

Transfer Study Committee Project Status Report and Initial Recommendations

March 1, 2016

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Executive Summary

There is compelling evidence for the need to improve articulation and credit transfer policies among and between all sectors of postsecondary education in Michigan. With several successful collaborative efforts aimed toward student success, Michigan's public two- and four-year institutions of higher education have partnered again in presenting these recommendations in addressing issues related to an enhanced transfer of credits, up to and including the associate's degree in ways that reflect the integrity of degree programs. The Study Committee agreed on several principles to guide the recommendations and next steps. They include *supporting state educational attainment and talent goals, transparency, voluntary involvement, and quality and alignment*.

After careful consideration of several issues, the committee recommends that Michigan consider the following six recommendations as it continues to develop a better transfer process:

- Research and Data Analysis - invest in research that will contribute to the collective understanding of student transfer pathways.
- Focus and Scope - further define the scope of the associate's degree transfer, identify specific transfer focus areas, and establish clear timelines for finalizing transfer pathways.
- Current and Best Practices - consider the effective policies and practices developed by other states and best practices documented in research studies without violating Michigan's unique governance structure.
- Transfer Pathways - develop specific pathways, where advisable, that meet program requirements for both associate's and bachelor's degree programs.
- Enhance Communication - create an enhanced online communication tool to share information about postsecondary options in Michigan, particularly clearly articulating transfer pathways.
- Promote Holistic Transfer - scale comprehensive support services for transfer students.

The committee recommends immediate action on the following:

- *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.

Introduction

On average, students in Michigan transfer from two- to four-year institutions of higher education at a higher rate than their peers in other states. A recent study found that 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 transfer.¹ While Michigan students are transferring at a higher rate than their peers in other states, they are completing associate's 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%). In addition, 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.

The study committee recognizes that Michigan colleges and universities need to do better serving the 37% of students who transfer from a two- to four-year institutions in addition to better supporting multi-directional transfer.

In the last several years, Michigan colleges and universities have invested in improving the transfer process for Michigan students:

- In Fall 2014, all 43 public colleges and universities and other private and tribal colleges implemented the Michigan Transfer Agreement (MTA). The MTA allows community college students to transfer 30 credits of general education coursework to a four-year institution. These courses transfer in a block and are guaranteed to count toward a bachelor's degree.
- Michigan's community colleges and public universities were accepted to the Math Pathways to Completion project through the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin. This collaborative project engages college and university math faculty to increase course alignment and learning outcomes in mathematics.
- The Consortium of Michigan Veterans Educators (CMVE), a collaboration between two- and four-year institutions, received a grant to increase access to higher education for veterans and military-affiliated students and to increase opportunities to award academic credit for military experiences. CMVE is strongly linked to the Midwestern Higher Education Compact's (MHEC) Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit (MCMC).
- Michigan is a leading state in the Credit When It's Due initiative, a national effort dedicated to increasing reverse transfer completion for students who complete their associate's degree after transferring from community colleges to universities.
- Along with these collaborative efforts, Michigan community colleges have implemented several initiatives to improve student success including Achieving the Dream, Guided Pathways, the Center for Global Initiatives, Michigan Colleges Online, and Project Win-Win. Likewise, Michigan universities have also engaged in efforts to improve student success, including Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP), Michigan Career Pathways, and the Michigan Gateways to Completion Project.

Collectively, these initiatives have helped Michigan make significant progress toward a better transfer process for the 37% of students who transfer from two- to four-year institutions. Despite these great

¹ 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.

efforts, this committee recognizes that Michigan still needs to increase the number of transfer students who are earning an associate's degree prior to transferring and students who are completing a bachelor's degree. Michigan continues to lag behind other states in degree attainment, both associate's and bachelor's degrees, among transfer students. This report responds to the legislative request (see Appendix A) to explore the issues relevant to the associate's degree transfer. The report outlines guiding principles, study recommendations, and next steps.

