



## POLICY BRIEF: **Transfer for Student Success**

**Texas taxpayers and students spend nearly \$120 million on excess credits each year.**

### Overview

Community colleges play a vital role in improving educational outcomes for students. With the rising cost of college and increase in number of students enrolling, Texas is relying more heavily on community colleges. Significantly, nearly 80% of Texas students completing bachelor's degrees were previously enrolled in a community college. However, transfers between community colleges and universities are often misaligned and result in wasted credits, excess course-taking, increased cost and time-to-degree, and lower college completion rates. At the same time, increasing college completion rates has become a priority for policymakers and institutions in Texas and nationally. Addressing these transfer issues is critical in ensuring students can achieve their postsecondary goals. With a streamlined transfer system, we can increase college completion rates, reduce time-to-degree, and decrease the cost of degree completion and excess credit hours.<sup>1</sup>

### At-A-Glance

55%

55% (720,000) of Texas public postsecondary students are enrolled in community colleges.

78%

Nearly 80% of Texas students completing bachelor's degrees were previously enrolled in a community college.

80%

80% of community college students intend to transfer.

20%

Only 20% of students actually transfer.

39%

Two out of five students lose all of their credits when transferring.



## Economic Implications

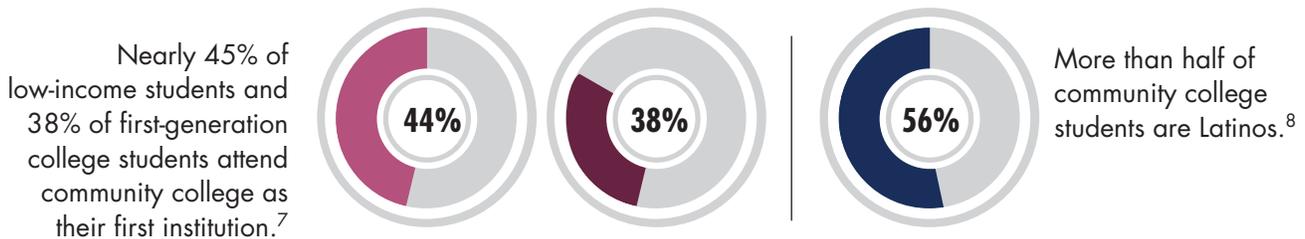
**Texas taxpayers and students bear the burden of an inefficient transfer system. When students are not able to transfer their credits successfully, it results in wasted credits, tuition, and time.** <sup>2</sup>

Texas students completing a bachelor's degree attain nearly 150 credits by the time they graduate, compared to the standard 120 credits required for most majors.<sup>3</sup> These excess credits are partly caused by students taking repeat coursework when universities do not accept their transfer credits.



## National Trends

**Community colleges disproportionately serve low-income, minority, and first-generation college students.** <sup>6</sup>



**Community colleges cater to students at various points in their academic career.**

Students' transfer patterns are becoming more complex as students increasingly attend more than one higher education institution in their academic career. Community colleges enroll students who wish to transfer to a university and also serve as a common destination for transfer students.

- Almost 60% of first-time bachelor's degree graduates attend more than one institution.<sup>9</sup>
- Public community colleges are a common destination, serving nearly half of all students who transfer from a university and 38% of students who transfer from another community college.<sup>10</sup>
- The majority of students who transfer do so in their second year of study, highlighting the need of transferring earned credits.<sup>11</sup>
- One in four students who transfer do so more than once.<sup>12</sup>



**Large numbers of students attend community colleges with the intent to transfer to a university; however, few students transfer and fewer complete their bachelor’s degree.**

- 75% percent of community college students identify transferring to a university as one of their main goals;<sup>13</sup> however only 20% of students do so within five years and only 11% complete a bachelor’s degree within six years.<sup>14</sup>

**Students who earn an associate’s degree at a community college prior to transferring are more likely to attain a bachelor’s degree; yet, few students do so.**

