



Promising Practices in Statewide Articulation and Transfer Systems

June 2010



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- Strengthen educational opportunities for students through expanded access to programs.
- Assist policymakers in dealing with higher education and human resource issues through research and analysis.
- Foster cooperative planning, especially that which targets the sharing of resources.

This publication was prepared by the Policy Analysis and Research unit, which is involved in the research, analysis, and reporting of information on public policy issues of concern in the WICHE states.

This report is available free of charge at www.wiche.edu/publications. For more information about this project, please visit www.wiche.edu/stas.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	iii
Foreword	v
Executive Summary.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Overview of States	4
Variation in State Approaches	4
Commonalities in State Approaches.....	5
General Education Common Core	8
Common Course Numbering	8
Statewide Program Major Articulation	8
Block Credit Transfer	8
Transfer Associate’s Degrees.....	9
Promising Practices	9
Promising Practices in Statewide Collaboration	9
Statewide Committees	9
Faculty Involvement	10
Promising Practices in Communication of Policies	11
State-level Transfer Office/Official.....	11
Professional Transfer Associations/Personnel	12
Transfer Fairs/Summits/Conferences/Meetings.....	12
Electronic Communication Tools.....	13
Encouraging Student Feedback	14
Promising Practices in Academic Policy.....	14
Statewide Articulation Agreements Between Program Majors	15
General Education Core Requirements	15
Guaranteed Admissions Policies	16



Promising Practices in the Use of Data	17
Assessment Initiatives	17
Student Unit Records	18
Assessment Reporting	18
Additional Promising Practices in Articulation and Transfer	19
Transfer Student Bill of Rights	19
Statewide Principles for Transfer	19
Transfer Student Scholarships.....	20
Funding for Transfer-Related Performance	21
Retroactive Degree Completion Initiatives	21
Policy Recommendations	21
Statewide Collaboration.....	22
Communication of Policies.....	23
Academic Policy.....	23
Use of Data.....	23
Additional Promising Practices.....	23
Endnotes	24
References.....	25
Appendices	
Appendix A. Research Methods.....	27
Appendix B. Research Recommendations.....	31
Appendix C. Interview Protocol.....	32
Appendix D. Administration Survey	33
Appendix E. Communication Survey	36
Appendix F. Evaluation Survey.....	37
List of Tables	
Table 1. Common Aspects of Articulation and Transfer Practice	6



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Ultimately, we hope that all of these efforts and the research findings and recommendations are useful to state leaders and help to ensure ready access to baccalaureate degrees for the many students who desire to keep moving forward in their education.

Richard T. Hezel
President & CEO
Hezel Associates

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Lumina Foundation for Education, its officers, or employees.





FOREWORD

Will this issue ever go away? Since substantial numbers of students began moving from one institution to another nearly a half century ago, particularly from community colleges to four-year colleges, transfer and articulation practices have been “an issue.” Students who began in community colleges, often with the intent of saving time and money, frequently found that the transfer track took longer and cost more than if they had just begun at a four-year institution.

This brief provides a number of clues as to why this issue has remained so persistent without apparent resolution over time.

In part the fault lies with the higher education community. Institutional pride often comes into play, with faculty at the institution to which a student wants to transfer believing that the courses taken at another institution can’t possibly measure up to theirs. In part, the problems result from a higher education ideal that envisions students attending only one institution for their entire education, which has created a curriculum and perception of academic integrity bounded by an outdated concept of what students actually do. Perhaps of even more significance, however, is the lack of broad trust within academe, particularly between types of institutions. Four-year institutions often simply don’t believe community colleges offer a real college experience, and this attitude is even more pronounced between traditional colleges and universities and new nontraditional providers, such as online and for-profit institutions.

But part of the fault also lies with the students. When students change majors, they will almost certainly lose some transfer credit. When they take courses not designated as transferable, either toward their major or at all, once again, they may lose credits.

Indeed, much of the impediment to transfer appears associated with that famous line from “Cool Hand Luke”: “What we’ve got here is failure to communicate.” Institutions have transfer guides, advisors have great knowledge on the

rules of transfer and articulation, and students have expressed desires. Too often, however, all our fine efforts fail to communicate effectively back and forth. So students often don’t hear or see what is provided to them to guide successful transfer and articulation. And faculty and advisors too often don’t see or hear when the students are getting off track.

Today, it is more important than ever to tackle this persistent issue and improve the transfer and articulation process. It is important because we must, as a nation, improve the efficiency of our educational process and get students through quicker and more successfully. President Obama has challenged the U.S. to regain international leadership in the education of our citizenry, yet we simply cannot achieve this goal, given our substantial reliance on community colleges, unless we improve transfer and articulation. As we improve transfer, we obviously must do so in a way that assures both the integrity and quality of the education being provided and received, and we must assure that faculty understand that this is our overarching goal. If for no other reason, we must improve success in transfer and articulation to retain, or in some cases restore, the faith of both state and federal policymakers who have become extremely frustrated with the persistence of this problem, a problem they blame primarily on the higher education community.

Most importantly, though, we need to improve in this area for the sake of the students. They deserve better. And the changing nature of our student population – the “swirling” nature of their course-taking as they move between institutions, their episodic attendance patterns, and the substantial increase in the number of returning older students – requires enhanced attention to the policies and practices around transfer and articulation.

Traditional higher education should also realize that if it does not respond to the needs of these students, the emerging nontraditional sectors of higher education – online institutions and for-profit providers – will respond to them.



Within this guide we document a number of promising practices with respect to statewide transfer and articulation policies and practices. The information we gathered suggests a legitimate role for policy, including policy at the state level. But it also cautions against believing that legislation will solve the problem, particularly legislation that dictates exactly “how” to improve transfer and articulation. The “how” must be found in the coordination of institutional and statewide efforts. And ultimately the faculty has to buy into the value and need for reform, if we are to make the transfer of credits from one institution to another work smoothly. Technology can likely help in improving transfer and articulation, as we show, both by enhancing effective communication between institutions and students and by facilitating the exchange of administrative and academic records.

We also discovered, however, that while we can identify “promising practices,” there is so little evidence of what actually works that we still must rely to a great extent on hunches. There is simply no culture of evidence in this arena. We believe common course numbering makes a difference, that good advising assists students, and that technology portals assist institutions and students. Yet few policies or practices have been measured against true performance metrics. And until the higher education policy and practice communities begin to measure progress against clear metrics of success, we will only be able to talk about what is “promising,” not about what we know works.

David A. Longanecker
President
Western Interstate Commission for Higher
Education (WICHE)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the U.S. has dropped to 10th in the world in terms of young adult collegiate educational attainment.¹ Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) highlights the stagnation of baccalaureate degree completion rates: the percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds with a bachelor's degree increased only from 29.1 to 30.8 between 2000 and 2008.²

Increasing degree completion rates and closing the gap between the U.S. and the highest-performing countries is a priority for policymakers, as well as other stakeholders. Lumina Foundation for Education, in its *Goal 2025*, made increasing “the percentage of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025” its overarching mission.³ President Obama has also issued a commitment “to ensuring that America will regain its lost ground and have the highest proportion of students graduating from college in the world by 2020.”⁴

While the loss of college completion potential occurs at numerous points, considerable “leakage in the pipeline” toward the baccalaureate degree appears in the transition from public two-year to four-year institutions. Compounding this problem is that most students attend more than one college or university during their postsecondary career. Specifically, over the course of the undergraduate education of first-time bachelor's degree recipients, almost 60 percent attend more than one institution.⁵ It is hoped that this study of promising practices in articulation and transfer between two- and four-year public institutions can help states and postsecondary institutions, so that the U.S. can reach the goals mentioned above.

The study on which *Promising Practices Guide in Statewide Articulation and Transfer Systems* is based was funded by Lumina Foundation for Education and conducted by Hezel Associates and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). These three partner organizations intend that the *Promising Practices Guide* should be informative to anyone

participating in policy discussions about statewide practices related to transfer and articulation between two- and four-year public institutions.

This guide is one of a set of related publications, all of which are available for download at www.wiche.edu/stas. These include an overview of literature relating to articulation and transfer; 50 state profiles describing related policies, practices, and strategies in each state; a policy brief highlighting findings from this guide; and a piece on higher education Web portals and how they serve students' transfer needs.

METHODOLOGY

Recommendations presented in *Promising Practices* are the result of a single research study, which utilized a mixed methods approach to examine a finite set of data over a limited time. A review of relevant literature served as a basis from which the research team developed an understanding of common components of statewide approaches to transfer and articulation. This conceptual framework in turn guided the collection of primary and secondary data through three means: a review of publicly available documentary evidence; interviews of key higher education officials in each state; and three state-level surveys examining practices related to the administration of statewide transfer and articulation systems; their evaluation, and communication strategies. Separate analyses resulted in individual state summaries, from which the research team identified practices that showed particular promise.

It is important to note that this study did not consider policies and practices that, while they may be systemwide or between individual institutions, are not truly statewide – except in cases where these represented de facto statewide policies. Other transfer-related topics, such as transfer between four-year institutions, to or from private institutions, or interstate transfer, were also beyond the scope of the research.



GENERAL FINDINGS ON VARIATIONS AND COMMONALITIES IN STATE APPROACHES

Analysis across states revealed a substantial variation in governance structure, policy development, and implementation, as well as in the specific initiatives or practices chosen by each state to address transfer (e.g., the transfer of associate's degrees).

There is also substantial variation across states in the types of transfer and articulation policy. In some states (e.g., California and Florida), there exist lengthy legislated policies, which cover many specific details of transfer and articulation. Other states (e.g., Arizona, Minnesota) have brief legislation that generally calls for sectors of public higher education to work together to smooth student transitions. The latter may be seen as warning legislation, intended to spur action among institutions, systems, and governing agencies to prevent further attention by state legislators. In a few cases (e.g., Hawaii, North Dakota, and Washington), a Senate or House bill never signed into state law was found to be the impetus for the higher education community's attention to some transfer issues. Further, interview and survey data collected for this study suggest that state higher education communities may not view a "top-down" legislative approach as positively as they would one that they perceive as more collaborative.

Strategies for the maintenance and communication of articulation and transfer policies are more common across the states. For example, having informational sessions and print materials for students and parents is typical. There is variation, however, in the modalities utilized and the audiences targeted in maintenance and dissemination activities.

Evaluations of state articulation and transfer policies range from anecdotal to formal evaluation activities. A few states (e.g., Arizona, Mississippi) conducted a one-time study, while others have recurring evaluations (e.g., Nevada, Washington). Some of the studies were mandatory; others were

voluntary. There is also variation in the types of student data collected.

A few common themes and practices emerged from this research, including evident faculty and institutional resistance to a top-down approach and university faculty's reluctance to accept community college courses as equivalent to those of a four-year institution. In addition, state government policymakers have little faith that transfer will be facilitated without direct state action.

In terms of academic or curricular elements, common practices in states' approach to transfer include establishing a general education "common core" for transfer, common course numbering, statewide program major articulation and transfer, block credit transfer, and transfer associate's degrees.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Several comprehensive recommendations, inspired by recent developments in transfer, articulation, and higher education generally, are important to consider.

- States should regularly and systematically evaluate their articulation and transfer policies to respond to changing conditions, mitigate problems that arise, and accommodate changing trends.
- Evaluations of transfer and articulation policies and practices should consider the perspectives of the entire range of stakeholders. Formal mechanisms to solicit feedback from institutional faculty, high school guidance counselors, college students, parents, and policymakers should be considered.
- Governors and state legislatures should provide general direction and goals related to transfer and articulation but should allow the state higher education executive offices, governing/ coordinating boards, and institutions to collaboratively develop policies and practices to meet specified objectives. Laws and policies



should specify that these entities be held accountable for implementing policy and accomplishing measurable objectives, assuming the allocation of sufficient resources of time and money.

- Legislatures should allocate funds to support the development of articulation and transfer policies and practices if they impose requirements or mandates. It is important that legislators recognize the costs associated with articulation and transfer initiatives.
- Legislative bodies, state higher education executive offices, and institutions should work together to identify key metrics regarding transfer and articulation in their state. States should identify the data collection mechanisms necessary to track these metrics and gather required data.
- In cases where quantitative data collection is economically or politically impracticable, systematic qualitative analysis should be undertaken. A thorough investigation of stakeholder perceptions and experiences may serve to improve policies and initiatives.