Study Committee

The study committee that examined this issue included representatives from two- and four-year institutions. Committee members from public and private institutions included diverse institutional representation including presidents, senior academic leadership, registrars, and other subject-matter experts with experience addressing the needs of transfer students. Appendix B includes a full listing of study committee members. The full Study Committee met during two in-person meetings on November 3, 2015 at the Henry Center at Michigan State University and on January 20, 2016 at the Michigan Community College Association. In December, committee members provided written feedback on draft Guiding Principles and Study Recommendations. In February, committee members participated via conference calls and provided written feedback to finalize this report. In addition, committee members reviewed practices from other states and thoughtfully considered the most effective way to design an enhanced transfer process.

Guiding Principles

Members of the Study Committee, taking guidance from the Michigan Transfer Agreement process, developed Guiding Principles to frame the discussion. The principles are:

Support State Educational Attainment and Talent Goals

The Study Committee believes that improving the transfer process for students is a worthwhile goal in and of itself. The committee also sees value in aligning institutional and sector policies with statewide educational attainment and talent goals. In 2013, Governor Rick Snyder adopted the goal of achieving a 60% attainment rate of Michigan adults with a degree or certificate by 2025. However, the committee also requests more clarity on the state's education and talent goals to ensure better alignment between transfer pathways and educational attainment and talent goals. The committee agrees that transfer improvement initiatives should acknowledge that students pursue higher education for the purposes of both academic enrichment and career preparation.

Transparency

The Study Committee values transparency as another guiding principle. Students deserve to have accurate and easily accessible information on the extent to which credits will transfer to other institutions. Public, regularly updated information on individual course equivalencies, articulation agreements, and degree pathways can reduce the incidences of non-transferrable credit and increase degree and certificate attainment rates.

Voluntary Involvement

The Study Committee respects institutional discretion, and supports voluntary participation in transfer related initiatives, while strongly encouraging maximum participation. Michigan public universities and community colleges function in a shared governance model where faculty have varying degrees of control over the curriculum. Universities and community colleges must retain control of their curriculum,

although if an institution participates in transfer initiatives, the institution should abide by all aspects of the agreement.

Quality and Alignment

The Study Committee recognizes that maintaining academic quality and rigor is and must remain an important principle. All public and independent nonprofit institutions in Michigan are accredited by the same entity, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).² The HLC validates quality through a rigorous process of examining institutional mission, academic governance, course offerings, and finances. The quality of courses is very important and the committee focused on the alignment of course content and learning outcomes to ensure quality of courses. The Study Committee also recognized that students and families, as consumers of education, have a role to play in determining an educational path.

Study Recommendations

After careful consideration of several issues, the committee recommends that Michigan consider the following six recommendations as it continues to develop a better transfer process.

Research and Data Analysis

The committee recommends that Michigan invest in research that will contribute to the collective understanding of student transfer pathways. This includes increased attention to the articulation of individual courses, loss of credit, academic performance, and associate's and bachelor's degree attainment. Individual colleges and universities often examine student success outcomes of transfer students and national studies contribute to our understanding of the transfer experience, but increased attention to transfer pathways across all Michigan colleges is an essential contribution to crafting associate's degree transfer pathways.

Focus and Scope

The committee recognizes that transfer between two- and four-year institutions is incredibly complex. Community colleges and universities offer hundreds of degree programs, designed to meet the needs of the workforce and prepare students for graduate education. Additionally, given the rise of reverse transfer, transfer acceptance is multi-directional among and between two- and four-year institutions. Given this complex system, the committee recommends that stakeholders further define the scope of the associate's degree transfer, identify specific transfer focus areas, and establish clear timelines for finalizing transfer pathways. This process must have executive level support from all participating institutions; ongoing engagement from Chief Academic Officers; significant involvement from faculty; and input and support from other stakeholders including admissions officers, registrars, academic advisors, and transfer and articulation specialists.

