



POLICY BRIEF: **Transfer for Student Success**

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

Overview

Many Texas students transfer between institutions as part of their postsecondary experience. Significantly, 75% of Texas students completing bachelor's degrees were previously enrolled in a community college. However, transfers between institutions often 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.¹

At-A-Glance

52%

52% of Texas public postsecondary students are enrolled in community colleges.

75%

75% of Texas students completing bachelor's degrees were previously enrolled in a community college.

72%

72% of Texas community college students are enrolled in an academic program designed to lead to transfer.

35%

Only 35% of Texas community college students actually do transfer.

21%

Nationally, two out of five of all transfer students lose all of their credits when they transfer. For two-year to four-year transfer students, 21% lose all credits.



Economic Implications

Texas taxpayers and students bear the burden of an inefficient transfer system. When students are not able to transfer their credits successfully, credits, tuition, and time are wasted. ²

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.³ These excess credits are partly caused by students taking repeat coursework when universities do not accept their transfer credits.

Texas taxpayers spend nearly \$57 million on excess credits each year.⁴

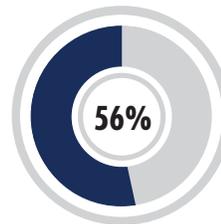
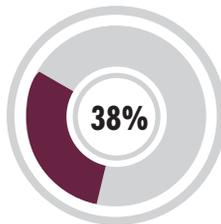
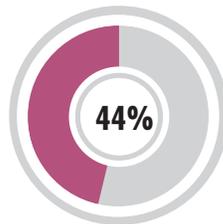


The cost to students is an additional \$58 million each year.⁵

National Trends

Community colleges disproportionately serve low-income, minority, and first-generation college students. ⁶

Nearly 45% of low-income students and 38% of first-generation college students attend community college as their first institution.⁷



More than half of Latino college students are enrolled in a community college.⁸

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.⁹
- Public community colleges are a common destination, serving nearly half of all students who transfer from a university and 39% of students who transfer from another community college.¹⁰
- About 37% of students who transfer do so in their second year of study, highlighting the need of transferring earned credits.¹¹
- More than one-third of students who transfer do so more than once.¹²



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.

- Nationally, 76% of students identify transferring to a university as a primary or secondary goal.¹³ However, only 33% of community college students ultimately transfer to a four-year institution, and only 14% of community college students complete a bachelor’s degree within six years of beginning their postsecondary education.¹⁴

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.

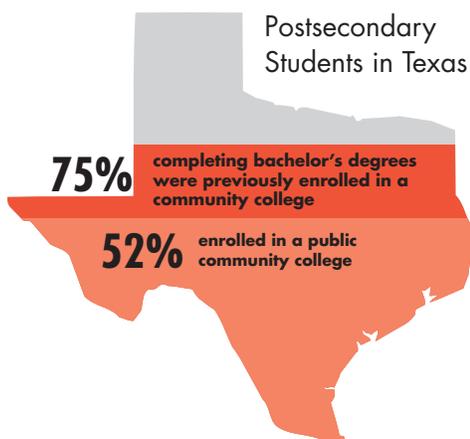
- Nearly seven out of eight community college students who transfer to universities do so without completing an associate’s degree first, despite the benefits of doing so.¹⁵
- Students who transfer after attaining an associate’s degree complete a bachelor’s degree at a higher rate than students who transfer without earning an associate’s degree first—a difference of approximately 16 percentage points.¹⁶

Students are less likely to complete a bachelor’s degree when their credits do not transfer successfully.¹⁷

- More than 38% of students report that they rarely or never use transfer credit assistance at their community college. About 31% report that they rarely or never use academic advising and planning services.¹⁸
- 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. For two-year to four-year transfers, 21% of students lose all their credits. On average, students lose 12.7 semester credit hours when they transfer.¹⁹
- 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.²⁰

Texas Trends

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



In 2016, 52% of Texas postsecondary students were enrolled in a public community college.²¹ 75% 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.²²

- Although 72% of Texas community college students are enrolled in academic programs, which are generally designed to lead to transfer to a four-year institution, only 35% of students actually transfer.²³
- Students who start at a public university complete bachelor’s degrees at higher rates than students who transfer in—a difference of approximately 18 percentage points.²⁴



Conclusion

The current transfer system is inefficient and costly for taxpayers and students. A significant number of Texas students are not transferring successfully, resulting in lower bachelor’s degree completion rates and higher costs. 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 titles of any field of study curriculum (FOSC) or 42 hour Texas core classes that are not applied to students’ course of study upon transfer.²⁵

Transfer and Articulation Policies	Description
Texas Core Curriculum	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. ²⁶
Field of Study Curriculum	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. ²⁷ FOSC are available in the following fields: business, communication, computer science, engineering, engineering technology, Mexican-American studies, music, and nursing. ²⁸
Reverse Transfer	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). ²⁹
Voluntary Transfer Compacts	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. ³⁰
Texas Common Course Numbering System	Voluntary, co-operative effort among Texas community colleges and universities to facilitate transfer of lower-level general academic coursework. ³¹
Other initiatives	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. ³²

Appendix A. Texas Transfer and Articulation Policies



Endnotes

- ¹ Southern Regional Education Board (2013); Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (2010).
- ² Altstadt, Schmidt, & Couturier (2014).
- ³ Complete College America (2013).
- ⁴ Complete College America (2013).
- ⁵ Cullinane (2014). Estimate based on the average number of untransferred credits for Texas students who transferred to a four-year institution after completing 60 credit hours.
- ⁶ 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).
- ⁷ National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2011).
- ⁸ American Association of Community Colleges (2014).
- ⁹ Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (2010).
- ¹⁰ Shapiro et al. (2015).
- ¹¹ Shapiro et al. (2015).
- ¹² Shapiro et al. (2015).
- ¹³ Center for Community College Student Engagement (2016). Percentage reflects community college students in a three-year cohort who indicated that transferring to a four-year institution was either a "Primary goal" or a "Secondary goal" when asked, "Indicate which of the following are your reasons/goals for attending this college." Note that in a special section of the survey administered to a smaller subgroup of students in 2016 only, respondents were asked to select one primary goal. In this case, 38.6% of respondents identified transfer to a four-year institution as their top goal.
- ¹⁴ Jenkins & Fink (2016).
- ¹⁵ Shapiro et al. (2015).
- ¹⁶ Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin, Chiang, Chen, Torres, & Harrell (2013).
- ¹⁷ National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2011); Monaghan & Attewell (2014).
- ¹⁸ Center for Community College Student Engagement (2016).
- ¹⁹ Simone (2014).
- ²⁰ Doyle (2006).
- ²¹ Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2017a).
- ²² National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017).
- ²³ Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2017b); Jenkins & Fink (2016).
- ²⁴ Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2013).
- ²⁵ Greater Texas Foundation (2014).
- ²⁶ Texas Administrative Code (2014a).
- ²⁷ Texas Administrative Code (2014b).
- ²⁸ Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2014).
- ²⁹ House Bill 3025 (2011); Senate Bill 498 (2013).
- ³⁰ Texas Administrative Code (2014c).
- ³¹ Texas Common Course Numbering System (2014).
- ³² House Bill 2999 (2011).

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- 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>.
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