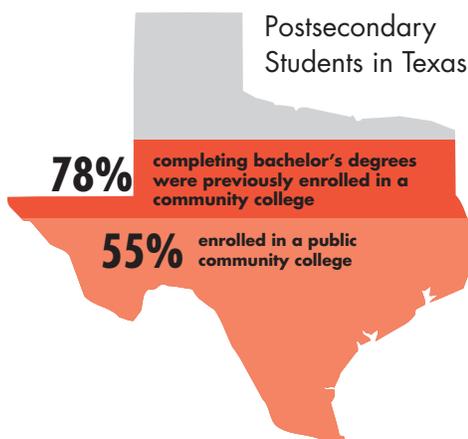
- Nearly two out of three community college students who transfer to universities do so without completing an associate’s degree first, despite the benefits of doing so.<sup>15</sup>
- Students are more likely to complete a bachelor’s degree as they earn more credit hours. This holds true up to 60 credit hours—the equivalent of an associate’s degree—and then tapers off with excess credits.<sup>16</sup>
- Students who transfer after attaining an associate’s degree complete a bachelor’s degree at a higher rate than students who transfer without earning an associate’s degree first—a difference of approximately 16%.<sup>17</sup>

**Students are less likely to complete a bachelor’s degree when their credits do not transfer successfully.**<sup>18</sup>

- About half of students indicate that transfer credit assistance at their community college is very important; however, nearly 40% of students report that they rarely or never use transfer credit assistance at their community college.<sup>19</sup> This can negatively impact the number of credits that transfer.
- Among students who transfer, 39% lose all of their credits, 28% transfer some credits, and only 33% are successful in transferring all of their credits.<sup>20</sup>
- Credit loss negatively affects bachelor’s degree completion rates—82% of students graduated within six years when universities awarded credit for all community college courses compared to 42% of students when universities accepted only some credits.<sup>21</sup>

## Texas Trends

**Public community colleges enroll over half of all Texas undergraduates. However, few students transfer and complete a bachelor’s degree successfully.**



In 2014, about 55% of Texas public postsecondary students were enrolled in a community college.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, 78% of Texas students completing bachelor’s degrees were previously enrolled in a community college, thus highlighting the importance of the transfer function of community colleges.<sup>23</sup>

- Although about 80% of students are enrolled in transfer programs at community colleges, only about 20% of students actually transfer.<sup>24</sup>
- Students who start at a public university complete bachelor’s degrees at higher rates than students who transfer in—a difference of approximately 16%.<sup>25</sup>



# Conclusion

The current transfer system is inefficient and costly for taxpayers and students. Most students attend community college with the intent to transfer to a university. However, students are not transferring successfully, resulting in lower bachelor’s degree completion rates and higher cost of degrees. Texas has various transfer and articulation policies in place. Raising awareness and increasing the use of the policies already in place is a beneficial first step in creating seamless transfer pathways that allow students to successfully transfer and complete a degree. For more information on Texas transfer and articulation policies, see Appendix A. Recommendations for reducing the inefficiencies in the transfer system include:

- Enhanced advising around credit transfer;
- Stronger ISD, community college, and university regional partnerships;
- Requiring all community colleges and universities to fully adopt and list courses according to the Texas Common Course Numbering System;
- Encouraging early college/dual credit students to complete the 42-hour Texas core curriculum; and
- Requiring universities annually to certify the number (and which) field of study curriculum (FOSC) or 42 hour Texas core classes are not applied to students’ course of study upon transfer.<sup>26</sup>

Transfer and Articulation Policies	Description
<b>Texas Core Curriculum</b>	19 TAC 4.28-4.31 (2011) – Requires Texas public higher education institutions to adopt a core curriculum of 42 lower-division semester credit hours that, once completed, may be transferred to any other Texas public higher education institution and must be substituted for the receiving institution’s core curriculum. <sup>27</sup>
<b>Field of Study Curriculum</b>	19 TAC 4.32 (2011) – Allows students who successfully complete a Coordinating Board-approved field of study curriculum to transfer the block of courses to a Texas public higher education institution, at which time the courses must be substituted for that institution’s lower-division requirements for the degree program for the field of study into which the student transfers, and students receive full academic credit toward the degree program for the block of courses transferred. <sup>28</sup>  FOSC are available in the following fields: business, communication, computer science, engineering, engineering technology, Mexican-American studies, music, and nursing. <sup>29</sup>
<b>Reverse Transfer</b>	HB 3025 (2011), SB 498 (amended 2013) – Allows students who transferred from a community college to be awarded an associate’s degree if they earned at least 30 credit hours at the community college and earned a cumulative total of 66 credit hours to date (changed from 90 credits in 2011). <sup>30</sup>
<b>Voluntary Transfer Compacts</b>	19 TAC 9.1, 9.185 (2011) – Statewide articulation agreements between community colleges and universities that facilitate the transfer of courses that apply toward earning a bachelor’s degree in a specific discipline; it also permits public community colleges to award an academic certificate to students who complete 50% of the curriculum specified in a voluntary transfer compact. <sup>31</sup>
<b>Texas Common Course Numbering System</b>	Voluntary, co-operative effort among Texas community colleges and universities to facilitate transfer of lower-level general academic coursework. <sup>32</sup>
<b>Other initiatives</b>	HB 2999 (2011) – Authorizes a Texas public higher education institution to develop a fixed tuition rate program for certain students who transfer to a public university within twelve months of completing an associate’s degree. <sup>33</sup>

