

Perspectives

Community College
Leadership for the
21st Century

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Improving degree outcomes for students who transfer from community colleges to universities is critical to achieving national goals for improving upward social mobility and economic vitality.

- Davis Jenkins and John Fink

As a nation, if we recruit, admit, enroll, and support more community college students, ensuring their successful transfer and baccalaureate degree completion, we will positively impact the growing economic disparity in our country.

- Eileen Stempel

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Strengthening Student Transfer: The Front Range Community College Model

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President

Front Range Community College
Westminster, Colorado

I received a graduation announcement recently from a former student. This young woman was graduating from the University of Colorado with a degree in biology—summa cum laude. Inside the announcement was a thank-you note expressing her gratitude for the preparation she received at Front Range Community College (FRCC). She referenced the rigor of academics and the personal attention from faculty and advisors as well as the tremendous confidence she gained at FRCC.

Her note reminded me of the inroads we have made in recent years to strengthen the community college transfer rate to four-year colleges and universities—and the path we continue to forge.

Nationally in 2007, 720,000 students entered community colleges intending to earn bachelor's degrees, according to the Community College Research Center (CCRC). Six years later, only 33 percent had transferred. Of those, less than half had graduated. The net result: Only 100,000 succeeded in graduating with a bachelor's degree.

While it is often administrators who draft partnership agreements, faculty are the key to successful pathways partnerships.

Fortunately, much has changed since then. Many community colleges have embraced student success initiatives, including developmental education reform and guided pathways, states have improved transfer policies, and dual enrollment has increased dramatically. All steps in the right direction, but improving transfer success still has a long way to go.

FRCC has always had a significant transfer focus. With several prominent universities in or near our service area and Colorado's highly educated population, transfer students make up more than two-thirds of our student body, or more than 20,000 students per year. With our partner Colorado State University (CSU), we were recently featured in the Transfer Playbook from CCRC and the Aspen Institute. Based on the CCRC data, we had greater transfer and graduation success in the 2007 cohort than expected. While we don't have any magic bullets, a few things we have learned about transfer success merit sharing. I've grouped them into the three main recommendations from the Transfer Playbook.

- 1) **Make transfer students a priority. Communicate this as an institution goal, share data to bolster outcomes, and dedicate significant resources for success.**

For almost the last decade we have focused on our transfer and graduation data. We have set clear goals to improve transfer success for all students and for students of color in particular, as their transfer rates have lagged.

One of the most important ways to make transfer a priority is in course offerings. Our general-education offerings focus almost entirely on transferable courses. If a course doesn't transfer to a least one partner, we don't offer it.

Our advisors spend a lot of time cultivating relationships with transfer institutions, and we have at least one transfer partner on campus almost every day of the school year. We have regular transfer fairs. Some of our academic- and student-support programs have developed trips to four-year colleges to help students get support in making the transition.

- 2) **Create clear pathways aligned with high-quality, rigorous instruction and other high-quality academic experiences so students are prepared for four-year programs. We do this in collaboration with universities to establish major-specific program maps. Embrace unconventional pathways as necessary.**

With so many students intending to transfer, we have built intentional relationships to strengthen pathways. One of many partnerships with CSU is Bridges to Baccalaureate (B2B). It aims to increase student transfers to baccalaureate programs and prepare students for research careers in biomedical and behavioral sciences. These students also may participate in National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded research. The program is funded by an NIH grant to support underrepresented students -- first-generation and low-income students, student veterans, students with disabilities, and students of color. This is one of many great partnerships with CSU.

We also have worked hard to develop strong partnerships with over a dozen partner colleges and universities, but a couple stand out – our partnerships with Colorado School of Mines, the pre-eminent engineering college in the state, and Regis University. The partnership with Mines required a great deal of faculty-to-faculty connection and vetting, but it created a clear road map for highly motivated students. Regis often will accept 90 credits in transfer, which is a particularly good option for adult students.