Promising practices fall into five thematic areas, based on the function that they serve relative to transfer and articulation: *collaboration* (cooperative actions among policymakers); *communication* (mechanisms that disseminate related policies and information); *academic policy* (the substance of transfer and articulation policies); the *use of data* as it relates to articulation and transfer; and *additional promising practices* that did not fit readily into the other categories. These areas are not mutually exclusive. Each thematic area describes several promising practices (e.g., “statewide committees” is a practice that falls under “collaboration”). The recommended practices which emerged from this study as having specific promise are as follows.

Statewide Collaboration

- Develop a statewide, standing committee to focus on multi-institution transfer and articulation.

- Involve faculty in policy development and implementation.

Communication of Policies

- Establish a state-level office or official whose sole or primary purpose is to facilitate a statewide approach to transfer and articulation.
- Designate campus or state-level personnel as contacts for transfer and articulation issues.
- Convene or establish a presence at fairs, summits, conferences, and meetings to communicate with students and their families about transfer and articulation.
- Build a strong presence for articulation and transfer on the Web.
- Include student feedback in articulation and transfer policies and practices.

Academic Policy

- Provide clear transfer pathways for community college students who have selected a program major.
- Develop a clear pathway for community college students to meet common general education requirements.
- Implement guaranteed admission policies for community college students who have met all transfer-related benchmarks.

Use of Data

- Evaluate transfer and articulation policies and statutes, as well as transfer students’ progress.
- Assess student success through quantitative measures of individual student-level indicators of performance.
- Expand the reporting of results of transfer and articulation and assessment.

Additional Promising Practices

- Publish a transfer student bill of rights to specify the treatment transfer students can expect during their transition.



- Establish financial assistance programs that actively support student transfers from two- to four-year institutions.
- Provide funding incentives to institutions that perform well in terms of student transfers.
- Provide alternate pathways to degree completion.

CONCLUSION

While the highlighted promising practices show the breadth of policies and practices used by states in their approaches to transfer and articulation, the list presented is neither exhaustive nor definitive, in that it does not presume to be a recipe for universally effective transfer and articulation. Nevertheless, the research team hopes that this information will be useful in the development of policies and practices that result ultimately in increased two- to four-year transfer and, consequently, in higher levels of baccalaureate degree completion in individual states and our nation.

ENDNOTES

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, “Education at a Glance,” 2009, accessed 20 November 2009 from <http://www.oei.es/pdf2/Panorama_educacion_OCDE_2009.pdf>.

² U.S. Department of Education: Institution of Education Sciences, “Student Effort and Educational Progress,” Table A-23-1, accessed 17 November 2009 from <<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2009/section3/table-eda-1.asp>>.

³ Lumina Foundation for Education, “Goal 2025,” accessed 20 November 2009 from <http://www.luminafoundation.org/goal_2025/>.

⁴ The White House, “Education,” accessed 20 November 2009 from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education>>.

⁵ Katherin Peter and Emily Forrest Cataldi, *The Road Less Traveled? Students Who Enroll in Multiple Institutions*, NCES 2005-157 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005), 33.



INTRODUCTION

As recently as 20 years ago, the U.S. led the world in terms of the proportion of people who hold a college degree. That is no longer true. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the U.S. has dropped to 10th in the world among the industrialized countries in the proportion of the population aged 25 to 34 with at least an associate's degree.¹ Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) highlights the stagnation of baccalaureate degree completion rates: the rate at which 25- to 29-year-olds earned bachelor's degree increased only from 29.1 to 30.8 percent between 2000 and 2008.²

Increasing degree completion rates and closing the gap between the U.S. and the highest-performing countries is a priority for policymakers and foundations alike. Lumina Foundation for Education, in its *Goal 2025*, made increasing "the percentage of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025" its overarching mission.³ President Obama also issued a commitment "to ensuring that America will regain its lost ground and have the highest proportion of students graduating from college in the world by 2020."⁴

To meet these ambitious goals, it is necessary to do a much better job of preparing students for college, from pre-K onward. In addition, since most students attend more than one college or university during their postsecondary career, having effective transfer pathways is key to student success (over the course of the undergraduate education of first-time bachelor's degree recipients, almost 60 percent attend more than one institution).⁵

But we also need to look at the structure of our higher education system. If we look at the educational pipeline to the baccalaureate degree, we see that considerable "leakage" occurs in the transition from community colleges to four-year institutions. Comparing students who began at four-year schools with those who started at two-year colleges makes this point vividly. Forty-four percent of students entering college for the first

time in 2003–04 began at a four-year institution. Three years later:

- 60 percent were still enrolled at the same institution but had not yet completed a degree.
- 13 percent had left the institution without a degree and were not enrolled anywhere during the 2005–06 academic year – what would have been their third year of postsecondary education.⁶

By comparison 48 percent of students beginning their postsecondary education that same academic year did so at a two-year institution (the remaining 8 percent began at a less than two-year institution). By the end of three years:

- 16 percent had attained a certificate or associate's degree.
- 24 percent were still enrolled at the same institution but had not yet completed a degree (a rate less than half of that for four-year schools).
- 35 percent had left the institution without a degree and were not enrolled anywhere by the 2005–06 academic year.⁷

For both groups 18 percent had transferred to a different institution without completing a degree.⁸ From this information it appears that students who do not complete their degrees at two-year schools are almost three times as likely to leave school – to drop out or "stop out" (leaving school temporarily, to return later to the same or a different institution) – as are those who enter four-year schools.

This is particularly distressing since two-year schools disproportionately serve students who are older and from less well-to-do households. Single parents attend two-year schools at almost three times the rate that they attend four-year schools (12.8 percent versus 4.2 percent).⁹ Finding ways to increase the rate at which community college students either complete associate's degrees or certificate programs or move to the four-year sector to earn baccalaureate degrees would likely boost degree attainment rates among



groups perhaps most in need of educational advancement.

As Wellman pointed out, “Improving the effectiveness of 2/4 transfer will be the key to national progress in closing the gap among racial groups in degree attainment since more minorities enter higher education through community colleges.”¹⁰ It would also increase the overall rate of adult educational attainment by a substantial amount, given the size of the community college population. Such attainment has important implications for long-term American economic competitiveness. Townsend, Bragg, and Ruud call public higher education the “states’ primary engine for workforce development” and emphasize that it “must develop degree pathways and infrastructures that ensure adult learners receive postsecondary education, including to the baccalaureate level.”¹¹

Improving processes related to transitions between community colleges and four-year institutions does more than increase the likelihood of a student attaining a bachelor’s degree. It also reduces the average number of years it takes to earn a degree and decreases the cost of degree completion. Thus, successful approaches to articulation and transfer between two- and four-year institutions represent an essential element of a strategy for reaching the goals of both Lumina Foundation and President Obama.

Promising Practices in Statewide Articulation and Transfer Systems is based on a study funded by Lumina Foundation for Education and conducted by Hezel Associates and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). Designed to aid policymakers and others, this report takes a state-by-state look at practices related to transfer and articulation between two- and four-year public institutions.

What, exactly, is meant by *articulation* – and what do we mean by *transfer*? While some minor differences exist in the literature on the definition of *transfer*, most researchers and policymakers define the term as the process of moving a student’s credits across different institutions.

Closely related to this term, and often used interchangeably with it, is *articulation* – generally understood to mean the institutional policies or other structures that are implemented to encourage, facilitate, and monitor the student transfer process. Ignash and Townsend provide a succinct distinction: “The difference between the two terms is perhaps most easily perceived as one between the ‘who’ and the ‘what.’”¹²

Promising Practices looks at both transfer and articulation. It builds on a body of literature that focuses on a broad range of topics: student mobility and patterns and rates of transfer; student demographics and enrollment statistics and trends; efforts to address the issue of community college student persistence; and other subjects.

Several major research studies have focused on statewide transfer and articulation agreements. One of them, an early study by Ignash and Townsend, has emerged as seminal to subsequent efforts and informed this work. Their study identifies seven core principles for good practice.

- Associate and baccalaureate degree-granting institutions are equal partners in providing the first two years of baccalaureate degree programs.
- Receiving institutions should treat transfer students comparably to “native” students – those who begin their educations where they intend to complete their degree.
- Faculty members from both the two-year and four-year institutions have primary responsibility for developing and maintaining statewide articulation agreements.
- Statewide articulation agreements accommodate those students who complete a significant block of coursework (such as the general education requirements) but who transfer before completing the associate degree.
- Articulation agreements are developed for specific program majors.



- A state’s private institutions are included in statewide articulation agreements.
- A statewide evaluation system monitors the progress and completion of transfer students.¹³

These core principles served as a conceptual framework that informed the research study resulting in *Promising Practices*. Appendix A details the research methods used in this study. Briefly, a review of relevant literature was conducted in early 2009 and served as a basis from which the research team developed an understanding of common components of statewide approaches to transfer and articulation. This conceptual framework guided the collection of primary and secondary data through three means: a review of publicly available documentary evidence; interviews of key higher education officials in each state; and three state-level surveys examining different areas of practice. A brief on each state summarizes its practices; from these briefs, the research team culled practices that show particular promise. Data collection ended in December 2009.

The promising practices detailed here are organized in five thematic areas: statewide collaboration; communication of policies; academic policy; use of data; and additional promising practices. The areas are not mutually exclusive; many policies and practices relate to several themes. For each promising practice, this report describes specific examples identified in the data collected from particular states.

It is important to note that this study did not consider policies and practices that are not truly statewide – except in cases where they represented *de facto* statewide policies. This report defines as “statewide” any policy or practice applied across a state, whether or not that was the intent of policymakers. Other transfer-related topics, such as transfer between four-year institutions, to or from private institutions, or interstate transfer, were also beyond the scope of this research.

In addition to this guide, this study yielded a number of other publications (all of which are available for download at www.wiche.edu/stas).

- An overview of literature presents a concise review of the literature that informed and framed this study.
- Fifty state profiles contain detailed descriptions of the particular policies, practices, and strategies regarding articulation and transfer utilized by each of the 50 states.
- A policy brief highlights the recommendations outlined in the *Promising Practices* guide.
- A piece on higher education Web portals includes findings, promising practices, and recommendations regarding Websites and Web portals related to articulation and transfer.

A few provisos are in order. First, it is important to remember that the recommendations in this paper arise from a single research study, which examined a finite set of data collected over a limited period. Second, although this report labels specific practices as “promising” in the states where they were identified, policy leaders should exercise careful judgment about the relevance of any practice drawn from another state to the particular politics, citizenry, and collaborative dynamics of their own. The 50 states have varying higher education environments and different governance structures, and there are distinct trends and forces that impact higher education and transfer and articulation policy. An effective practice in a small state may not be appropriate for a large state, and practices showing evidence of success in a state with a particular governance structure may not translate readily to another with a different set of circumstances. Third, while this report describes policies and practices that may have a positive influence on student transfer and degree completion (or are otherwise noteworthy), the data tracked by states and examined by this study are insufficient to show a correlation between a specific practice and student outcomes.



The list of promising practices presented here, while broad, is neither exhaustive nor definitive, in that this guide is not a recipe describing the ingredients of universally effective articulation and transfer policy. Nevertheless, the research team hopes that this information will be useful to those working to develop policies and practices that increase the rate of two- to four-year transfer and the level of baccalaureate degree completion.

OVERVIEW OF STATES

VARIATION IN STATE APPROACHES

The research team captured an overview of policies and practices in each of the 50 states in a series of individual state profiles. The profiles summarize information about the public higher education governance structure, policy landscape, maintenance and communication activities, and evaluation efforts within each state. Each describes unique circumstances, strengths, areas for improvement, or other interesting state details. These summaries do not attempt to rank or grade states (nor does this guide) but instead document practices within states and allow comparisons among states.

