements for both associate and bachelor’s degree programs.	4
Enhanced online communication tool to share information about postsecondary options in Michigan, particularly clearly articulating transfer pathways	4
Timelines for finalizing transfer pathways.....	5
Conclusion.....	5
Appendix A: Transfer Steering Committee Members.....	6

Introduction

In the 2010-2011 academic year, 42% of bachelor's degree completers in Michigan attended community college.¹ Enrolling in more than one institution of higher education before completing a bachelor's degree is increasingly becoming the norm, not the exception. Furthermore, 37% of community college students transferred to a four-year institution in the six years after starting college. This is compared to the national average of 33% and ranks Michigan among the top seven states in community college transfers.² While Michigan students are transferring at a higher rate than their peers in other states, they are completing associate and bachelor's degrees at lower rates. Approximately 24% of community college transfer students completed an award prior to transferring (compared to the national average of 29%) and 34% completed a bachelor's degree within six years of beginning college (compared to the national average of 42%). However, completion rates differed by sector with 40% of students transferring to public institutions completing a degree within six years compared with 14% of students transferring to private, non-profit institutions.

For these reasons, transfer student success has become more important than ever. In a March 2016 report, a study committee on the block transfer of the associate degree made two major recommendations for immediate action. The committee recommended:

- *Create a Collaborative Foundation for Prioritization, Dialogue, and Planning* – Form a single, representative body to act as a Steering Committee for all state-level transfer and articulation initiatives in Michigan. The report further outlines the structure and purpose of this committee, including clear deliverables to measure progress.
- *Create a Student Portal to Share Transfer Information* – Aligned with recommendations from the Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (MACRAO) Michigan Transfer Network (MTN) Replacement Committee and the Michigan Postsecondary Credential Attainment Workgroup, it is recommended that the state invest in a communication tool to share information about postsecondary options in Michigan, including essential tools for transfer planning.

Immediately after the 60-hour block transfer study committee recommended that Michigan create a committee, the colleges and universities in Michigan created the Transfer Steering Committee. The Transfer Steering Committee includes representatives from 15 public universities, 15 community colleges, three independent colleges and universities, and ex officio representation from MACRAO. The committee representatives are listed in Appendix A. The cross-sector Transfer Steering Committee has met twice since the previous report was submitted. The Committee reviewed information on transfer student outcomes in Michigan and across the country and discussed strategies to improve transfer including current projects related to aligning learning outcomes in mathematics across the state and providing technical assistance to colleges and universities awarding academic credit for military experience.

In addition, the Committee discussed and endorsed a proposal submitted to the State Budget Office to replace the Michigan Transfer Network. This joint proposal, submitted by the Michigan Association of State Universities and the Michigan Community College Association on behalf of their members,

¹ <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SnapshotReport6-TwoYearContributions.pdf>

² Jenkins, D., & Fink, J. (2016). Tracking Transfer: New Measures of Institutional and State Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students Attain Bachelor's Degrees. New York, NY: Community College Research Center.

requests a \$1 million appropriation to replace the Michigan Transfer Network, enhance the Michigan Transfer Agreement, and design and build statewide associate to bachelor's degree transfer pathways.

Implementation of the Michigan Transfer Agreement

All 43 public colleges and universities implemented the Michigan Transfer Agreement in Fall 2014. While students have been able to receive the MTA endorsement on their transcript for two years, too few students in Michigan know how to use the MTA to efficiently transfer general education coursework between community colleges and universities. The Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (MACRAO) has generously maintained information for students about the MTA on their website, but the MACRAO website is not an intuitive place for students to navigate to find information about the MTA. Additionally, the new Michigan Transfer Network will eliminate the need for students to read through a central repository of MTA policy documents by flagging any course in the MTN that is eligible to be used for the MTA. Students would have the ability to plan out their schedule of courses knowing in advance that each course has been MTA approved. The MTN site will also include information about the MTA, how to use the MTA to transfer across institutions in Michigan, and additional links to MTA-specific information at colleges and universities in Michigan. As with the overall course equivalency database, this information will be presented in a student-friendly format. The data will be housed in the same secure database as the course equivalency database and institutions will be expected to report their MTA information to the MTN.