Key Role of Faculty. While it is often administrators who draft partnership agreements, faculty are the key to successful pathways partnerships. Good relationships with transfer partner universities hinge on the community college academic quality. Faculty must be engaging, motivated teachers who set high expectations and support students in success. We have invested heavily in faculty development, with a focus on adjuncts, who teach 63 percent of our classes. We have reassigned some of our best faculty to be instructional coaches, expanded professional development

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EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

Community colleges are known for their open doors, and preparing their students for transfer to bachelor's degree programs remains a key component of the community college core mission. Yet today the transfer process does not work well for most students, with research revealing that fewer than one in five entering community college students attains a bachelor's degree. Therefore, it is essential that the transfer process is fixed. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

What are the most critical steps community colleges can take to address inefficiencies and existing barriers to improve the transfer process?

Amanda Bylczynski, MS

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There are several critical steps community colleges can take in order to provide a smooth transition for students transferring into a bachelor's degree program. The most important thing students need is support. Having a good advising system in place where students can connect with their advisor right away is essential. The goal of the advisor isn't just scheduling classes, but mentoring students as they move through the two year degree.

Many students start college with a goal in mind, but they don't always know the best path toward reaching the goal. The advisor is the best person to help them with the information they need to succeed, including required classes, how many courses to take per semester to fit their home life, what scholarships may be available in the field, and which four year institutions have the best fit for their specialty. Once the institutional choices are discussed, the advisor can help connect the student with transfer advisors at those institutions to work together to build the best possible student education plan.

Although many associate of science and arts degrees contain common general education classes required by four year colleges, they do not account for certain subject-specific general education classes a four year program may require. This can negatively impact student progress and add extra time to the completion of their programs. Therefore, working directly with the transfer institution is vital.

Another way to help promote seamless transfer is by building strong articulation agreements and partnerships. Articulation agreements allow both students and the community college the ability to see exactly what classes should be taken to help the student transfer smoothly into the four year program. This also provides students with a clear pathway plan to follow, which ultimately can help encourage completion. Along with this is the creation of partnerships. By partnering with local four year colleges, community colleges can create designated pathways by having the transfer school declared early on. Partnerships often offer additional student perks as well, such as application fee waivers, early admittance, and other support services (based on the agreement between the schools). Further, partnerships can benefit the community college by driving a review of the preferred courses which community college leaders may determine can be created and offered on their campus. With these support mechanisms in place, increasing numbers of students will be able to transition to four year institutions more successfully.

Amanda Bylczynski, MS, is the Associate Professor of History at Edison State Community College where she serves as a faculty advisor for K-12 education and history majors, as well as a part-time success advisor for all programs. She has helped build new articulation agreements for K-12 education majors, including a recently signed 3-to-1 agreement. She earned MS degrees from Illinois State University and the University of Central Missouri and is enrolled in the DCCL program.



procedures as needed that align with community college transfer objectives. It is through relationships with colleges nationwide that make the student transfer process smoother.

Once the institutional choices are discussed, the advisor can help connect the student with transfer advisors at those institutions to work together to build the best possible student education plan.

~ Amanda Bylczynski, MS

Community colleges are at the forefront of preparing students to transfer to four year colleges. A key component of the mission is also to advance upward social mobility. In the student transfer process the attrition rates may be lowered by implementing more transparent policies and procedures (Handel, 2011). Scalability is essential too because if community colleges keep enrolling students who do not graduate, prospective students may view that as off-putting and decline to enroll when that enrollment may have been in their best interest.

In an effort to enhance the student transfer process, a focus on efforts that are yielding positive results is key. Student outcomes including persistence, degree completion, and transfer increase educational attainment when appropriately implemented – creating solutions to make the college more fitting to the needs of educational stakeholders at community colleges (Soliz, 2015). A more standardized metrics system may be warranted. A significant challenge that community colleges are facing to that end is a deficiency with the current metric system that measures transfer student outcomes – from transfer-out rates to transfer-in bachelor's completion rates (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). In order to simplify the complexity involved it may be best to hone "common course numbering" that allows students to compare their course plan alongside the colleges they are considering to transfer into (Soliz, 2015). This in turn avoids a lot of the misunderstandings that go along with determining course equivalency.