Many interviewees emphasized the uniqueness of their state's governance structure, transfer committee makeup, and various transfer practices. Variations stem from historical and political realities individual to each state. For example, in Colorado the work of a single legislator shaped policy to a high degree; while in Arizona and Utah, groups of faculty worked together on transfer for many years before drawing any attention from state legislators; and in Massachusetts, Louisiana, and New Jersey, the higher education community approached a sympathetic legislator to champion legislation.

Analysis across states revealed substantial variation in governance structures, policy development and implementation, and the specific initiatives or practices chosen by each state to address transfer issues, such as the transfer of associate's degrees. Although public higher education governance generally falls into

one of three broad categories – governing board, coordinating board, or state planning agency – the functioning of these entities varies in each state. This variety may be due to the type of authority vested to each board: some governing boards' authority is enshrined in the state constitution, while others' powers are provided for in statute. Likewise, coordinating boards granted the “power of the purse strings” might in fact wield more authority than would be expected for a body of this type. A few interviewees commented that though their state has a governing board, it operates in the spirit of a coordinating board to prevent institutional and faculty resistance.

A few states (Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming) have both a coordinating board and a governing board overseeing various aspects or institutions within public postsecondary education. In other states (Hawaii, Nevada, and Ohio), the public two- and four-year institutions are governed by the same body. Statewide governing agencies must acknowledge the role of system and institutional governance in policy implementation.

There is also substantial variation across states in the types of transfer and articulation policy. In some states (California and Florida), lengthy legislated policies cover many specific details of transfer and articulation. Other states (Arizona and Minnesota) have brief legislation that generally calls for sectors of public higher education to work together to smooth student transitions. The latter type of legislation may be seen as a warning, intended to spur action among institutions, systems, and governing agencies, so that further attention from state legislators is not needed. In a few cases (Hawaii, North Dakota, and Washington), a Senate or House bill never signed into state law was the impetus for the higher education community's attention to transfer issues.

Regardless of how detailed the policy is at the state level, there is value in actively engaging those stakeholders who will be responsible for implementing policy. Interview and survey data collected for this study suggest that state higher education communities are not likely to view a “top-down” legislative approach as positively



as a collaborative one. Yet policymakers remain skeptical that effective transfer will happen without state intervention.

Whether public higher education institutions are governed by a coordinating board or a governing board, board policies often provide details for a statewide approach to articulation and transfer. This is especially true in cases where the same body governs both two- and four-year institutions, such as in Minnesota and Ohio. In other cases, one or the other sector may take the lead in transfer policies (Arizona) or a committee composed of representatives from both sectors may address transfer (Oregon and Iowa).

Strategies for the maintenance and communication of articulation and transfer policies are common across the states. For example, having informational sessions and print materials for students and parents is typical. There is variation, however, in the modalities utilized and the audiences targeted in maintenance and dissemination activities. Many states utilize Web portals to provide transfer information to students, parents, and others. A more detailed analysis of Web portals and their features is provided in a companion report, “Higher Education Web Portals: Serving State and Student Transfer Needs.”

Evaluations of state articulation and transfer policies range from anecdotal to formal evaluation activities. A few states (Arizona and Mississippi) conducted a one-time study, while others have recurring evaluations (Nevada and Washington). Some of the studies were mandatory; others were voluntary.

COMMONALITIES IN STATE APPROACHES

All transfer policies intend to simplify the experiences of students moving between institutions or sectors, but not all transfer policies aim to increase the number of students moving overall. This is partially in recognition of the fact that factors other than ease of transfer weigh on students. Despite structural interventions by states, “students weigh current labor market

conditions, their own propensity for schooling, and their financial, personal, and family needs when making enrollment decisions,” according to Goldhaber, Gross, and DeBurgomaster.¹⁴ Even where increased transfer rates might be the intent of the policy, research on the efficacy of such practices is mixed in terms of the degree to which they achieve specific outcomes. In some instances, such policies show a positive impact on rates of transfer, retention, or graduation while for other cases no such evidence exists.

State transfer and articulation approaches incorporate various specific academic strategies and policies addressing issues such as course numbering or credit transfer. This is true, despite the lack of research evidence that either the strategies or the statewide transfer and articulation policy agreements that include them consistently raised retention or degree completion rates.¹⁵ Further, Wellman argues that differences in outcomes may be evident among states implementing broadly similar articulation and transfer approaches:

The research shows that there is not much difference between the high-performing and low-performing states in many of their basic approaches to transfer policy. All have paid a good deal of attention to the academic policy aspects of transfer, and have comparable policies in place concerning core curriculum, articulation agreements, transfer of credit, and statewide transfer guides (including Web-based catalogues).¹⁶

However, despite a lack of definitive evidence in the literature that these “academic policy aspects,” in and of themselves, are shown to ease transfer, it is still informative to consider practices that suggest promise. Indeed, a number of aspects of articulation and transfer practice emerged from this study as common among states, including a general education common core, common course numbering, statewide program major articulation, block credit transfer, and transfer associate’s degrees.

As of the close of this study, 15 states reported having implemented **general education common**



State	General Education Common Core	Common Course Numbering	Statewide Major Articulation	Block Credit Transfer	Transfer Associate's Degree
Alabama			X		
Alaska*				X	
Arizona	X		X		X
Arkansas	X		X		X
California*					
Colorado			X		
Connecticut*					
Delaware*					
Florida		X	X	X	X
Georgia				X	X
Hawaii			X	X	X
Idaho	X				X
Illinois*	X		X	X	X
Indiana			X		X
Iowa*			X		X
Kansas*					
Kentucky	X		X	X	X
Louisiana*					
Maine					
Maryland			X	X	X
Massachusetts				X	X
Michigan*					
Minnesota	X		X	X	X
Mississippi					X
Missouri*	X		X	X	X
Montana	X	X		X	
Nebraska*					
Nevada*	X	X	X		X
New Hampshire					
New Jersey				X	X
New Mexico	X		X	X	X
New York*					X
North Carolina				X	X
North Dakota	X	X	X	X	
Ohio			X		X
Oklahoma			X		
Oregon	X	X		X	X
Pennsylvania					
Rhode Island*					
South Carolina					X
South Dakota*					X
Tennessee*					X
Texas	X	X	X	X	X
Utah*	X	X	X	X	X
Vermont*					
Virginia					X
Washington	X		X	X	X
West Virginia					X
Wisconsin			X	X	X
Wyoming*					
Total	15	7	22	20	31

* Denotes a state that did not return the administration survey or did not provide a statewide contact for this survey.



core courses in some form. Broadly speaking, practices of this nature attempt to assure that the general education portion of a degree – as opposed to specific major requirements – are easily transferrable from one institution to another.

Seven states had **common course numbering** processes of one type or another in place as of the completion of this study. In its purest form, this practice would result in course numbers being identical within a state, irrespective of the institution or level. However, this policy is implemented in different fashions (e.g., for lower-division courses only) depending on the context and interests within each state. States may find it easier to apply a common course number to “common courses” – those for which content is general and well-established – than for those that are more specialized.

To date four of those seven states also reported using common course descriptions to complement their numbering systems. It is conceivable that two courses with the same number might in fact differ in terms of content or description, so a common description provides students assurance that courses listed with the same number do in fact cover the same content.

Nearly half of states (22 of 50) reported having **statewide program major articulation** practices in place. While this was referred to in the administrative survey as “statewide major articulation,” this aspect of policy is more accurately described as “program-major-to-program-major” articulation. Derived from Ignash and Townsend’s term *program major*, referring to major transfer,¹⁷ program-major-to-program-major articulation more accurately describes the process, as “majors” can be called “programs” and “programs” can also include “majors.” This provision (again, in its pure form) allows students to change institutions seamlessly if they maintain their major area of study. As implemented, however, this practice may or may not ensure transferability of lower-division major prerequisites, for example.

Twenty states reported having implemented **block credit transfer** practices that allow credits earned to transfer en masse. Block credit transfer is typically applicable to general education or prerequisite courses. Variations among state practices in this area may apply to all courses taken or only to courses clustered in some way (e.g., within a content area). Irrespective of the details of implementation, this practice intends to avoid course-by-course evaluation of transferability.

The most popular of the common articulation and transfer practices (reported by 31 states), **transfer associate’s degrees**, are another attempt to eliminate the need for course-by-course examinations of credit transfer. Most typically applied to associate of arts or science degrees, these practices may be limited – for example, assuring acceptance to an institution as a junior, while not guaranteeing admission to a major program.

Table 1 summarizes the presence of these practices as reported, by state. Most of the information in Table 1 came from responses to this study’s administration survey, completed for each state by an individual identified through the processes described in Appendix A. Respondents were not asked to define details of an aspect before responding to the pertinent survey items, so differences may exist in personal as well as state definitions behind those responses.

For those states that did not return a completed administration survey (denoted by an asterisk in Table 1), the information was gleaned from interviews and secondary sources. It is important to recognize the variation likely produced by this approach within each aspect area – even beyond the substantive differences in how each state conceptualizes and implements its practices. Some states are developing new policies, not yet implemented by the conclusion of this study, and Table 1 does not include these new initiatives. Interpretations of the totals indicated at the bottom of the table must take such considerations into account.



General Education Common Core

Some states (Georgia and Ohio) have developed a general education common core with distributed requirements that allow individual institutions to determine which courses meet the requirements. Still other states (Minnesota and Tennessee) specify common general education learning outcomes, which students may meet by taking a number of courses to develop the knowledge required. When students have completed the courses, they may transfer to any other public institution secure in the knowledge that they have met their lower division general education requirements. Recently, in hopes of improving transfer, several states (Georgia and New Mexico) have changed their statewide general education core requirements to allow greater flexibility to institutions. In all 15 states reported having adopted some form of the general education common core.

Common Course Numbering

This tactic was reported to be implemented in seven states. Common course numbering of lower-division courses can be quite difficult to put into place. Some states (Florida and Texas) have implemented common course numbering of lower-division courses for the entire public higher education system. In other states, however, only the community college system or a few high-demand courses have common course numbering (Alabama, Mississippi, and Oregon). Although this component may provide students with a level of ease in transfer, it faces substantial barriers to implementation in many states. As mentioned earlier four states (Florida, North Dakota, Oregon, and Texas) reported that they complement common numbering with common course descriptions.

Many states provide transferring students with information through the use of course equivalency guides (e.g., Kentucky, Maryland, and North Carolina). Such guides generally review each course for equivalency, relative to every other relevant course at public institutions in the state, and often include caveats and provisos specific to each institution. The guides help students to

make informed decisions to take courses that will be considered comparable to those that will be required should they transfer to another institution. Such guides are often available online, as well as in a print version. One drawback to this approach is that course equivalency guides for past years must be maintained and made available for students because they are held accountable to the guide that applies in the year that they transfer; any subsequent changes to the guides must include a grandfather provision for students who have already transferred. There is also the potential for students to take additional unneeded courses, as these guides often do not provide a clear pathway for those who have selected a major.

Statewide Program Major Articulation

Program major transfer is also a common practice, although there are multiple ways that states approach this. There is at least one state, Nevada, which mandates that each major program be articulated with every other similar program in the state. The majority of states, however, articulate far fewer majors, often focusing on high-demand majors that lend themselves to articulation due to curricular standards imposed by external accrediting or licensing boards. However, these types of external standards may limit the transferability of major programs. For example, business programs accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business may be reluctant to accept courses from institutions that have not earned this accreditation. On the other hand, nursing programs leading to state licensure may actually be easier to articulate due to the uniform standards imposed on the curriculum from the state level.

Block Credit Transfer

Block credit transfer allows for an entire grouping of courses to transfer and fulfill requirements at another institution, without the need to individually evaluate each course for transferability. The block transfer of credit facilitates transfer by assuring students that course credits within the block will automatically



transfer. Though not as comprehensive as general education or program major transfer, block transfer provides students with a greater measure of certainty than a course-by-course approach to transfer. However, some states reported that this policy component was burdensome to maintain, since institutions make frequent changes to their programs and courses. Another limitation noted by some sources was that few students complete an entire block prior to transferring.

