

Implications of Texas Transfer Policies for Community College Transfer Success

Today, one third of all current college enrollees attend community colleges (NCES, 2014). In Texas, that number is even larger: 40 percent of students start at a community college and 75 percent of all Texas public college students take some community college credits (THECB, 2014). While community colleges increase access among populations who might otherwise not attend college, sociological research suggests that they also maintain inequality due to low rates of transfer to baccalaureate-granting institutions (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011; Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2015). At the same time, with the correct policy levers, community colleges may provide the stepping-stone to a bachelor's degree that advocates envision. This study examines the extent to which current transfer policies in Texas higher education align with that vision.

Texas includes a number of initiatives to improve success among transfer students, some which are required by law, including the core curriculum and field of study (FOS) curriculum, while others, like transfer agreements, are "encouraged, but not required" (THECB, 2014). This project takes a closer look at mandated and recommended transfer policies in Texas to examine the impact on vertical transfer to a four-year college, time to degree, credit accumulation, degree attainment, and college costs for community college entrants. Using detailed administrative data combined with institution- and program-specific information on core and FOS courses and transfer agreements, I will track student coursework and progress across different institutions and programs.

Strengthening transfer pathways between community colleges and regional universities is a strategy with the potential to increase postsecondary attainment among low-income students while minimizing the cost to students and taxpayers (Jenkins, Kadlec, & Votruba, 2014). This study will pinpoint institutions and programs where policy is not functioning to its potential (for instance, colleges are not making use of the core or FOS curricula). The results have the potential to inform local policy discussion, delving into the effects of existing policies. It also will make an important contribution to the literature on the effects of community colleges, particularly arguments about their diversionary effects on student educational aspirations, as it captures the role that larger-loomed policy and policy implementation play in diverting students from bachelor's degree attainment. Without clear channels to and through destination colleges, community college students face an uphill climb toward a bachelor's degree.

References:

- Bastedo, M., & Jaquette, O. (2011). Running in place: Low-income students and the dynamics of higher education stratification. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 33*, 318-339.
- Jenkins, D., Kadlec, A., & Votruba, J. (2014). *Maximizing Resources for Student Success: The Business Case for Regional Public Universities to Strengthen Community College Transfer Pathways*. Washington, DC: HCM Strategists.
- NCES. (2014). *Profile of Undergraduate Students: 2011-2012*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Schudde, L., & Goldrick-Rab, S. (2015). On second chances and stratification: How sociologists think about community colleges. *Community College Review, 43*(1), 27-45.
- THECB. (2014). *Improving Transfer to Increase Student Success*. Austin, TX: THECB.