The expanded course equivalency database would build upon the new MTN described above, but add several features that will improve the search experience for students. Beyond the new MTA-eligible identifier, course attributes will be added to the current database along with more course details, effective dates, and increased functionality to add comments to courses. The expanded course equivalency database would also provide several advanced search options such as searching for courses in a particular region of the state or by searching based on the course department or title, and keywords. This expanded course equivalency database will continue to be hosted in the same database as the course equivalency database described above. This phase of the MTN will specifically focus on expanding the functionality of the course equivalency database so that students have more robust search options which will make it easier to locate course equivalencies.

Improvements to Articulation and Credit Transfer Policies

Policies and Practices Developed by Other States

As Michigan colleges and universities have been focused on improving transfer student outcomes, these institutions have been simultaneously following the process of other states who are also focused on improving transfer student outcomes. States such as South Carolina³, Tennessee⁴, Indiana⁵, Ohio⁶, Connecticut⁷, and Massachusetts⁸ have developed statewide transfer portals, improved course-to-course equivalencies between colleges and universities, adopted and implemented a general education block transfer, and convened faculty to build associate to bachelor's degree transfer pathways so that students can complete both degrees without completing unnecessary credits.

³ <https://www.sctrac.org/>

⁴ <http://www.tnreconnect.gov/>

⁵ <http://www.transferin.net/index.aspx>

⁶ <https://transfercredit.ohio.gov/ap/1>

⁷ <http://www.ct.edu/transfer>

⁸ <http://www.mass.edu/masstransfer/>

Michigan follows national trends in transfer student success very closely. Fortunately, many states have strong student data systems that can track student outcomes across institutions and understand more clearly how students perform when they transfer from one institution to another. Michigan has an equally robust student data system (maintained by the Center for Educational Performance and Information). As Michigan continues to implement policies, practices, and principles that improve transfer student outcomes, we hope to track student progress with the support of CEPI.

Specific pathways, where advisable, that meet program requirements for both associate and bachelor's degree programs.

States that have successfully implemented degree-specific transfer pathways that meet program requirement for the associate and bachelor's degrees have done so with significant engagement from discipline-specific faculty at community colleges and universities. It is essential that faculty lead these conversations since they establish course learning outcomes, determine transfer equivalencies, and establish program requirements at community colleges and universities. The proposal that Governor Snyder included in the Executive Budget includes faculty development of these associate to bachelor's degree transfer pathways.

Students have been using "articulation agreements" developed between individual community colleges and universities for decades. These articulation agreements are used by students, but there is a great opportunity to expand the scope of articulation agreements to include multiple community colleges and multiple universities. This requires statewide engagement and this phase of the work would convene discipline-specific faculty and administrative committees to align course and program requirements so that students can complete up to 60 credits and an associate degree at a community college, then transfer and complete the remaining bachelor's degree requirements. Some of this work is already complete, building on course equivalencies, the 30-credit Michigan Transfer Agreement block, and many colleges and universities that have already signed articulation agreements and created transfer guides in specific disciplines. Developing degree transfer pathways requires statewide coordination to begin to braid together this patchwork of transfer options and more effectively communicate these options to students throughout the state.

Enhanced online communication tool to share information about postsecondary options in Michigan, particularly clearly articulating transfer pathways

The current MTN is hosted by Michigan State University (MSU) and is financially supported by an in-kind contribution of MSU. The MTN uses old technology which is challenging to maintain and difficult to upgrade or add new features. If approved by the Legislature, the first phase of the MTN replacement will migrate the current MTN database to a new database on a new website. The new database will be hosted on a secure platform with 24/7 access and will be mobile-friendly with the ability to use the site from a mobile device. Colleges and universities will continue to report their transfer course data to the MTN in a format that is compatible with the new database. The new site will include a modern user-interface with a more student-friendly "look and feel." Students will continue to be able to search for course equivalencies between colleges and universities in Michigan, but results will be presented in a clear and consistent format. The entire focus of this phase of the new Michigan Transfer Network is to create a stable database on a new platform and to build a new user-interface. It is not expected that students will experience any downtime as a result of the migration.