Transfer Associate’s Degrees

Some states include transferable associate of art degrees (Florida and Rhode Island), while others also offer associate of science transfer degrees (New Jersey, New York, and Ohio). These degrees provide students with a clear pathway to transfer and often allow transfer students to enter a receiving institution with junior status. In some cases states have also allowed for the transfer of associate of applied science degrees (Maryland). However, these types of degrees are typically only transferable to bachelor of applied science programs.

PROMISING PRACTICES

PROMISING PRACTICES IN STATEWIDE COLLABORATION

Two key components of collaboration among policymakers attending to articulation and transfer issues emerged from the data collected by the research team: the presence of a statewide committee dedicated to articulation and transfer; and faculty involvement.

Statewide Committees

Develop a statewide, standing committee to focus on multi-institution transfer and articulation.

Statewide committee membership gives a voice to multiple institutions, accounting for variations in student enrollment and other demographics, institutional geographic location, institutional type (two- and four-year, public and nonpublic), and other factors. Diversity in committee members

(related to such factors as their role at the institution and which department they work in) is also useful. Some committees also have non-faculty members. Committees can vary in terms of the frequency with which they meet, modality (rotating, in-person, teleconference, or Web conference), and issues for discussion.

Most states currently have one or multiple standing statewide committees whose charge is to focus on transfer and articulation issues. These committees vary, likely reflecting contextual factors unique to each state; for this reason, no single committee structure represents a “gold standard” for all states. Several states’ articulation and transfer committees are described below to provide a glimpse into the diverse ways that these committees may be convened and to highlight unique aspects which may inform implementation.

Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education’s Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group (CTAG) is a large standing committee with broad representation of major stakeholder groups from across the state and the campuses. The CTAG includes faculty, chief academic officers, transfer professionals, legislators, and school administrators, as well as representatives from sector boards or organizations, regional or independent transfer-related groups, and the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. After two years of intensive and sustained work, this 22-member group developed and successfully launched a new statewide transfer and articulation initiative, MassTransfer, effective for students matriculating in community colleges in the fall of 2009.¹⁸

Minnesota. Though the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System addresses transfer issues with several committees, the Transfer Oversight Committee is notable due to its inclusion of faculty and students. This committee is tasked with the “development of criteria to evaluate the functioning of the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum” and the “monitoring of data on transfer students.”¹⁹ It meets at least three times a year and provides recommendations to the senior vice chancellor for student and academic affairs. This



committee’s oversight “assures appropriate high quality education for students who transfer within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System.”²⁰ Committee representation includes union-appointed faculty from state colleges and state universities. Additionally, one student member serves as a representative from the Minnesota State College Student Association, and transfer specialists are also included on the committee.

Rhode Island. Rhode Island provides another example of a statewide committee devoted to transfer and articulation. The presidents of the three public institutions of higher education in Rhode Island each appoint three representatives from their institution to serve on the state’s Articulation/Transfer Committee – one of whom must be the school’s articulation/transfer officer. A representative from the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education, the administrative agency of the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education, chairs the Articulation/Transfer Committee. The inclusion of multiple representatives from each institution supports wider collaboration back on campus, as well as on the state level, and as such is a practice that shows promise, particularly for states with smaller higher education systems.

Faculty Involvement

Involve faculty in policy development and implementation. Community college and university faculty members are experts in their fields of study, as well as in curriculum development for their courses and program majors. As such they are often best positioned to evaluate the transferability of courses. Further, faculty buy-in to the transfer policies is critical to widespread implementation. Faculty advisors who do not support mandated policies may not advise their students to follow them, and department heads may well be in a position to ignore policies with which they disagree. States address issues in myriad ways, but top-down implementation of transfer policies can prompt faculty resistance. Often, however, faculty members are involved in the process early or serve as an impetus for

policies. The state examples that follow help illustrate variations in the ways that faculty members contribute to transfer and articulation policies.

Arizona. Discipline-specific articulation task forces (ATFs, of which there are 46) and their predecessors have been meeting for close to 30 years in Arizona. Currently, each task force meets one or more times per year to confirm current common courses, consider adding or deleting common courses, examine curricular changes that impact transfer, and discuss any other transfer-related issues. One member of each discipline-specific ATF is also a member of the Arizona Transfer Articulation Committee. This individual’s responsibilities include communication of recommended changes in transfer policy to the Academic Program Articulation Steering Committee, which has general oversight for the state’s approach to transfer.

Hawaii. Community college faculty prompted the statewide approach to transfer and articulation in Hawaii. Faculty members were on the verge of voicing their concerns to the state Legislature. Concerned about the possibility of management by legislation, however, the University of Hawaii faculty began working with community colleges on transfer ahead of the drafting of legislation. As a direct result of the community college faculty’s concerns, the Hawaii Board of Regents implemented its transfer and articulation policies.

Wyoming. Cross-sector faculty participation in discipline-specific meetings is important to build bridges between sectors. In states that cover a large geographic area however, travel time can become a disincentive to participation. The University of Wyoming has removed this barrier by providing university faculty with travel support and other incentives to participation, so that cost is not a barrier to the functioning of cross-sector, discipline-specific groups.



PROMISING PRACTICES IN COMMUNICATION OF POLICIES

The research team identified a number of useful mechanisms utilized by states for the dissemination of new policies to students, transfer advisors, and others impacted by these regulations. A key element for seamless transfer is ensuring include students having accurate advice from institutions, particularly in terms of knowing upfront the courses they should take if they want to transfer. The presence of a state-level articulation and transfer office or official; transfer professionals or associations; transfer fairs, summits, conferences, and meetings; electronic communication tools, and practices which encourage and include student feedback are all considered advantageous for both internal and external communication.

State-level Transfer Office/Official

Establish a state-level office or official whose sole or primary purpose is to facilitate a statewide approach to transfer and articulation. This practice indicates a state's sustained commitment to making student transfer between the two- and four-year sectors seamless. Further, this practice provides a panoramic viewpoint on the state's needs and resources related to transfer and articulation and thereby offers a valuable opportunity to facilitate communication among those at the nexus of transfer and articulation. The examples described below demonstrate several variations within this practice.

Alabama. The executive director of the Academic General Studies Committee and Statewide Transfer and Articulation System (AGSC/STARS) office oversees the state's approach to articulation and transfer. The office provides services to institutions, as well as to students. For example, the executive director works closely with the AGSC Advisory Group that has senior officials representing the public two- and four-year institutions, the state higher education systems' governing boards, and the state coordinating body, the Alabama Commission on Higher Education. In addition, the executive director oversees the Web-based transfer database

system. Finally, when issues regarding transfer credit evaluation arise, there is an appeals process, described on the AGSC/STARS Website. The executive director reported that no appeals have been filed in the past 15 years, perhaps in part because the executive director, along with the students and the points of contact at the institutions, have worked out problems before an appeal was needed.

Florida. In Florida the Department of Education's Office of K-20 Articulation is dedicated to statewide transfer and articulation. According to its Website, the office concerns itself with efficient student progress throughout the entire educational pipeline and works with all sectors in education, including independent institutions. This office administers and disseminates information about the statewide course numbering system, the *Postsecondary Articulation Manual*, the *Common Prerequisite Manual*, and the statewide two-plus-two agreements. In addition, students whose transfer problems are not resolved satisfactorily at the institutional level have recourse to the mediation services of this high-profile office.

Mississippi. The assistant commissioner for community and junior college relations is a newly created position at the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL), the governing body for the state's public universities. The responsibilities of the assistant commissioner include coordinating activities related to the state's articulation agreement and all other statewide issues regarding transfer and articulation. This position serves the role of advocate for the community colleges and provides them with a contact at the IHL who can work to solve cross-sector differences when they arise. Recent progress on the statewide approach to transfer is credited to the existence of this position.

Montana. Montana has devoted financial resources to state-level articulation and transfer personnel and resources. In 2007 the Legislature passed and funded a transferability initiative. The initiative funded two and a half administrative positions (including a director of transferability initiatives) and one and a half data positions, as



well as hardware and software for data activities and faculty discipline council meetings. In addition, the Montana University System received funds to arrange common course numbering – a strategy viewed as unique for a state that’s often perceived as being fiscally conservative. In the autumn of 2009, common course numbering for 18 disciplines took effect. Many of the recent activities targeting articulation and transfer in Montana would likely not have been possible without the creation of the designated positions.

Professional Transfer Associations/ Personnel

Designate campus or state-level personnel as contact persons for transfer and articulation. In some cases these individuals provide information about the policies, agreements, and processes of transfer. They may also serve as liaisons during an appeal initiated by a student or a dispute between the sending and receiving institutions over transfer credit. The following examples show the diverse duties of these important contacts and the various offices in which they’re posted.

Nevada. The Nevada System of Higher Education calls upon the presidents of each university, state college, and community college to identify an articulation coordinator, who is required to assume responsibility for expediting transfer decisions and to have comprehensive knowledge of issues and policies related to transfer. University and state college coordinators are expected to work with deans, department chairs, and two-year institutions to guarantee timely decisions for courses submitted for transfer status by community colleges. When changes are made to courses that fulfill general elective credit, the coordinators are required to notify their counterparts at other institutions, as well as the chancellor’s office.

New York. New York is home to one of the nation’s oldest and biggest voluntary associations of transfer professionals: the New York State Transfer and Articulation Association (NYSTAA), founded in 1993. According to its Website, NYSTAA provides a forum for discussion, debate, and the exchange of ideas pertaining to transfer issues, activities, and

new developments in the field.²¹ NYSTAA employs many mechanisms to communicate information. It has five subcommittees, publishes an e-newsletter, sponsors several listservs, and holds regional and statewide conferences. At its annual statewide conference in 2009, NYSTAA announced the award of \$1,000 scholarships to four transfer students, as well as special recognition awards to several members. In addition, NYSTAA developed and maintains a publication, *Transfer Advisor Guide*, designed to improve the transfer and articulation knowledge and practices of its 600 faculty and staff who serve over 100 institutions – full members from accredited schools in New York State and associate members from schools in other states.

Ohio. Although the identification of a campus transfer professional is a practice common to many states, in Ohio each public institution of higher education has two individuals tasked with communicating to students about transfer and articulation policies and practices: one works with the Ohio Transfer Module (OTM) and the other with the state’s Transfer Assurance Guides (TAGs). The OTM is the subset of each institution’s general education coursework that meets the statewide student learning outcomes; while TAGs are the guaranteed pathways to baccalaureate degree majors. Each institution has an OTM coordinator and a TAG coordinator, who advise students about these components of Ohio’s academic policy on transfer and articulation. These individuals also communicate among themselves as statewide groups.

Transfer Fairs/Summits/Conferences/ Meetings

Convene or establish a presence at fairs, summits, conferences, and meetings to communicate with students and their families about transfer and articulation. Events provide a good opportunity for disseminating information, for consistently attending to issues in transfer and articulation, and for giving stakeholders an opportunity to share their successes and challenges. The audience may include institutional faculty, legislators, high school



guidance counselors, high school or college students, and parents. These events may take place at such locations as the state department of higher education or college campuses. Frequency of meetings varies: many states have annual events, while others host them more often. The content and agenda also vary from state to state.

Illinois. Illinois is commendable for the frequency of its transfer conferences. Anyone working with transfer students at Illinois colleges and universities is welcome to attend a conference offered each semester by the transfer coordinators group of the Illinois Articulation Initiative. The conference held by the Illinois Association for College Admission Counseling also addresses transfer issues.

Minnesota. The Center for Teaching and Learning in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities provides conferences, workshops, and other types of training that often focus on transfer topics. Workshops may be multiday meetings where out-of-state experts provide keynote presentations to inspire subsequent discussion on transfer topics. The center also organizes the annual Realizing Student Potential Conference, which includes faculty presentations and information on transfer issues.

Oklahoma. Discipline-specific faculty groups meet each fall in Oklahoma to create common descriptions and develop course equivalencies. Each year seven to 12 of the 40 most common undergraduate disciplines participate in this meeting; representatives from any given discipline may meet once every three to five years. One faculty member from each public and private institution is chosen by the institution's president to attend the meeting. A report summarizing faculty recommendations is submitted to the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. In the winter the Council on Instruction reviews and either approves or rejects each of the faculty's recommendations, and the changes are then submitted to the state regents for final approval.