## Appendix A. Texas Transfer and Articulation Policies



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Southern Regional Education Board (2013); Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (2010).
- <sup>2</sup> Altstadt, Schmidt, & Couturier (2014).
- <sup>3</sup> Complete College America (2013).
- <sup>4</sup> Complete College America (2013).
- <sup>5</sup> Cullinane (2014).
- <sup>6</sup> Altstadt, Schmidt, & Couturier (2014); American Association of Community Colleges (2014); National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2011); Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2013); Wellman (2002).
- <sup>7</sup> National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2011).
- <sup>8</sup> American Association of Community Colleges (2014).
- <sup>9</sup> Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (2010).
- <sup>10</sup> Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin, Chen, Zerquera, & Torres (2012).
- <sup>11</sup> Hossler et al. (2012).
- <sup>12</sup> Hossler et al. (2012).
- <sup>13</sup> Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014).
- <sup>14</sup> Horn & Skomsvold (2011).
- <sup>15</sup> Hossler et al. (2012).
- <sup>16</sup> Belfield (2013).
- <sup>17</sup> Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin, Chiang, Chen, Torres, & Harrell (2013).
- <sup>18</sup> National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2011); Monaghan & Attewell (2014).
- <sup>19</sup> Simone (2014).
- <sup>20</sup> Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014).
- <sup>21</sup> Doyle (2006).
- <sup>22</sup> Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2014a).
- <sup>23</sup> National Student Clearinghouse (2012).
- <sup>24</sup> Jenkins (2013).
- <sup>25</sup> Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2013).
- <sup>26</sup> Greater Texas Foundation (2014).
- <sup>27</sup> Texas Administrative Code (2014a).
- <sup>28</sup> Texas Administrative Code (2014b).
- <sup>29</sup> Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2014b).
- <sup>30</sup> House Bill 3025 (2011); Senate Bill 498 (2013).
- <sup>31</sup> Texas Administrative Code (2014c).
- <sup>32</sup> Texas Common Course Numbering System (2014).
- <sup>33</sup> House Bill 2999 (2011).

## References

- Altstadt, D., Schmidt, G., & Couturier, L. K. (2014). Driving the direction of transfer pathways reform. Jobs for the Future. Retrieved from: <http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/publications/materials/Driving-the-Direction-Pathways-Reform-042414.pdf>.
- American Association of Community Colleges (2014). 2014 Fact Sheet. Retrieved from: [http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Documents/Facts14\\_Data\\_R3.pdf](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Documents/Facts14_Data_R3.pdf).
- Belfield, C. (2013). The economic benefits of attaining an associate degree before transfer: Evidence from North Carolina. Community College Research Center. Retrieved from: <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/economic-benefits-associate-degree-before-transfer.pdf>.
- Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014). *Community College Survey of Student Engagement: 2014 frequency distributions*. File provided by author on 5/27/15.
- Complete College America (2013). *Complete College Texas*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from: <http://completecollege.org/docs/CCT-low-res.pdf>.
- Cullinane, J. (2014). *Transfer and credit loss in Texas*. PowerPoint presentation presented at The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.
- Doyle, W. R. (2006). Community college transfers and college graduation: whose choices matter most?. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 38(3), 56-58.
- Greater Texas Foundation (2014). *Minimizing Student Debt through Dual Credit and Early College*. PowerPoint presentation presented at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Strategic Planning Committee, Austin, TX.
- Horn, L., & Skomsvold, P. (2011). Community college student outcomes: 1994-2009. USD: NCES 2012-253. Retrieved from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012253.pdf>.
- Hossler, D., Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Ziskin, M., Chen, J., Zerquera, D., & Torres, V. (2012, February). *Transfer and mobility: A national view of pre-degree student movement in postsecondary institutions* (Signature Report No. 2). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.
- House Bill 2999 (2011). Retrieved from: <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/82R/billtext/html/HB02999F.HTM>.
- House Bill 3025 (2011). Retrieved from: <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/82R/billtext/html/HB03025F.htm>.
- Jenkins, D. (2013). Policy brief: Texas would benefit by improving its community college to bachelor's transfer system. Community College Research Center. Retrieved from: [http://www.edtx.org/uploads/general/EDTX\\_CCRTPolicyBrief.pdf](http://www.edtx.org/uploads/general/EDTX_CCRTPolicyBrief.pdf).
- Monaghan, D. B., & Attewell, P. (2014). The Community College Route to the Bachelor's Degree. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 0162373714521865.
- National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2011). Affordability and transfer: Critical to increasing baccalaureate degree completion. San Jose, CA: Author. Retrieved from: [http://www.highereducation.org/reports/pa\\_at/PolicyAlert\\_06-2011.pdf](http://www.highereducation.org/reports/pa_at/PolicyAlert_06-2011.pdf).