Current and Best Practices

At least 35 states have implemented state-level transfer of the associate degree with another nine in progress on this work as of 2014.³ The committee recommends that Michigan consider the effective policies and practices developed by other states and best practices documented in research studies. Common components of other state policies include the transfer of the general education coursework, common lower-division pre-major and early major pathways, a focus on credit applicability, and junior

² <https://www.hlcommission.org/>

³ <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbquestRTL?rep=TA04>

status upon transfer. In addition, many states have created transfer and articulation steering committees and have engaged executive leadership, faculty, and administrative staff. Most states have invested in an online communication tool designed to share transfer options with students. Indeed, adapting practices from other states will require Michigan adapt practices that accommodate its unique governance structure, yet the committee acknowledges that the principles associated with these practices remain very relevant to any state's transfer process. Finally, the inclusion of faculty in developing transfer pathways is essential. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) recently released a series of reports that focus on the important of assessing learning outcomes. Approximately 87% of member institutions assess learning outcomes which is also an essential component of determining course equivalences between colleges and universities that clarify transfer policies. Colleges and universities can more confidently encourage students to transfer when courses are aligned through learning outcomes.⁴

Transfer Pathways

Degree and program requirements vary widely across Michigan's institutions of higher education. Many degree-seeking students at two- and four-year institutions complete a general education curriculum which can allow students to select from a wide variety of courses. However, once students select a major, course requirements become more prescribed. For this reason, a one-size-fits-all transfer pathway would not meet the needs of students pursuing all associate's and bachelor's degree programs. As leader states have learned, the most successful approach to associate degree transfer is by developing specific pathways that meet program requirements for associate's and bachelor's degree programs. The committee recommends an initial focus on high-enrollment transfer pathways, while building a process that can also work for lower-enrollment transfer pathways. Discipline-specific faculty groups from two- and four-year institutions will work collaboratively to determine alignment between associate and bachelor's degree requirements in their discipline. Michigan's successful transfer-related initiatives include engagement with faculty who define course and program learning outcomes, course equivalencies, and program articulation. These processes can be scaled to include state-level faculty representation in determining more global discipline-specific transfer pathways.

Enhance Communication

One of the first areas of consensus to emerge from this committee's work was the need for improved transparency about transfer options in Michigan. There are two important aspects of enhancing communication. First, this committee joins the Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (MACRAO) Michigan Transfer Network (MTN) Replacement Committee⁵ and the Michigan Postsecondary Credential Attainment Workgroup⁶ to recommend an investment in an enhanced online communication tool to share information about transfer (and postsecondary options in Michigan). An enhanced communication tool should include information about course equivalences, guidance on the Michigan Transfer Agreement, information about local articulation agreements, and the anticipated associate's degree transfer pathways. Legislation currently encourages institutional participation in the MTN, which provides a public, searchable database for statewide transfer and articulation of credit among participating institutions. MACRAO has developed comprehensive technical requirements to replace the MTN. This committee recommends that the state invest in an online communication tool to share information with students. Second, the committee recommends that, in addition to creating transfer

⁴ <http://www.aacu.org/about/2015-membersurvey>

⁵ <https://www.macrao.org/Committees/Committees.asp>

⁶ <http://mitalentgoal2025.org/>

pathways, the process should include comprehensive training and support for academic and faculty advisors, admissions officers, counselors, and other college and university staff who advise students. A well-defined transfer pathway will only be effective if requirements are effectively communicated with students.

Promote Holistic Transfer

Course and program equivalency are not the only barriers to successful transfer. Effective transfer support services, such as academic advising practices, mandatory orientation, and other transfer support services, are also an essential aspect of a successful transfer process. Many colleges in Michigan currently provide effective support services specifically designed to meet the needs of transfer students. The committee recommends that colleges and universities consider how to scale comprehensive support services for transfer students. These support services occur at the institution level and will compliment a transfer process. Efforts to share promising evidenced-based practices will contribute to the likelihood that an associate's degree transfer articulation process will be effective.

Next Steps

The committee identified important guiding principles and recommendations to develop the statewide transfer of the associate's degree. In addition to these recommendations, the committee recommends immediate action on the following:

Create a Collaborative Foundation for Prioritization, Dialogue, and Planning

This study committee recommends the formation of a single body to act as a Steering Committee for all state-level transfer and articulation initiatives in Michigan. This committee recommends that a public 2-year representative and a public 4-year representative serve as co-chairs in leading this effort. In addition to appointing co-chairs, campus presidents and chancellors will appoint members of the representative committee. This committee also recommends that representatives from Michigan's independent colleges and universities serve on this committee. The MACRAO organization is also recognized as a strong partner in the state's evolving transfer work. Therefore, the MACRAO President and President-Elect are recommended to serve on this Steering Committee and engage their membership as initiatives progress.