Texas. Several states sponsor annual summits devoted to transfer and articulation as a way to promote communication about these issues

among stakeholders. In Texas 150 heads of two- and four-year institutions and systems attended the 2008 Transfer Success Summit. During this two-day conference, the institutional leaders discussed relevant issues and generated a list of recommendations for improving student transfer. The resulting 45-page report provides detailed information on the meeting's activities, discussions, and recommendations. But Texas went further and, as a follow-up to the summit, held Texas Transfer Success conferences at eight sites across the state on May 22, 2009. Over 1,000 institutional representatives – faculty, administrators, and staff members – participated in these conferences, which focused on principles and strategies for improving student transfer. The conferences, sponsored and funded by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, received local and national media attention.

Utah. The Utah System of Higher Education convenes several groups that address transfer and articulation on a statewide basis, including the annual Utah “majors meeting.” This meeting brings together faculty from every discipline at every institution to work on transfer, competencies, and other issues. More than 500 faculty members typically attend.

Electronic Communication Tools

Build a strong presence for articulation and transfer on the Web. There are a number of promising examples of practices that encourage cross-sector communication and collaboration through the use of technology. The practices described below are but a few examples of innovative ways that technology is being used to encourage regular communication. A more detailed analysis of Web portals and their features is provided in a companion report, “Higher Education Web Portals: Serving State and Student Transfer Needs.”

Oregon. The Oregon University System hosted online forums for the Joint Boards Articulation Commission. These forums were a mechanism for collecting suggestions on proposed criteria for general education transfer courses and on revisions of the associate of arts/Oregon transfer



degree. Unfortunately, infiltration by hackers forced the closure of these forums while this study was underway.

New York. The State University of New York (SUNY) served as the statewide system for the purposes of this study. SUNY's Web portal, SUNY Transfer Process, contains many features, including a live chat feature that allows users to obtain help while online or to leave a message for a transfer representative who will reply within one business day.

Montana. As part of Montana's Transferability Initiative, the state Legislature allocated significant funds to support faculty involvement and to develop centralized data and Web support capabilities to promote information accessibility. Faculty learning outcomes councils have statewide representation, with faculty, staff, and administrators from Montana University System units, tribal colleges, and private institutions. Discipline-specific councils review individual transferable courses and reach consensus about appropriate learning outcomes for each. The councils have an online discussion board, which allows for continued deliberations without members having to travel to meetings.²² Council members also have online access to reference and resource documents to provide background discussions, data, and a national context to inform their decision making.

Encouraging Student Feedback

Include student feedback in articulation and transfer policies and practices. Since transfer and articulation policies should benefit students, policies or practices that encourage or include student feedback give a voice to those who are most directly impacted. Some states have developed mechanisms to give students a voice, whether they are speaking up for themselves or have a representative to advocate for them.

Alaska. The University of Alaska System, which represents all public institutions in the state and thereby offers a de facto statewide approach, has recognized the power differential between students and faculty or administrators. For

this reason, it created an 800 number and an anonymous email address to which students may send complaints about transfer and articulation decisions.

Kentucky. As reported by Kentucky's Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) in its policy brief, "Transfer Pipeline," in 2004 CPE and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System conducted a statewide study of major barriers to transfer, using survey feedback from almost 5,000 community college students and statewide focus groups of key campus transfer officials.²³ The two groups agreed to address significant barriers in order to help Kentucky to prioritize subsequent statewide transfer and articulation initiatives.

Missouri. The Missouri Department of Higher Education has a "Joint Leadership Statement on Commitment to Transfer," which emphasizes students' needs as a priority over "institutional habit, convenience, or territoriality." Missouri is also implementing a new appeals process that is both innovative and progressive. This appeals process arranges for institution-to-institution communications when a student experiences difficulty, improving the likelihood that grievances will be heard. Students who feel as though they have been treated unfairly at the receiving institution are encouraged to report the experience to their sending institution, and when they do so they are paired with an advocate.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN ACADEMIC POLICY

Just as the characteristics of each state's approach to collaboration and communication vary depending on historical and political circumstances, the content of academic policy pertaining to transfer is likewise unique to each state. Study participants shared promising aspects of both the substance of transfer and articulation policy in their states and the processes used to implement policy, specifically as they related to articulation agreements for transfer between program majors, transferable general education core requirements, and guaranteed admission.



Statewide Articulation Agreements Between Program Majors

Provide clear transfer pathways for community college students who have selected a program major. Transfer of a general education core or sequence of courses is often a starting point in a statewide approach to transfer. It is not simple to develop equivalencies for these courses; the process may take years of cross-sector work. However, developing consensus on preparation coursework for majors can be even more onerous, due to faculty members' sense of ownership of upper-division major courses and their prerequisites and the specialized nature of major coursework. Many states articulate only a small number of program majors, but there are a few that require articulation of all program majors.

Alabama. Alabama has achieved the remarkable feat of having 99 percent of program majors articulated statewide. No details were available, however, regarding the process used or the length of time involved to forge these agreements.

Colorado. Program-major-to-program-major articulation agreements are of particular note in Colorado because institutional autonomy is both culturally and structurally entrenched in the state. Despite this, several program majors have been articulated statewide. These articulation agreements are constructed as “60 plus 60” agreements, which allow students to complete 60 credits at a community college and the remaining 60 at a university. When a student transfers, all 60 previously earned credits apply to graduation requirements, and the student enters as a junior. One factor that eased the development of these agreements is that the program majors selected are typically those with course requirements stipulated by accrediting or external licensure boards, such as nursing.

Nevada. The Nevada System of Higher Education requires that every baccalaureate degree be fully articulated with every institution in the system. Regardless of where a transfer student begins a degree, the courses required to complete the degree are clearly laid out in these articulation agreements.

New Mexico. Some states focus on high-demand career fields where program-major-to-program-major practices are concerned. In New Mexico transfer modules have been developed by discipline-based faculty committees and the statewide Articulation Task Force for the following popular program majors: business, criminal justice, early childhood education, social work, and teacher education. In addition, transfer modules for nursing, film and digital arts, and computer science were nearing completion as this study came to a close.

General Education Core Requirements

Develop a clear pathway for community college students to meet common general education requirements. Although general education requirements have been a curricular mainstay in American higher education, data collected for this study suggest that this core component is in a state of flux. States provided examples of various approaches to general education requirements that showed promise: the traditional distributive/disciplinary approach; one based on student learning outcomes or competencies; and others that combine these two approaches.

Arkansas. The “state minimum core” general education requirements in Arkansas include 35 semester hours distributed across six areas: English composition, speech communication, mathematics, science, fine arts/humanities, and social sciences.²⁴ Institutions submit the courses to be included in their general education core to discipline-based review teams composed of an equal number of faculty from two- and four-year institutions. These disciplinary teams also set comparability criteria used to review the courses. Comparable courses share a common index number, title, and course description, as well as learning outcomes assigned by the faculty review teams. A listing of all comparable courses is included on the Arkansas Course Transfer System on the Arkansas Department of Higher Education's Website.

Oregon. Recent work by staff members from the Oregon University System and the State Board of Education (which coordinates the delivery of



education by community colleges in the state) led to the creation of general education learning outcomes for the first two years of college. The associate of arts/Oregon transfer degree (A.A./O.T.) is based on these outcomes. The Oregon Transfer Module makes up one year of this degree and also one year of the agreed-upon general education outcomes.

Utah. The Regents Task Force on General Education, which oversees transfer, articulation, and assessment, has developed general education common competencies and learning goals. The competencies are used at all Utah System of Higher Education institutions, and all general education courses are expected to address them. Utah's efforts have been recognized by Lumina Foundation for Education, and the state is one of three currently participating in the Tuning USA project, a faculty-led pilot project designed to define what students must know, understand, and be able to demonstrate after completing a degree in a specific field.²⁵ In addition, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) invited Utah to become part of their Liberal Education and America's Promise initiative, in which AAC&U partners with campuses, state systems, and K-12 educational leaders as they make these essential learning outcomes a framework for educational excellence, assessment of learning, and new alignments between school and college.²⁶ Both of these initiatives place emphasis on learning outcomes (competencies).

Guaranteed Admissions Policies

Implement guaranteed admission policies for community college students who have met all transfer-related benchmarks. Students may believe that completion of a transferable degree grants them admission into any public four-year institution. This is not necessarily the case: transfer students may have difficulty gaining access to a particular institution. But they should be able to attend one of their state's four-year colleges or universities, and practices that address this aspect of transfer show promise.

Florida. In Florida the statewide policy guaranteeing admission is provided for by law. Florida's Statewide Articulation Agreement, as stated in Fla. Stat. §1007.23, "must specifically provide that every associate in arts graduate of a Florida college shall have met all general education requirements and must be granted admission to the upper division of a state university, except to a limited access, teacher certification program or a major requiring an audition."²⁷

Nevada. The Nevada System of Higher Education guarantees admission into either of the universities or the state college if transfer students complete a transferrable associate's degree. Transfer students are automatically granted junior status, are not required to fulfill additional general education requirements, and are admitted regardless of grade point average.

New Hampshire. New Hampshire launched a statewide admissions initiative in 2008. The University System of New Hampshire (USNH), in cooperation with the Community College System of New Hampshire (CCSNH), offers the Connections Program, providing two "seamless pathways to a four-year degree for New Hampshire students."²⁸ The first pathway is for students whose application to a USNH residential institution was not accepted. These students are offered admission to a public community college and, after successfully completing specified courses and meeting other performance requirements, are admitted to a USNH institution without having to reapply or pay another fee. All of their credits will transfer. However, the students are not guaranteed admission to restricted majors with limited capacity, and they may be required to take additional courses for new transfer students. The second pathway is for students enrolling in a CCSNH institution with the expressed intention of transferring to a USNH institution. Students in both pathways receive individualized transfer counseling to help ensure their success.

Washington. The Higher Education Coordinating Board's proportionality agreement, while not a guarantee for any individual student, stipulates that approximately 30 percent of new students



admitted to baccalaureate institutions each year must be transfer students. The exact proportion varies by baccalaureate institution, determined by historical transfer rates. The proportionality agreement gives priority to students who have completed an associate's degree or 90 quarter hours or have otherwise progressed as far as they can at community colleges. This agreement was developed as a response to severe capacity pressure at the public four-year institutions.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN THE USE OF DATA

Three policies that relate to the use of data to support transfer and articulation policy implementation – assessment initiatives, maintaining student unit records, and assessment reporting – demonstrate promise in their states.

Assessment Initiatives

Evaluate transfer and articulation policies and statutes, as well as transfer students' progress.

According to the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, tracking transfer from two- to four-year institutions is essential.²⁹ By evaluating transfer rates, states are able to monitor the composition of transfer students (who, how many, which institutions, which majors, reason for transfer, etc.), observe trends, and understand how students are impacted by the rules that apply when going through the process. Evaluating policy is likewise critical to building a healthy higher education system.

The evaluation of transfer rates may take the form of record review (such as a review of student transcripts) or a survey of institutional staff, students, or other stakeholders. Some states have conducted one-time studies, while others have recurring evaluations, though a number still have no formal data collection or analysis processes (only anecdotal ones). In addition, some states are required by a policy to do some form of review to ensure the policies are indeed working, while other assessments are voluntary. There are also variations in who conducts the evaluation

(whether evaluators are internal or external) and in funding sources for evaluation activities.

Arizona. Several years ago Arizona's community colleges and universities hired one of this study's authors, Hezel Associates, to evaluate the state's transfer and articulation policies. This was the only systematic evaluation of transfer conducted in the state and included surveys and focus groups to solicit feedback from various stakeholders, including students, advisors, faculty, and admissions and registrar professionals. The findings showed that Arizona's articulation and transfer approach effectively reduced the number of credits earned by transfer students completing their bachelor's degrees. The evaluation also highlighted a need for improved marketing and communication to citizens and students about articulation and transfer.