Disenfranchised students often overcome significant barriers to complete a four year degree particularly when transferring to a four year institution. Wells' research reveals that disenfranchised community college students who transfer to a four year college are more likely to graduate compared with those students who are disenfranchised and start off at a four year institution instead of a community college (2008). In order to advance students' completion at four year educational institutions, both underrepresented students and transfer students need to be built into the retention planning practices (Aska, 2015). Educational stakeholders have a duty to be constructive so as to encourage transfer students to help fulfil our community college mission.

Monica Koziol, MA, serves as an adjunct faculty member in Sociology at Harper College in Palatine, Illinois, where she has been teaching for over 9 years. Monica's professional foci include alumni engagement, curriculum design, and professional development. She earned her MA in Sociology from DePaul University and an MA in in Educational Leadership and Organizations from Roosevelt University. Currently, she is pursuing her doctorate in the Ferris State University DCCL Program.



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The most important step community colleges can take to improve the student transfer process in an attempt to upturn college completion is to take action by shaping and fine-tuning policies and

NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Community colleges are known for their open doors, and preparing their students for transfer to bachelor's degree programs remains a key component of the community college core mission. Yet today the transfer process does not work well for most students, with research revealing that fewer than one in five entering community college students attains a bachelor's degree. Therefore, it is essential that the transfer process is fixed. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

Cross-sector Partnerships Crucial for Transfer Success

Gail Wootan, MEd

Associate Director, Academic Affairs and Policy
Washington Student Achievement Council
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As transfer students, practitioners, and experts know, the transfer process can be confusing and frustrating. One primary challenge for some community colleges is developing and maintaining separate transfer plans to prepare students for the hundreds of majors found at four-year institutions. In contrast, Washington State community and technical college students, advisors, and faculty only need to know a handful of agreements—and they know that most four-year institutions will take them.

In 1971, Washington developed its first statewide transfer degree, called the Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA). The DTA transfers to all of Washington's public four-year institutions and many of its private four-year institutions. A group of two- and four-year sector representatives and higher education agencies developed this well-established and regularly-reviewed agreement. Transfer partners also wrote a statewide policy in 1984. This long-running cooperation has ensured the DTA's endurance and has made it easier to create additional transfer degrees in science, engineering, and other majors.

Here are some lessons learned from nearly half a century of collaboration in Washington.

Establish strong partnerships among community colleges, four-year institutions and state agencies. Although community colleges are the first stop for transfer students, it is obvious that transfer cannot happen without four-year institutions. Many community colleges have developed effective relationships with their primary transfer schools for this very reason. The next step is to convene all stakeholders to develop statewide agreements and policies.

Washington has two groups that meet regularly about transfer. Members include public and private institutional representatives from admissions and registrars' offices and academic leadership, as well as state higher education agencies and organizations. The two groups develop and recommend transfer strategies and degrees as well as implement and evaluate transfer "on-the ground."

Provide flexibility and simplicity. Washington's most flexible and popular degree is the DTA. Community and technical colleges have autonomy to choose courses that meet degree requirements, while four-year institutions can maintain their admission standards. When four-year partner institutions admit DTA earners, the students know they have met lower division general education requirements and enter with junior standing.

Another way to increase flexibility is to examine how academic credit for prior learning and dual credit programs can help students complete their transfer degrees sooner. Common course numbering for transfer courses is another effective strategy.

Create community college pathways for popular or high-demand bachelor's degrees. In 2003, Washington began developing Major Related Programs (MRPs). These pathways build on the DTA and prepare students for specific four-year majors. Other community colleges can implement similar

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major preparation through the guided pathways approach. This approach encourages meta-majors, well-mapped pathways in broad academic areas.