Timelines for finalizing transfer pathways

As discussed in the funding proposal included in Governor Snyder's FY2018 Executive Budget, we expect that the Michigan Transfer Network replacement, the Michigan Transfer Agreement enhancements, and the associate to bachelor's degree transfer pathways would be implemented between October 2017 and September 2020.

While the initial implementation will be completed before September 2020, maintaining course equivalencies, the general education block transfer, and associate to bachelor's degree transfer pathways requires on-going maintenance. Other states typically engage faculty annually to ensure that transfer information is up-to-date. We expect the same in Michigan.

Conclusion

Improving transfer student outcomes is essential to improving all student outcomes across Michigan community colleges, state universities, and independent colleges and universities. The strategies presented in the budget request included in Governor Snyder's FY2018 Executive Budget are reflective of successful strategies implemented in Michigan's peer states. The proposal is a comprehensive strategy to address transfer student success - from improving course equivalencies to building statewide associate to bachelor's degree transfer pathways and considering how to communicate about these transfer programs to more Michigan residents through the development of a new online transfer portal.

In addition to the leaders of the Michigan Association of State Universities and the Michigan Community College Association, the Transfer Steering Committee is in agreement that the strategies will improve transfer student outcomes in Michigan.

Appendix A: Transfer Steering Committee Members

State Universities		
Central Michigan University	Claudia Douglass	Associate Provost for Academic Effectiveness
Eastern Michigan University	Michael Tew	Director of Undergraduate Studies
Ferris State University	Dee Dee Stakley	Transfer Services Director
Grand Valley State University	Maria Cimitile	Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs
Lake Superior State University	David Finley	Interim Provost & VP for Academic Affairs
Michigan State University	John Gaboury	Associate Provost
Michigan Technological University	Leonard Bohman	Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
Northern Michigan University	Kim Rotundo	Registrar
Oakland University	Susan Awbrey	Senior Associate Provost
Saginaw Valley State University	Deb Huntley	Provost & VP for Academic Affairs
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	Jim Penner-Hahn	Associate Dean
University of Michigan- Dearborn	Mitch Sollenberger	Associate Provost for Ugrd Progs and Integrative Learning
University of Michigan - Flint	Doug Knerr	Provost & VC for Academic Affairs
Wayne State University	Darin Ellis	Associate Provost & Associate Vice President
Western Michigan University	Dave Reinhold	Associate Provost
Independent Colleges and Universities		
Northwood University	Rhonda Anderson	Associate Dean of Adult Degree Programs
Cleary College	Jayson Boyers	President
Baker College	Denise Bannan	Provost
Community Colleges		
Grand Rapids Community College	Laurie Chesley	Provost/Executive VP for Academic & Student Affairs
Mott Community College	Amy Fugate	Vice President, Academic Affairs
Delta College	Jean Goodnow	President
Mid Michigan Community College	Scott Mertes	Dean of Liberal Arts
Macomb Community College	Jim Sawyer	Provost and Senior Vice President
Kirtland Community College	Tom Quinn	President
Northwestern Michigan College	Stephen Siciliano	Vice President for Educational Services
Muskegon Community College	Teresa Sturuss	Vice President of Academic Affairs and Finance
Muskegon Community College	Kelley Conrad	Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs
Gogebic Community College	Jeanne Graham	Dean of Student Services (and Interim Dean of Instruction)
Kalamazoo Valley Community College	Dennis Bertch	Executive VP of Instructional and Student Services
Glen Oaks Community College	David Devier	President
Jackson College	Rebekah Woods	Provost
Montcalm Community College	Rob Spohr	Chief Academic Officer
West Shore Community College	Ken Urban	President
St. Clair County Community College	Deb Snyder	President