North Dakota. At the request of North Dakota's Transfer and Articulation Steering Committee, the North Dakota University System is conducting a series of three transfer evaluations focusing on the state's 11 public higher education institutions – an assessment collectively known as the Transfer Migration Study. Two reports have been produced (in 2006 and 2007), informed by the review of nearly 1,500 student transcripts, and another report is in progress. The Transfer Migration Study examined a number of factors, including: students transferring from institution to institution within the state; students transferring outside the state's university system; completion rates for the statewide general education program; completion of math courses prior to transfer; remedial math and remedial writing courses taken prior to transfer; transfer direction (traditional, upper-division lateral, reverse, lower division lateral); instances of probation or suspension among transfer students; evidence of significant stop-out; and student participation in national credit-by-exam programs.

Texas. In keeping with its statutory responsibilities, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) issues various reports on higher education that contain quantitative and qualitative data relevant to transfer and articulation in the state. Institutional



data are stored, analyzed, and reported from the Texas Higher Education Data Website, which THECB created and maintains.³⁰ There is an “accountability systems” section on this Website, which includes institutional target rates for enrollment and degree completion, as well as performance results by institution. Graduation rates are tracked for cohorts of first-time students who enrolled in a minimum of 12 credit hours for their first term as undergraduates. The Website also makes available comparative data for university native versus community college transfer students for six and 10 years and disaggregates much of the reported data by institution or system.

In addition, several THECB advisory committees and other statewide higher education groups provide qualitative data on transfer and articulation in Texas. In 2001 THECB’s Transfer Issues Advisory Committee (TIAC) issued a report, “Identifying and Closing the Gap,” that detailed discussions among five representative higher education institutions. These discussions were prompted by the TIAC Data Subcommittee, which had worked on a previous study of thousands of transfer student transcripts (its findings are included in “Identifying and Closing the Gap”).³¹

Student Unit Records

Assess student success through quantitative measures of individual student-level indicators of performance. Currently, few states have the ability to track individual students as they move from one institution to another. However, federal and state initiatives around the development of state longitudinal data systems could make it possible to track students across state higher education institutions, as well as from pre-K through graduate education, through measures like graduation and retention rates, grade point average, and credits to degree. Barriers to this capability include lack of funding, lack of political will, and concerns regarding compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. In the absence of such data, many states rely on anecdotal evidence, such as fluctuations in the number of student complaints, to assess their

approach to transfer. A few notable states that have student unit records are Florida, California, and Minnesota.

Assessment Reporting

Expand the reporting of results of transfer and articulation assessments. Variability exists among states’ transfer and articulation assessment reporting practices, even among those identified as promising by this study. Three examples help to illustrate the differences among them and the positive attributes that might inform practice in other states.

Florida. Given the number of relevant statutory policies in Florida, it is not surprising that four different entities assess and report on articulation and transfer. The state boards of both major systems of public higher education, the State Board of Education (SBOE) and the Board of Governors of the State University System (BOG), are required by Fla. Stat. §1008.38 (Articulation Accountability Process), to assess annually the state-mandated transfer and articulation system at two- and four-year institutions. This responsibility is met through the statewide Articulation Coordinating Committee (ACC) of Florida’s Department of Education (DOE), the administrative arm of SBOE. The ACC’s “Articulation Accountability Report” is sent to the higher education community, as well as to legislative bodies, but it is not available to the general public. In addition, DOE conducts its own research studies and issues its own reports with transfer and articulation data.³² BOG’s annual “Accountability Report” is also distributed widely, in accordance with its statutory responsibility.³³ Finally, the Florida Legislature’s own Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability issues reports relevant to transfer and articulation in public institutions of higher education.³⁴

Minnesota. The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities are able to track individual students both within and outside of their system. This data allows assessment and reporting on the function of transfer in the system. In 2006 this information was presented at the annual Association for



Institutional Research conference. The data showed that both the number of credits and the number of students transferring into the system increased for each year from 2000 to 2004. Other data collected on transfer students includes cumulative GPA at graduation, cumulative credits earned at graduation, persistence rate, and graduation rate after three and six years.

Oklahoma. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education office collects data on student retention and graduation within the state as a whole rather than for individual institutions. The statewide system accounts for graduates who have transferred from a two- to four-year institution as being the product of both a community college and a university.

Importantly, while this study uncovered a few promising practices related to the evaluation and assessment of statewide transfer and articulation systems, evidence-based evaluations that can inform state and institutional policymakers about the effectiveness of their systems are few and far between. Policy and practice have largely been driven by past perceptions, hunches, and occasional examinations, but overall there is a lack of comprehensive evidence-based research on how statewide articulation and transfer policies affect outcomes for students.

ADDITIONAL PROMISING PRACTICES IN ARTICULATION AND TRANSFER

Some practices related to articulation and transfer do not fit into the categories developed by this study. However, a few specific practices documented in a small number of states appear to hold promise for facilitating student transfer and articulation and so deserve further consideration. These include: the student bill of rights; published statewide best practices guides on transfer; transfer student scholarships; funding for transfer-related performance; and retroactive degree-completion initiatives.

Transfer Student Bill of Rights

Publish a transfer student bill of rights to specify the treatment transfer students can expect during their transition. Such a document may also spur additional work on transfer.

Colorado. In Colorado the transfer student bill of rights states (among other things) that “students have a right to know which courses are transferable among the state public two-year and four-year institutions” and further that “upon completion of core general education courses, regardless of the delivery method,” they “should have those courses satisfy the core course requirements of all Colorado public institutions of higher education.”³⁵

Florida. As mentioned earlier in this guide, Florida’s Statewide Articulation Agreement was created by statute and grants comprehensive rights to certain transfer students. The Florida Department of Education Office of K-20 Articulation’s *Statewide Postsecondary Articulation Manual* explains that students who graduate from a Florida community college with an associate of arts degree are assured: admission to one of the 11 state universities, except to limited access programs; acceptance of at least 60 semester hours by the state universities; adherence to the university requirements and policies, based on the catalog in effect at the time the student first enters the community college and provided the student maintains continuous enrollment; transfer of equivalent courses under the Statewide Course Numbering System; acceptance by the state universities of credits earned in accelerated programs; no additional general education core requirements; advance knowledge of selection criteria for limited access programs; and equal opportunity with native university students to enter limited-access programs.³⁶

Statewide Principles for Transfer

Develop and disseminate statewide principles related to transfer and articulation. Having a set of principles to guide decisions can foster effective policy design and implementation.



Indiana. Indiana created a series of principles guiding statewide transfer and articulation, emphasizing the importance of shared responsibility and equal partnership among two- and four-year institutions. Its use of academic experts for developing and implementing statewide principles for transfer is noteworthy.³⁷

Missouri. Missouri has also established guiding principles and best practices related to articulation and transfer. The Missouri Department of Higher Education has responded to a statute that requires the establishment of guidelines to promote and facilitate transfer via the Council on Transfer and Articulation (COTA). This council's primary responsibilities are to "review and make recommendations on transfer issues; study and develop transfer guidelines for traditional and non-traditional credits; and review and recommend resolutions on cases of appeal from institutions or students."³⁸ COTA has also organized conferences, discussions, and publications of best practices. Missouri has credit transfer guidelines, with 10 guiding principles. A publication describing "good practice" for transfer and articulation displays a commitment to collaborating across colleges and universities and to giving express attention to this issue.³⁹

Transfer Student Scholarships

Establish financial assistance programs that actively support student transfers from two- to four-year institutions. A lack of portable financial assistance acts as a potential barrier to community college students transferring to four-year institutions. While some financial aid programs are available to students at both two- and four-year institutions, many aid sources are institutional and so do not afford continuity that would encourage students to transfer. Despite tough economic times, some states are addressing this barrier head on by means of statewide scholarship programs designed to enable – and even promote – student transfer.

Kentucky. Kentucky recently launched a new Workforce Development Transfer Scholarship for Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) students in high-demand career

fields. Upon entry to KCTCS, full- and part-time students enrolled in associate degree programs in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics, or in selected teacher education programs, are eligible for a scholarship that is renewable for a second year if certain conditions are met. These students must document their intention to transfer to a four-year institution in an appropriate field of study upon graduation, have a minimum GPA of 2.75, and have financial needs, according to the Pell Grant's standards.⁴⁰ The Kentucky Legislature funded the Transfer Scholarship Program to encourage student retention and transfer.

Maryland. Maryland has two scholarships available for qualifying community college students who are state residents. The first scholarship, the Workforce Shortage Student Assistance Grant (WSSAG) program, is for students majoring in programs tied to career fields with identified critical shortages, such as childcare, human services, teaching, nursing, physical and occupational therapy, and public service. Because it is a multiyear award and many of these critical need areas require four-year degrees, this scholarship may facilitate student transfer in addition to improving student retention. According to the Maryland Higher Education Commission's Website for the WSSAG, "applicants will be ranked by Grade Point Average (GPA) and then by need within each occupational field. Those students with the greatest need within each GPA range will be awarded first." Students are also ranked in terms of financial need via the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, though not by its eligibility standards.⁴¹ In addition, the Distinguished Scholar Community College Transfer Program is available to as many as 50 full-time students at four-year colleges who have previously (in the last year) completed 60 credits or an associate's degree in Maryland and maintained a minimum GPA of 3.0 while doing so.⁴²

Virginia. Virginia's General Assembly established the Two Year College Transfer Grant Program in 2007 to encourage the completion of the associate degree and support transfer for baccalaureate degree completion. This program



awards an annual grant of \$1,000 to students who have completed a transfer associate's degree and met both academic and financial eligibility criteria. Students may use the grant towards tuition at a public or private four-year institution. Further, if the student chooses to major in engineering, mathematics, nursing, teacher education or science, he or she will receive an additional \$1,000 annually.

Funding for Transfer-Related Performance

Provide funding incentives to institutions that perform well in terms of student transfers. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education has instituted performance funding as part of its broader approach to enrollment management by rewarding institutions for the number of students they retain and graduate. This provides an incentive to make transitions, such as transfer from two- to four-year institutions, as smooth as possible. Recent degree completion rates have increased more than would be expected from simultaneous increases in enrollments alone.

Retroactive Degree Completion Initiatives

Provide alternate pathways to degree completion. These options are especially important for students who transfer to a four-year school before receiving their two-year degree and who, for whatever reason, fail to earn their baccalaureate.

Michigan. Michigan's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth has called for a program similar to one that was implemented in Nevada (described below). Termed the Michigan Milestone Compact, it would allow students who transfer prior to receiving an associate's degree the option of earning a community college credential if they have completed coursework that meets specific learning outcomes.

Nevada. The Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) developed a program called "reverse transfer." NSHE community college students who transfer to a university prior to obtaining an associate's degree are eligible to transfer

portions of their university coursework back to the sending institution. This coursework then applies retroactively to graduation requirements for an associate of arts, associate of business, or associate of science degree.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

At the heart of all policies and practices related to articulation and transfer should be a common element: a focus on students. The research study behind this guide attempted to identify statewide approaches to articulation and transfer that ease the process for students and ultimately make baccalaureate degree completion more likely. The value of any policy or practice can be determined based on the degree to which it makes student transfer seamless and student success more likely.

Besides having a student-centered approach to articulation and transfer, it is also crucial that policies be created and implemented in collaborative ways. Successful approaches to articulation and transfer require the agreement of and open communication between two- and four-year institutions, as well as the engagement of faculty, advisers, and others. Faculty, for instance, must be involved in the process of determining course equivalencies. Advisers are often a primary source of transfer-related information for students, so their buy-in is important. Many states have standing committees that deal with transfer and articulation, while some have designated staff to address the issues statewide.

In some states articulation and transfer policy has been heavily influenced – or even mandated by – the legislature. There is little conclusive evidence one way or the other, however, to answer the question of whether transfer approaches heavily influenced or mandated by statute are more effective than those arising with minimal legislative direction. Further, it is important to consider the value of insisting upon early and ongoing participation of higher education stakeholders in policymaking processes. A top-down process can create institutional resistance and might actually have detrimental effects on



articulation and transfer practices and policy compliance.