Promote Early advising. Although the DTA is fairly simple and straightforward, students need early advising from both their two- and four-year institutions to ensure a smooth transition. In addition, websites and other communications must be accurate and up-to-date to support students who self-advise.

Encourage earning an associate degree. Evidence suggests that students have a higher probability of earning a bachelor's degree if they transfer after earning an associate degree or other postsecondary credential (Shapiro, Dunder, Ziskin, Chiang, Chen, Harrell, & Torres, 2013). To improve the transfer process, community and technical colleges must, at the very least, create structures to encourage timely transfer degree completion. For students who transfer before earning a degree, community colleges should consider the value of reverse articulation agreements. These allow students to transfer credits from their four-year institution to the community college for associate degree completion.

Track transfer challenges. Despite institutions' best efforts, students may still run into transfer challenges. Washington has a widely published Transfer Rights and Responsibilities document for students and institutions to follow. Washington's colleges and universities also developed a transfer liaison, which is a single statewide point of contact for transfer issues.

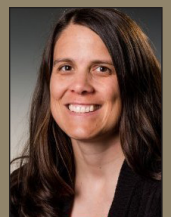
The liaison tracks patterns in transfer challenges and serves as a go-between for students and institutions.

Transfer policy highlights the strengths we can leverage and the challenges we face at multiple levels—on campuses, with institutional partnerships, and in statewide coordination. Serving transfer students requires us to partner at and across each of these levels to examine, assess, and adjust our practices to meet their needs. These transfer best practices may also benefit broader higher education policy issues particularly as they relate to other types of student transitions.

Reference

Shapiro, D., Dunder, A., Ziskin, M., Chiang, Y.C., Chen, J., Harrell, A., & Torres, V. (2013). Baccalaureate attainment: A national view of the postsecondary outcomes of students who transfer from two-year to four-year institutions (Signature Report No. 5). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center

Gail Wootan, MEd, is the Associate Director of Academic Affairs and Policy at the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) in Olympia, Washington, where she focuses on transfer and residency policy for Washington State. Her responsibilities include reporting on statewide transfer policy in Washington State, as well as advising universities and colleges on Washington residency policy for tuition purposes. Her background is in graduate admissions, orientation, and first-year experience programming at state institutions in Washington, Oregon, and California. Gail earned her Master of Education at Oregon State University in College Student Services Administration and her bachelor's degree at Pacific University in Mathematics and Literature.



To improve the transfer process, community and technical colleges must, at the very least, create structures to encourage timely transfer degree completion.

QUICK TAKES
Highlights
from the Field

The Transfer Playbook: Essential practices for two- and four-year colleges

by the Aspen Institute and the CCRC

Community colleges have long offered a gateway to higher education for millions of Americans. Research indicates that most entering students are aiming for a bachelor's degree, making the transfer process a critical means for upward mobility. Yet it has become apparent that the transfer process does not work well for most students. This playbook presents a guide to the design and implementation of practices to aid community college and four-year partners "realize the promise of the transfer process."

Access this work here: <http://bit.ly/2pdX0ln>

Transition and transformation: Fostering transfer student success

by Stephen J. Handel and Eileen Stempel

The authors stress that although community colleges prepare students for the transfer transition and four-year institutions admit students and set the conditions for that admission, barriers to transfer are well-documented. This volume attempts to help strengthen the transfer process by highlighting the experience of practitioners. Organized into 1) Strategic Planning and Organizational Review; 2) Curricular Innovations; and 3) Outreach and Advising, each area contains a varied set of chapters to illuminate issues critical for the transfer process.

Access this work here: <http://bit.ly/2r6z58z>



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Strengthening Student Transfer: The Front Range Community College Model (continued from page 1)

for adjuncts, created a paid 24-hour teaching academy focused on active learning, and emphasized training faculty who teach online.