This Steering Committee will prioritize state-level transfer initiatives, oversee the continued implementation of the Michigan Transfer Agreement, support the creation of a student portal and an enhanced Michigan Transfer Network, and establish the sub-committees and working groups necessary to develop associate's degree transfer pathways. With significant input from faculty and staff, this group will develop a comprehensive strategic plan with specific goals and timelines; appoint discipline-specific, faculty-led committees that determine the articulation of courses and alignment of degree requirements within their selected disciplines; identify administrative committees to support all aspects of the transfer process (i.e. admissions, registrar, advising); and provide guidance to institutions on developing and implementing enhanced transfer processes for students.

Universities and community colleges function in a shared governance model where faculty have varying degrees over control over the curriculum. The Steering Committee should focus on establishing strategic goals that achieve a better transfer process, and input from faculty and administrative staff on the transfer process will be two essential components of that process. However, individual campuses will still have discretion on whether to participate in the Steering Committee initiatives through their own shared governance processes. Some community colleges and universities may have greater involvement in the development and implementation of transfer pathways. As demonstrated by the hundreds of transfer

articulation agreements currently active between community colleges and universities, some institutions have a greater predisposition to participate in designing pathways that achieve a more enhanced transfer process.

Other states that have built enhanced transfer processes have invested in transfer initiatives for many years and continuously evaluate and improve their processes to maximize outcomes. The committee recognizes that this work will take time and requires a strong foundation with strategically phased building blocks to make sustainable progress. The ad-hoc approach taken in Michigan to improve transfer student outcomes in recent years has been successful, but an integrated approach that moves transfer initiatives under the umbrella of a Steering Committee is the only way to reach sustainable statewide goals.

Create a Student Portal to Share Transfer Information

Michigan does not have a portal that shares information for students and families to learn about higher education options in Michigan. This committee joins the MACRAO Michigan Transfer Network (MTN) Replacement Committee and the Michigan Postsecondary Credential Attainment Workgroup to recommend an investment in an enhanced communication tool to share information about transfer (and postsecondary options in Michigan). An enhanced communication tool should include information about course equivalences, guidance on the Michigan Transfer Agreement, information about local articulation agreements, and the forthcoming statewide associate degree transfer pathways. Legislation currently requires institutional participation in the MTN which provides a public, searchable database for statewide transfer and articulation of credit among participating institutions. MACRAO has developed comprehensive technical requirements to replace the MTN. This committee recommends that the state invest in a communication tool to share information with students. The committee recommends that the MTN Replacement Committee, along with partners from the Michigan Postsecondary Credential Attainment Workgroup, continue its work toward an enhanced solution.

Appendices

A. Legislative Language

SEC. 210C. (1) A STUDY COMMITTEE SHALL BE CREATED TO DEVELOP A PROCESS TO IMPROVE THE TRANSFERABILITY AND APPLICABILITY OF ASSOCIATE OF ARTS AND ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE DEGREES AS A BLOCK OF CREDITS BETWEEN COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES ON A STATEWIDE BASIS. BUILDING ON THE MICHIGAN TRANSFER NETWORK SPONSORED BY THE MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE REGISTRARS AND ADMISSIONS OFFICERS AND, WHERE POSSIBLE, EXISTING LOCAL ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTIONS, THE COMMITTEE SHALL WORK TO EXPLORE STANDARDS FOR PROGRAM ARTICULATION BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS SO THAT AN ASSOCIATE OF ARTS OR ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE DEGREE EARNED AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE IS CONSIDERED THE EQUIVALENT OF THE FIRST 60 CREDITS OF A BACCALAUREATE DEGREE, AND THOSE CREDITS CAN BE SEAMLESSLY TRANSFERRED AND APPLIED TO THE PROGRAM OF STUDY AT THE RECEIVING UNIVERSITY.