A major limitation of this and many studies of transfer and articulation is the lack of data with which to make objective determinations regarding the efficacy of particular policies and practices. In light of this limitation, this report highlights promising practices and examples from the states that may have a positive impact on student transfer and degree completion or are otherwise noteworthy. Policymakers are similarly constrained and are too often forced to make decisions regarding policies and practices based on anecdotal evidence. In order for researchers to be able to identify truly promising practices and for policymakers to make fully informed decisions, it is essential that states collect, analyze, and disseminate data related to student transfer.

A wealth of actionable promising practices emerged from this study. Before we review them, several more comprehensive recommendations, inspired by recent developments in transfer and articulation, and higher education in general, are important to consider.

1. States should regularly and systematically evaluate their articulation and transfer policies to respond to changing conditions, mitigate problems that arise, and accommodate changing trends.
2. Evaluations of transfer and articulation policies and practices should consider the perspectives of the entire range of stakeholders. Consider formal mechanisms to solicit feedback from college students, institutional faculty, high school guidance counselors, parents, and policymakers.
3. Governors and state legislatures should provide general direction and goals related to transfer and articulation but should allow the state higher education executive offices, governing/ coordinating boards, and institutions to collaboratively develop policies and practices to meet specified objectives. It is entirely reasonable for these entities to be held

accountable for implementing policy and accomplishing measurable objectives, assuming sufficient resources of time and money are allocated. Laws and policies should specify such accountability provisions.

4. Legislatures should allocate funds to support the development of articulation and transfer policies and practices if they impose requirements or mandates. It is important that legislators recognize the costs associated with articulation and transfer initiatives.
5. Legislative bodies, state higher education executive offices, and institutions should work together to identify key metrics regarding transfer and articulation in their state. States should identify the data collection mechanisms necessary to track the metrics they choose and should systematically gather the appropriate data.
6. In cases where quantitative data collection is economically or politically impracticable, systematic qualitative analysis should be undertaken. A thorough investigation of stakeholder perceptions and experiences may serve to improve policies and initiatives.

In addition, our research highlighted specific promising practices, organized according to five categories: statewide collaboration, communication of policies, academic policy, use of data, and a catchall category for additional promising practices in articulation and transfer.

Statewide Collaboration

- Develop a statewide, standing committee to focus on multi-institution transfer and articulation.
- Involve faculty in policy development and implementation.



Communication of Policies

- Establish a state-level office or official whose sole or primary purpose is to facilitate a statewide approach to transfer and articulation.
- Designate campus or state-level personnel as contacts for transfer and articulation issues.
- Convene or establish a presence at fairs, summits, conferences, and meetings to communicate with students and their families about transfer and articulation.
- Build a strong presence for articulation and transfer on the Web.
- Include student feedback in articulation and transfer policies and practices.

- Provide funding incentives to institutions that perform well in terms of student transfers.
- Provide alternate pathways to degree completion.

Finally, while it was the primary purpose of this research to contribute to a better understanding of transfer and articulation policy issues, this study surfaced questions in addition to answers, as is often the case. Appendix B (research recommendations) briefly describes questions for possible consideration in future research.

Academic Policy

- Provide clear transfer pathways for community college students who have selected a program major.
- Develop a clear pathway for community college students to meet common general education requirements.
- Implement guaranteed admission policies for community college students who have met all transfer-related benchmarks.

Use of Data

- Evaluate transfer and articulation policies and statutes, as well as transfer students' progress.
- Assess student success through quantitative measures of individual student-level indicators of performance.
- Expand the reporting of results of transfer and articulation and assessment.

Additional Promising Practices

- Publish a transfer student bill of rights to specify the treatment transfer students can expect during their transition.
- Establish financial assistance programs that actively support student transfers from two- to four-year institutions.



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APPENDIX A. RESEARCH METHODS

TERMINOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

In general this study defined as “statewide” any policy or agreement with statewide application, whether or not there was statewide intent by policymakers. Alaska, for example, has one system of public higher education, which governs all public institutions in the state, so system policies were considered statewide on a de facto basis.

Initial versions of data collection tools used in this study applied this terminology; but in order to enable the widest participation by states and gather the most information, study participants were not provided with definitions of “transfer,” “transfer student,” or “articulation agreement,” nor were state respondents asked to provide their definitions of these terms.

The use of the term “system” proved problematic for some state contacts, who hesitated about participating in this study because their state did not have a “system.” Given the aim of being as inclusive as possible, the research team decided to change the wording in the interview protocol and surveys to “statewide approaches to transfer and articulation.”

COLLECTION OF SECONDARY DATA

The focus of this research was limited to statewide transfer and articulation from public two- to four-year institutions. Policies and practices that were systemwide or between institutions but not truly statewide were not considered for this study (except in cases where they represented de facto statewide policies). Other transfer-related topics, such as transfer between four-year institutions, transfer to or from private institutions, or interstate transfer, were also beyond the scope of this research.

A review of relevant scholarly research literature was conducted at the outset of this project

and published in February 2009. In this review particular attention was paid to previous state-by-state studies of transfer and articulation, especially the seminal work of Jan Ignash and Barbara Townsend, published in 2000. Based on this work and the other reviewed literature, a list of generally recommended components of statewide transfer and articulation systems was compiled. This list contributed substantially to the design of data collection instruments (discussed below) and informed the selection of practices highlighted as “promising” in this guide.

In the course of this study, the research team also referred to the following databases of states’ transfer and articulation policies or Websites: the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers’ “Transfer and State Articulation Websites” (2008); the Education Commission of the States’ “Transfer and Articulation Policies” (2001) and Postsecondary Governance Structures Database (2007); the National Articulation and Transfer Network’s *State Policies and Guidelines on Articulation and Transfer* (2007); the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems’ *State Policies on Student Transitions: Results of a Fifty-State Inventory* (2008); the Southern Regional Education Board’s *Clearing Paths to College Degrees: Transfer Policies in SREB States* (2007), and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education’s State Policy Issues Database Online (2007).

Information on policy documents, legislation, and practices related to articulation and transfer was also obtained through reviews of various state Websites, including those of the legislature and other relevant state offices, as well of separate systems of public higher education, where available.

COLLECTION OF PRIMARY DATA

A list of desirable information pertaining to transfer and articulation was developed as a framework for this research. The framework was used to develop an interview protocol (Appendix C) and three survey instruments. These



instruments are provided in Appendices D, E, and F.

Interview Participants

To obtain an overview of each state's approach to transfer and articulation, the research team compiled a list of state higher education officials. An introductory email was sent in early March 2009 to these individuals, announcing the study and requesting a short interview. When necessary, a series of follow-up emails and phone calls were made to secure an appointment for an interview. Between mid-March and late May 2009, the researchers were able to interview at least one individual in every state, except Michigan and New York.

Not all states have a statewide higher education agency. Therefore, not all of the interviewees were state higher education academic officers. In states where a system was selected as a de facto statewide entity, researchers invited a senior academic official within the system to be interviewed.

In some states the request for an interview was forwarded by the initial point of contact to another staff person in the statewide agency or additional individuals were invited to be present for the interview. In states without contact information, the respondent to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) survey (mentioned earlier) or officials listed on a state agency Website served as a contact generator for the study.

Given the subject of this research, in those states with a separate organizing structure for the community college system or some indication of difference of opinion between the two- and four-year sectors of public higher education, every effort was made to contact and interview a high-level official from the community college system as well as someone from the state agency.

Interview Protocol

Items from the study's framework (mentioned earlier) were selected for the protocol. It was

decided that the protocol should be a tool to collect broad background information and anecdotes on policy development rather than detailed operational/factual information. Many of the questions were exploratory, relying on the participants to be familiar with transfer and articulation and to be as descriptive as possible. In early March 2009, the designed protocol was tested in an interview with a higher education official familiar with Hezel Associates. The protocol was subsequently edited for length and content.

Survey Participants

At the conclusion of the initial interview, the interviewee was asked to name individuals with detailed knowledge on statewide practices/policies in the administrative, evaluation, and communication areas (see below for description of survey content) to whom surveys developed for this study could be sent. In some cases interviewees selected themselves as survey respondents. If interviewees indicated that their state did not have a statewide approach to transfer and articulation, no surveys were sent.

Interviewees sometimes suggested that surveys be sent to institutional representatives who served in some statewide articulation and transfer capacity, such as committee membership. Surveys were sent to those individuals, unless they had no statewide knowledge. For example, since all Alaska referrals were to institutional admissions officers at all three public universities, each would have provided institutional information. Therefore, no surveys were distributed for Alaska.

Surveys were sent by email in April and May 2009. Respondents were instructed to type their answers directly into the documents and return them to the researchers. Multiple attempts were made via email and phone to collect the surveys. Completed surveys were returned from mid-May through the end of June 2009. Though interviews were conducted with 48 out of 50 states, the rate of survey completion was lower (see below). When possible, Internet research substituted for missing participant data.



Survey Instruments

The administration and components survey (hereafter called the administrative survey) asked questions about typical academic components of articulation and transfer policies and the student and institutional populations included in the state's articulation and transfer policies or agreements.

The assessment and data survey (hereafter called the evaluation survey) asked questions about the state's evaluation of its approach to articulation and transfer, including the results for specific metrics, and about the reporting of those findings.

The communication and dissemination survey (hereafter called the communication survey) asked questions about how the state advertised or disseminated information on articulation and transfer to and among various stakeholder groups.

In total, 31 administrative surveys, 34 communication surveys, and 30 evaluation surveys were returned, including those from two states that did not return surveys until the member check process – described below – was implemented. This produced response rates of 62 percent, 68 percent, and 60 percent, respectively.

The Member Check Process

Following completion of the initial data collection activities, the information gathered was used to produce a summary document for each state, called a state profile. This document was sent to each individual (or “member”) who participated in an interview or completed a survey, along with an email explaining the purpose of the process: to verify the accuracy of facts and inferences described in the document. In some cases interview or survey respondents were no longer employed in the same position and could not be reached. There were instances when the person providing the member check was not the original source of the information. Members were given an opportunity to provide other feedback on the content of the summary but were advised that the researchers reserved the right to decide whether or not to include such comments. State profiles were revised accordingly. In total, 15 of the 48

states afforded the option of the member check process did not complete the process. New York and Michigan were not afforded this opportunity because there was no response to requests for interviews.

DATA ANALYSIS

Information gathered from the primary and secondary sources discussed above was analyzed and used to generate a profile of each state's approach to transfer and articulation. Each state profile was revised following the member check process.

The 18 promising practices highlighted in this guide are organized thematically into five areas: collaboration; communication; academic policy; assessment and data; and additional promising practices. Within each of the five thematic areas are several promising practices, with individual state practices highlighted as examples. There are a total of 17 promising practices across the five thematic areas:

- Collaboration: Statewide committees and faculty involvement.
- Communication: State-level transfer and articulation office/official; professional transfer associations/personnel; transfer fairs/summits/conferences/meetings; electronic communication tools; and practices that encourage or include student feedback.
- Academic policy: Statewide articulation agreements dealing with program major transfer; general education core requirements; and guaranteed admissions policies.
- Assessment and data: Assessment initiatives; student unit records; and assessment reporting.
- Additional promising practices: Transfer student bill of rights; statewide principles for transfer; transfer student scholarships; institutional funding for transfer-related performance; and retroactive degree completion initiatives.



Only a few states collected or supplied relevant assessment data on their statewide transfer and articulation policies or practices. Therefore, researchers were not able to base their selection of the promising practices or the state examples on this type of data. Nor did the researchers base selections solely on a practice's popularity, reasoning that frequency of use is not in and of itself evidence of effectiveness. Rather, the identification of promising practices was inspired by the literature – particularly the work of Ignash and Townsend, who identified themes such as cross-sector equality, faculty involvement, program major articulation, and the importance of evaluation as core principles of successful approaches to articulation and transfer.

Highlighted examples also include policies and practices that may have a positive impact on student transfer and degree completion or were otherwise noteworthy. In the absence of objective data, examples from particular states were chosen in order to illustrate interesting variations within the practice and to highlight notable examples. It was necessary to apply a degree of subjectivity to the selection of practices and examples for this guide, and while the promising practices contained herein cover a broad range, this should by no means be considered an exhaustive or determinative list.