State Policy. A second key to transfer pathways is state policy. Favorable state policy is crucial, especially for community colleges with multiple transfer partners. It's very difficult for students and staff to navigate multiple conflicting transfer programs with four-year partners. We have been fortunate, under the leadership of Colorado Community College System President Dr. Nancy McCallin, in working with the state legislature to create policies to support student transfer. These include developing a core of about 32 credits of transferable courses guaranteed to fill the lower division general-education requirements at all public universities and colleges in our state. In addition, relatively recent legislation requires community colleges and public universities to establish a series of statewide transfer agreements to ensure students can transfer 60 credits to any public state university with junior status in key popular degrees.

Strong concurrent enrollment programs can prepare students for college and improve chances of success at both community college and university.

High school partnerships. Strong concurrent enrollment programs can prepare students for college and improve chances of success at both community college and university. FRCC partners with 10 school districts and many charter schools to offer several thousand high school students transferable college classes for free. This bolsters confidence and success, particularly for those students who are first in their families to attend college. Just as importantly, it reduces the cost of a diploma, improving access to college.

3) Provide tailored transfer student advising with committed, dedicated personnel. Help students access financial resources.

This is one area we needed to improve. While we have many wonderful advisors, we often burdened them with learning different transfer information for multiple partner schools in almost every discipline. They have performed remarkably well, but we know we have not provided enough resources.

Guided Pathways. This is one of the reasons we joined the Pathways Project, led by the American Association of Community Colleges and funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and others. FRCC was selected to participate along with 29 other community colleges across the nation. Guided Pathways offers students a more structured and supported education track from start to finish.

We have developed clearer academic plans for every degree and transfer program, but most importantly, we more than doubled the number of advisors. Each Pathways advisor will be assigned to one of six broad areas of study called "Career and Academic Communities:"

- 1) Liberal Arts, Communication & Design
- 2) Business & Information Technology
- 3) Math & Science
- 4) Health Sciences & Wellness
- 5) Social Sciences, Education & Public Service

- 6) Manufacturing, Automotive, Construction & Design Technologies

Because advisors will work in one community, they can develop a better understanding of programs and transfer options and form better relationships with faculty. The Career and Academic Communities also will help students develop better connections on campus and can be a "home" for students who have not picked a particular program but have a general idea of where they are heading.

Advisors will follow a case-management model, providing students one-on-one support and guidance. This more personalized attention and engagement should help more students succeed. Advisors will help navigate life challenges that may crop up, serving as a safety net of support. It's a fine balance between hand-holding and creating self-sufficient, independent thinkers, but I think for many of our students we have erred too far on letting them flounder.

Other efforts for improving transfer success include moving from an optional orientation, which attracted only 20 percent of students, to a mandatory one. This new policy aims to have students ready to hit the ground running on day one. In addition, we found that 75 percent of our graduating or transferring students took at least one online course at FRCC. Online course success rate has traditionally lagged classroom success, so we added online-specific advisors and created more effective guidelines for online courses. We have expanded our tutoring, adding more small-group sessions because we found that to be more helpful and effective.

The process is an evolving one that requires a flexible growth mindset and contributions from the entire faculty, administration, and university partners to be successful.

Increasing the rate of college transfers is no small feat. The process is an evolving one that requires a flexible growth mindset and contributions from the entire faculty, administration, and university partners to be successful. If graduation announcements and thank-you notes from our former students are any indication, we're headed on the right path.



Andy Dorsey has been President of Front Range Community College since 2009, after serving 14 years as faculty, dean, and vice president. During his tenure, FRCC has strengthened partnerships with businesses and K-12 education. Those efforts led to a \$10 million federal grant to develop advanced manufacturing programs and a \$4.7 million grant to train workers in

information technology. FRCC was the first site in Colorado for Gateway to College, a program that has supported more than 300 dropouts to diplomas and college credit. FRCC also has two of the state's three P-TECH programs, which partner students (St. Vrain Valley, Adams 12) with industry (IBM, Level 3 Communications), leading to a high school diploma and college degree, with paid internships and job interviews along the way. Dorsey has a BA (magna cum laude) in economics from Harvard College, an MBA from Harvard Business School, and an MA from Lesley College.