National Student Clearinghouse (2012). Snapshot report – Mobility. Retrieved from: <http://nscresearchcenter.org/snapshotreport-mobility2/#prettyPhoto>.

Senate Bill 498 (2013). Retrieved from: <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/83R/billtext/html/SB00498F.HTM>.

Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Ziskin, M., Chiang, Y. Chen, J., Torres, V., & Harrell, A. (2013, August). *Baccalaureate Attainment: A National View of the Postsecondary Outcomes of Students Who Transfer from Two-Year to Four-Year Institutions* (Signature Report No. 5). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Simone, S.A. (2014). *Transferability of Postsecondary Credit Following Student Transfer or Coenrollment* (NCES 2014-163). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.

Southern Regional Education Board (2013). Statewide transfer policies. Retrieved from: [http://publications.sreb.org/2013/013\\_Ess\\_Elem\\_State\\_Tran.pdf](http://publications.sreb.org/2013/013_Ess_Elem_State_Tran.pdf).

Texas Administrative Code (2014a). 19 TAC 4.28, 29, 30, 31. Retrieved from: [http://info.sos.state.tx.us/pls/pub/readtac\\$ext.ViewTAC?tac\\_view=5&ti=19&pt=1&ch=4&sch=B&rl=Y](http://info.sos.state.tx.us/pls/pub/readtac$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=5&ti=19&pt=1&ch=4&sch=B&rl=Y).

Texas Administrative Code (2014b). 19 TAC 4.32. Retrieved from: [http://info.sos.state.tx.us/pls/pub/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p\\_dir=&p\\_rloc=&p\\_tloc=&p\\_ploc=&pg=1&p\\_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=4&rl=32](http://info.sos.state.tx.us/pls/pub/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=4&rl=32).

Texas Administrative Code (2014c). 19 TAC 9.1, 9.185. Retrieved from: [http://info.sos.state.tx.us/pls/pub/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p\\_dir=&p\\_rloc=&p\\_tloc=&p\\_ploc=&pg=1&p\\_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=9&rl=1](http://info.sos.state.tx.us/pls/pub/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=9&rl=1); [http://info.sos.state.tx.us/pls/pub/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p\\_dir=&p\\_rloc=&p\\_tloc=&p\\_ploc=&pg=1&p\\_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=9&rl=185](http://info.sos.state.tx.us/pls/pub/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=9&rl=185).

Texas Common Course Numbering System (2014). Retrieved from: <http://www.tccns.org/>.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2013). The community college transfer student report. Retrieved from: <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/pdf/3254.pdf?CFID=18540647&CFTOKEN=29396480>.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2014a). 2014 Texas public higher education almanac: A profile of state and institutional performance and characteristics.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2014b). Improving transfer to increase student success. Retrieved from: <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us>.

Wellman, J. (2002). State policy and community college-baccalaureate transfer. National Center Report #02-6.

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (2010). Promising practices in statewide articulation and transfer systems. Retrieved from: <http://www.wiche.edu/info/publications/PromisingPracticesGuide.pdf>.