APPENDIX B. RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of this study was on statewide transfer and articulation policies and practices from public two- to four-year sectors. Two- to four-year transfer represents only one way in which students transfer, however: four-year to four-year and four-year to two-year transfer patterns are also common. In several states a substantial number of students transfer among the private and for-profit sectors of postsecondary education.

In addition, there are regional higher education compacts that include policies related to transfer and articulation. These policies attempt to stem the flow of students outside of their geographic regions. Given this, it would be interesting to conduct research on the issue of transfer and articulation that encompasses a much broader scope than was examined by this study.

The research team encountered a dearth of relevant, aggregated data on student and institutional performance related to transfer and articulation. Beyond that – and in more than a few states – differences were found in the views of those from the two- and four-year sectors of public higher education on the effectiveness of statewide policy. Research that compares and contrasts those differences might prove interesting and helpful for state policymakers and higher education officials in their policy assessment and implementation activities. One particular example involves two potentially contradictory policies: one guaranteeing admission for transfer students and another imposing enrollment caps for some popular program majors at four-year institutions.

It may also be edifying to explore further the impact that various types of institutions have on statewide transfer and articulation policies. The role of flagship institutions often appears to be disproportionate to that of other institutions. Additionally, relationships among institutions, both within and outside of structured systems (depending on the higher education landscape in a given state), may contribute to the adoption of statewide transfer policies. This study did not

substantially illuminate this issue, so further research is warranted.

Another promising area for research would be relationships between the governance structure of a state and the evolution of its approach to transfer and articulation. While one size does not fit all in higher education, statewide policy might serve to limit flexibility or may neglect organizational or other differences that allow institutions to tailor their programs to specific groups of learners. As a means of furthering the collective understanding of the issue of transfer and articulation, it may be helpful to identify and explore possible correlations among political structures, policy and practices, and educational products.

Research into how statewide policies are operationalized in day-to-day application may also be appropriate. The perspectives of advisors, admission counselors, faculty, student services staff, and students are all absent from this study, and each group of stakeholders may have a different view of – or intention for – any given policy or practice. Research that bridges gaps between policy implementation, daily professional practice, and student experience may assist in pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses of various practices and serve to bolster effective policies.



APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - SHEEO/SHEAO

STATE:

DATE:

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE:

TITLE & DEPARTMENT:

ORGANIZATION:

PHONE:

EMAIL:

INTERVIEWER NAME:

A. BACKGROUND AND POLICY

1. I know from researching the website(s) of your state [and name of higher education governing or coordinating entity, if appropriate] that your state has [the title(s) and number(s) of relevant legislation, policy(ies), regulation(s), executive order(s), mandate(s) or agreements]. Is that correct?
2. Where did your state's approach to Articulation & Transfer begin, in your view?
3. What recent events, if any, have impacted your state's approach to Articulation & Transfer?
4. Who has overall authority/oversight for your state's A&T approach? (BoR, legislature, some other entity/committee) If some other entity/committee, to whom does this body ultimately report?

B. EVALUATION

5. In your view, does your state's approach work?
6. What are the three main practices or features of your state's approach that contribute the most to making it work?
7. What, in your view, is missing from your state's Articulation & Transfer approach?

C. WRAP UP

8. Who else do you recommend contacting regarding your state's approach to transfer and articulation? We would like to gather more detail in the areas of system administration, evaluation and communication. Would you give us the contact information for these individuals?

Thank you for your time! I'll send you a summary of my notes on this conversation in a few days for your review. Meanwhile, if you have questions about this project, please feel free to contact me at:



APPENDIX D. ADMINISTRATION SURVEY



STATEWIDE TRANSFER AND ARTICULATION

Survey on Administration and Components

STATE:

DATE:

RESPONDENT NAME:

TITLE AND DEPARTMENT:

ORGANIZATION:

PHONE:

EMAIL:

Survey Instructions: For multiple-choice and Yes/No questions, please **bold** your selected answer(s). For other questions, please type and save your answers directly into this document.

A. TRAINING

1. What initial and ongoing training is provided to the following
 - a) Advisors
 - b) Faculty
 - c) College officials and administrators
 - d) State officials and administrators
 - e) Others

2. What percentage of each of these groups do you estimate have been trained?
 - a) Advisors
 - b) Faculty
 - c) College officials and administrators
 - d) State officials and administrators
 - e) Others

B. COMPONENTS

- 1) If there is a general education common core:
 - a) Are there goals associated with the GE core? If so, what are they?

- 2) If there is a common course numbering:
 - a) Are there goals associated with the CCN? If so, what are they?

- 3) If there are common course descriptions:
 - a) Are there goals associated with them? If so, what are they?
- 4) Are there any other common components in the state? (i.e. common course catalog, common transcripts, etc)
 - a) If so, please list them and the goals associated with them:



STATEWIDE TRANSFER AND ARTICULATION

Survey on Administration and Components

- 5) If there are both common course descriptions and a common course numbering:
 - a) How do the common course descriptions and common course numbering components differ?
 - b) Why does your state include both?
- 6) Are there statewide major specific articulation agreements? YES/NO
 - a) Approximately what percent of majors are articulated statewide?
- 7) How are course equivalencies developed?
- 8) Are credits transferred as a block? YES/NO
 - a) If so, which credits? (GE, major requirements, all, etc)
- 9) Are there transfer associate's degrees? YES/NO
 - a) What are they called?
- 10) Are there provisions for the articulation of technical associate's degree programs with baccalaureate programs? YES/NO
- 11) How are transcripts reviewed for transfer students?
- 12) Is there an online portal for transfer information? YES/NO
 - a) If yes, website:

C. PARTICIPATION

- 13) What students are included in the articulation and transfer approach (Please **bold** all answers that apply)
 - a) HS students
 - b) Vo tech students
 - c) CC students
 - d) 4 - year students
 - e) Certificate completers
 - f) Associate degree holders
 - g) Other (dual credit, concurrent enrollment)
- 14) What responsibilities do students have?
 - a) Do they have advocates when necessary? YES/NO
 - b) Who are these advocates?



STATEWIDE TRANSFER AND ARTICULATION

Survey on Administration and Components

- c) Are students responsible for instigating appeals? YES/NO
 - i) Please explain as necessary:

- 15) Does your state provide financial incentives to encourage community college students to transfer to 4-year institutions? YES/NO

- 16) What institutions are included? (Please **bold** all answers that apply)
 - a) public 2-year colleges
 - b) public 4-year colleges
 - c) private 2-year colleges
 - d) private 4-year colleges
 - e) private for profit institutions
 - f) private non-profit institutions
 - g) regionally-accredited postsecondary institutions
 - h) nationally-accredited postsecondary institutions
 - i) out of state institutions, please describe:

- 17) Does your state provide incentives and consequences to institutions that comply with statewide agreements? YES/NO
 - a) If so, what are those incentives and consequences?

- 18) Is participation by publicly-funded institutions mandatory? YES/NO

- 19) Is participation by private institutions voluntary? YES/NO
 - a) Approximately what percentage of the private institutions in your state participate:
 - i) For Profit?
 - ii) Non Profit?
 - b) What, if any, are the incentives for them to participate?
 - i) For Profit?
 - ii) Non Profit?

Thank you for your time!

Please send your completed survey to: Meegan Cox meegan.cox@hezel.com
If you have questions about this survey, please contact Meegan Cox 440-942-6706



APPENDIX E. COMMUNICATION SURVEY



STATEWIDE TRANSFER AND ARTICULATION Survey on Communication and Dissemination

STATE:

DATE:

RESPONDENT NAME:

TITLE AND DEPARTMENT:

ORGANIZATION:

PHONE:

EMAIL:

Survey Instructions: For multiple-choice and Yes/No questions, please **bold** your selected answer(s). For other questions, please type and save your answers directly into this document.

1. Is there an advertising campaign to promote higher education, degree attainment, and the link to regional, state, and national economic and civil success? **YES/NO**
2. What information on transfer and articulation is provided to high school counselors and high school students and parents?
 - a. How is it presented?
3. What information on transfer and articulation is provided to community college students?
 - a. How is it presented?
4. What information on transfer and articulation is provided to community college advisors?
 - a. How is it presented?
5. Is there a central website with information related to transfer and articulation? **YES/NO**
 - a. If so, what is the site address?
6. How successful have the various advertising campaigns been?
 - a. How has success been measured?
 - b. Who measured the success of the campaigns?

Thank you for your time!

Please send your completed survey to: Meegan Cox meegan.cox@hezel.com
If you have questions about this survey, please contact Meegan Cox 440-942-6706



APPENDIX F. EVALUATION SURVEY



STATEWIDE TRANSFER AND ARTICULATION

Survey on Assessment, Evaluation, and Data

STATE:

DATE:

RESPONDENT NAME:

TITLE AND DEPARTMENT:

ORGANIZATION:

PHONE:

EMAIL:

Survey Instructions: For multiple-choice and Yes/No questions, please **bold** your selected answer(s). For other questions, please type and save your answers directly into this document.

1. Has there been any assessment of transfer and articulation? YES/NO
 - a. Is such assessment explicitly required? YES/NO
 - b. What are the main objectives of the evaluation (Is it summative or formative)?
 - c. What is the framework for the evaluation/assessment?
 - i. Is it based on literature and research in the field? YES/NO
 - ii. Is it politically driven? YES/NO
 - iii. Is it economically driven? YES/NO
 - d. Has any benchmarking with other states' policies been done? YES/NO
 - i. Which state(s) were used?
 - ii. How is benchmarking information used in assessment?
2. What are the elements of the evaluation? (e.g. student course evaluation, student learning outcome assessment, transfer and completion rates using federal funding formulas, annual institutional reports, etc.)
3. For each of the metrics listed below that you track, please indicate your findings.
 - a. Transfer rates:



STATEWIDE TRANSFER AND ARTICULATION

Survey on Assessment, Evaluation, and Data

- b. Persistence rates:
 - i. 4-Year Natives:
 - ii. 2-Year Transfers :
 - c. Number of credits to degree:
 - i. 4- Yr. Natives:
 - ii. 2-Yr. Transfers :
 - d. Time to degree:
 - i. 4-Yr. Natives:
 - ii. 2-Yr. Transfers :
 - e. Associate degree completion rates:
 - f. Baccalaureate degree completion rates:
 - i. 4-Yr. Natives:
 - ii. 2-Yr. Transfers:
 - g. Graduating GPA:
 - i. 4-Yr. Natives:
 - ii. 2-Yr. Transfers:
 - h. Users (If measured, also indicate the number of users in each category)
 - i. Students:
 - ii. Advisors:
 - iii. Faculty:
 - iv. Registrars:
 - v. Administrators:
 - vi. Others (Who? How many?):
 - i. Other metrics? Please specify:
4. For each of the metrics mentioned in #3, how are these measured? (Formulas, surveys, interviews, informal means, data from your institutional research office, etc.)
 5. How have the transfer and graduation rates changed over time?
 6. What other data can be shared with us?
 7. How are the data and assessment findings reported?
 - a. Where are they reported?
 - b. How frequently are data collected?
 - c. How frequently are the results analyzed and reported?
 8. Are students asked about their transfer experience? YES/NO
 - a. If so, how?
 9. Has student feedback been considered when making changes? YES/NO
 - a. If so, how?
 - b. What changes were made based on feedback?
 10. Is there a difference in the success of students who transfer within the policies vs. those who transfer outside them? YES/NO



STATEWIDE TRANSFER AND ARTICULATION

Survey on Assessment, Evaluation, and Data

- a. What is the difference?
 - b. How do you know this?
11. Are these stakeholders asked about their perceptions of the transfer and articulation?
- a. Advisors? YES/NO
 - b. Faculty? YES/NO
 - c. College Administrators? YES/NO
 - d. State Officials/Administrators? YES/NO
12. If so, how is their feedback solicited?
13. Has other stakeholder feedback been considered when making changes? YES/NO
- a. If so, please give an example.

Thank you for your time!

Please send your completed survey to: Meegan Cox meegan.cox@hezel.com
If you have questions about this survey, please contact Meegan Cox 440-942-6706