(2) IT IS THE INTENT OF THE LEGISLATURE THAT THE STUDY COMMITTEE CREATED UNDER SUBSECTION (1) EXPLORE ISSUES RELEVANT TO BLOCK TRANSFER AGREEMENTS, INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, THE SATISFACTION OF ALL LOWER DIVISION GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS, THE APPLICABILITY OF EQUIVALENT COURSES TO THE MAJOR PROGRAM OF STUDY, JUNIOR-LEVEL STANDING AT THE UNIVERSITY FOR TRANSFER STUDENTS, AND THE COMPLETION OF THE BACCALAUREATE DEGREE WITH A LIMIT OF 60 POST-TRANSFER CREDIT HOURS. BECAUSE OF THE LEGISLATURE'S INTEREST IN PROMOTING DEGREE COMPLETION, THE STUDY COMMITTEE SHOULD ALSO CONSIDER INCENTIVES FOR STUDENTS TO COMPLETE 2 BOTH AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE AND A BACCALAUREATE DEGREE.

(3) THE STUDY COMMITTEE CREATED UNDER SUBSECTION (1) SHALL CONSIST OF THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS:

(A) TEN REPRESENTATIVES FROM COMMUNITY COLLEGES SELECTED BY THE MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE ASSOCIATION.

(B) TEN REPRESENTATIVES FROM PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES SELECTED BY THE PRESIDENTS COUNCIL, STATE UNIVERSITIES OF MICHIGAN.

(C) FOUR MEMBERS OF THE MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE REGISTRARS AND ADMISSIONS OFFICERS.

(D) ONE MEMBER OF THE MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SELECTED BY THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE.

(E) ONE MEMBER OF THE MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SELECTED BY THE MINORITY LEADER OF THE HOUSE.

(F) ONE MEMBER OF THE MICHIGAN SENATE SELECTED BY THE SENATE MAJORITY LEADER.

(G) ONE MEMBER OF THE MICHIGAN SENATE SELECTED BY THE SENATE MINORITY LEADER.

(4) THE STUDY COMMITTEE CREATED UNDER SUBSECTION (1) SHALL SUBMIT A PROJECT STATUS REPORT AND INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SENATE AND HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEES ON COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND HIGHER EDUCATION, THE SENATE AND HOUSE FISCAL AGENCIES, AND THE STATE BUDGET DIRECTOR BY MARCH 1, 2016.

B. Study Committee Members and Association Staff

Name	Title	Institution
Laurie Chesley	Provost/Executive Vice President for Academic & Student Affairs	Grand Rapids Community College
Amy Fugate	Vice President, Academic Affairs	Mott Community College
Jean Goodnow	President	Delta College
Laurie Kattuah-Snyder	Associate Dean of Advising and Partnerships	Schoolcraft College
Scott Mertes	Dean of Liberal Arts	Mid Michigan Community College
Donna Petras	Dean, University Relations	Macomb Community College
Tom Quinn	President	Kirtland Community College
Stephen Siciliano	Vice President for Educational Services	Northwestern Michigan College
Chris Spradlin	Vice President, Academic Services, Arts & Sciences	Lake Michigan College
Paula Welmers	Counselor/Student Services	North Central Michigan College
Lynn (Chick) Blue	Vice President for Enrollment Development	Grand Valley State University
Leonard Bohmann	Assoc. Dean for Academic Affairs	Michigan Technological University
Angela Dillard	Assoc. Dean for Undergraduate Education	University of Michigan-Ann Arbor
John Gaboury	Assoc. Provost for Academic Services	Michigan State University
Rhonda Kinney Longworth	Interim Provost & Assoc. VP for Academic Programming and Services	Eastern Michigan University
Keith Malkowski	Registrar	Central Michigan University
Kim Rotundo	Registrar	Northern Michigan University
Steve Shablin	Registrar	Oakland University
DeeDee Stakley	Transfer Services Center Director	Ferris State University
Susan Wells	Undergraduate Program Director	University of Michigan-Dearborn
Libby Bonnell	Assistant Director of Admissions/ MACRAO President	Grand Valley State University/ MACRAO
Noreen Ferguson	University Registrar & Director of Institutional Research and Academic Planning	Lawrence Technological University/ MACRAO
Ron Hultman	Assistant Registrar	Spring Arbor University/ MACRAO
Christopher Marx	Director of Transfer Articulation	Davenport University/ MACRAO

Association Staff

Michigan Community College Association	Michigan Association of State Universities
Mike Hansen	Dan Hurley
Erica Orians	Bob Murphy
Katie Giardello	
Erin Schor	