

SECTION 3 | TRANSFER AND ARTICULATION POLICY

Questions researched for the 50 states

1. *Is there a statewide guarantee that an associate degree earned at a public in-state institution will transfer to any other public institution in that state?*
2. *Is there a statewide guarantee that general education or lower-division courses earned at a public in-state institution will transfer to any other public institution in that state for major credit?*
3. *Is there a statewide common course-numbering system?*
4. *Is there a statewide credit-by-assessment policy?*

One-third of all college students today transfer at least once prior to earning a degree.¹ On average, these students lose 13 credits when transferring institutions — that is time and money spent that students must make up in order to earn a degree.² The rise in mobility and its impact on college completion goals and students has increased pressure in many states to create or improve transfer and articulation policies.³

Increasingly, states are replacing institutional or systemwide policies with statewide policies to enhance uniformity and consistency across all institutions within a state's borders. As of Jan. 1, 2014, 36 states offered statewide transfer for associate degrees earned at in-state public institutions. In addition, 35 states guaranteed the transfer of general education or lower-division courses from one in-state public institution to another. While most states have transfer policies in place, implementation and enforcement are not very robust and reporting is inconsistent.

POLICY GOALS

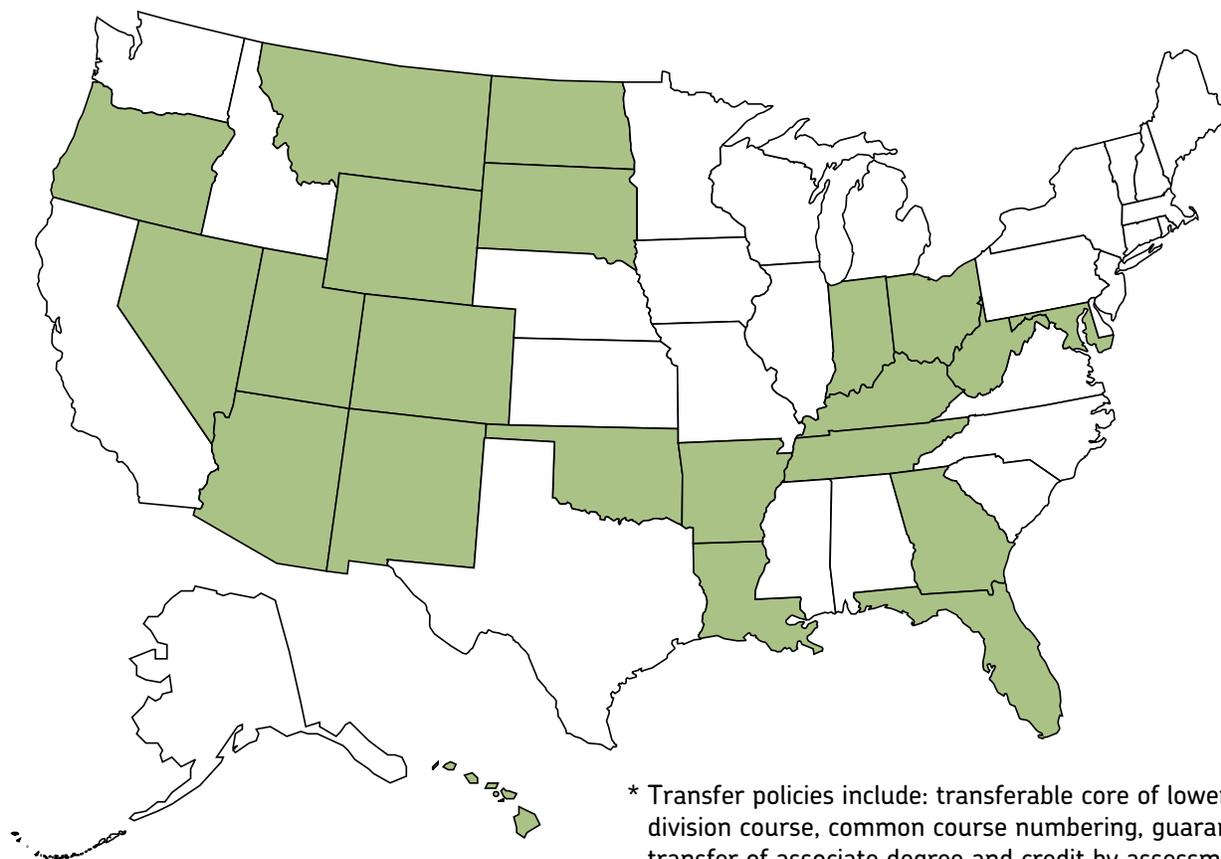
ECS' review of transfer and articulation policies in the 50 states found that state leaders recognize the challenges involved with transferring, and they are implementing policies with the following goals:

- ✦ Ensuring students do not have to repeat courses that add unnecessary expense and time onto their journey to credential or degree attainment.
- ✦ Easing the transition between institutions so the transfer process is more efficient and seamless.
- ✦ Increasing the transparency of course requirements at different in-state public institutions so students can make informed decisions about their futures.
- ✦ Offering multiple options for course completion so more students can earn credits, and ultimately a degree, in less time.
- ✦ Achieving statewide higher education credential attainment goals.

For many students, the ability to change campuses and keep earned credits impacts their likelihood of earning a degree. The vast majority of non-traditional and lower-income students begin their college careers in community colleges, institutions designed to facilitate transfer for most of their enrolled students.

For these students, transfer policy is particularly critical. Community college transfers who have all or almost all of their credits transferred are two-and-a-half times more likely to graduate compared to students who have less than half of their credits transfer.⁴

22 states have three out of four transfer policies*



* Transfer policies include: transferable core of lower-division course, common course numbering, guaranteed transfer of associate degree and credit by assessment.

STATE ANALYSIS

Approaches to transfer policy vary, often due to the differences in the governance structures of states' higher education systems. States with decentralized systems — Nebraska and New Hampshire, for example — tend to rely on non-legislative approaches to transfer, such as faculty decisions or a memorandum of understanding.

The Blueprint transfer database evaluates four components of statewide policies identified as best practices. While some states have policies in place, if they apply to only one higher education system — community colleges, for example — they do not count as statewide policies. Instead, such policies would be considered institutional or systemwide policies.

ECS found that states are replacing fragmented transfer policies set by individual institutions with common statewide policies to enhance consistency. For example, 36 states guarantee the transfer of an associate degree statewide. Thirty-five states guarantee the transfer of general education or lower-division courses statewide compared to nine states with systemwide policies.

States are adopting additional policies aimed at easing the transition from one institution to another. Fifteen states have statewide common-course numbering systems and 16 states have a statewide credit-by-assessment policy, meaning they award credit through tests or other academic evidence. Common assessments used by states with these policies include the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) and the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) assessment.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS

As student transfers increase, state policymakers seeking to improve credential attainment goals should consider actions that smooth the burdens of transition, including:

- ✦ Guaranteeing an associate degree earned at a public in-state institution will transfer to any other public in-state institution.
- ✦ Requiring that general education or lower-division courses earned at a public in-state institution will transfer to any other public institution in the state.
- ✦ Implementing common course numbering, a uniform system for numbering courses used within and across public higher education institutions.
- ✦ Implementing a statewide credit-by-assessment policy that covers PLA, CLEP assessment, AP and other benchmarks in a uniform manner across the state. This approach will ensure a transfer students' credits awarded will "be accepted" at the receiving institute of higher education.
- ✦ Monitoring compliance and holding institutions accountable for implementation.
- ✦ Mandating public reporting of statewide transfer policies, including the publication of databases that list all courses that transfer.

The success of transfer policies is contingent on how well they are communicated and understood by the public. States are recognizing that if students don't understand the policies, or if the policies are not implemented or enforced effectively, the impact will be limited.

In addition, a number of states are using the process of "reverse transfer" to help students earn a credential for classes completed as they continue to work toward higher degrees. For example, many students spend two years at a community college before transferring to a four-year university. But they don't always apply for, and receive, their two-year associate degree since the four-year diploma is the ultimate goal.

Efforts are underway in a number of states to contact those students and let them know they are eligible for an associate degree. This helps states achieve their credential attainment goals while ensuring students are getting credit for the work they've done.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Effective transfer policy requires broad support to enable coordination across institutions and across systems. A collaborative process that promotes alignment provides an opportunity for states to improve transfer and make strides toward their completion goals.

The Challenge: Systemwide versus statewide

Policies that are not applied to all state higher education systems can create obstacles for students transferring from one system to another.

Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Create a statewide transfer and articulation council or committee to support coordination across systems.
- ✦ Convene stakeholders on the state, institutional and faculty levels.

The Challenge: Implementation and enforcement

Unless transfer policies are well implemented and enforced, they lose their ability to support student transitions.

Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Implement uniform data collection and reporting methods to ensure institutional compliance.
- ✦ Create incentives for institutions that support student transfer and communicate their policies clearly.

The Challenge: Communicating to students

If students don't understand the policies that allow a more seamless transfer, the impact of these initiatives will be limited.

Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Expand advising to support student transitions and decisions.
- ✦ Ensure a statewide articulation guide is publicly available to help students know in advance which courses will transfer.

EXAMPLES OF STATE POLICIES

Approaches to consider

The following state examples illustrate the complexities transfer policies can take on. In both cases, state-level action has spurred local activity that works to create more seamless transfer for students.

LOUISIANA

Priority admissions and consistency



Louisiana's **S.B. 285/Act 356** (2009) was one of the first major pieces of transfer legislation in the country to require the four transfer policies in the ECS Blueprint database — a statewide policy for a transferable core of lower-division courses, a statewide policy for common course numbering, a statewide policy for guaranteed transfer of associate degree and a statewide policy for credit by assessment. The legislation is also singular in that it required institutions to be monitored for compliance and created an appeals process for students whose credits were not transferred. Additionally, S.B. 285 included:

- ✦ Priority admission for transfer students with an associate degree.
- ✦ A common college transcript to establish consistency across institutions.
- ✦ A centralized database of courses and course substitutions that meet the prerequisite requirements for each postsecondary certificate, industry-based certification and associate and baccalaureate degree program.

FLORIDA

Communication and transparency



Florida has long been considered a leader in transfer policy.⁵ In addition to the four necessary statewide transfer policies listed in the Blueprint database, recent legislation — **H.B. 7135** — further supports transfer and completion through focusing on students and ensuring institutional compliance:

- ✦ Requires that students entering an associate degree program must, within the first completed 30 credits, indicate a baccalaureate degree program of interest at a four-year institution. The institution must notify the student of the prerequisites for that program.
- ✦ Mandates that performance metrics for the community college system include transfer rates.
- ✦ Requires that the Board of Governors' accountability plan address performance metrics and be submitted as part of its legislative budget.

ENDNOTES

- 1 D. Shapiro et al., *Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates-Fall 2007 Cohort* (Signature Report 6), (Washington D.C.: National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013, p. 12), <http://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport6/>.
- 2 Sean Anthony Simone, *Transferability of Postsecondary Credit Following Student Transfer or Co-enrollment Statistical Analysis Report* (Washington D.C.: National Center for Education Studies, DATE, p. 23), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014163.pdf>.
- 3 Ibid., 23.
- 4 David Monaghan and Paul Attewell, *The Community College Route to the Bachelor's Degree* (Washington D.C.: AERA, March 2014, p. 14), <http://www.aera.net/Newsroom/RecentAERAResearch/TheCommunityCollegeRouteToTheBachelorsDegree/tabid/15414/Default.aspx>.
- 5 Brenda Bautsch, *State Policies to Improve Student Transfer* (Denver, CO: National Conference of State Legislatures, January 2013, p. 2), <http://www.ncsl.org/documents/educ/student-transfer.pdf>.