



INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
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CRAFTING A STUDENT-CENTERED TRANSFER PROCESS IN CALIFORNIA: LESSONS FROM OTHER STATES

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Executive Summary

California is Facing a Shortage of College-Educated Workers

The supply of workers with a bachelor's degree will not meet the projected demands due to the retirement of the highly-educated baby boom generation and the reduced migration of college-educated workers into California from other states and countries. Under current trends, by 2025 there will be one million fewer college graduates than are needed in the workforce. This gap could be narrowed by increased college attendance rates, increased transfer rates from community colleges to four-year universities, and increased graduation rates from universities.

Improving Community College Transfer Rates is Key

In California, community colleges play a major role in producing baccalaureate degrees. Under the Master Plan for Higher Education, the vast majority of college students in California begin their college education in a community college. Access to the baccalaureate for these students is provided through the transfer process.

While a large number of university graduates are community college transfers, data on transfer rates show that only a small percentage of students who begin in community colleges successfully transfer. When students do transfer, the process is often inefficient or incomplete. Some students transfer with many units that don't count toward the specific requirements for a bachelor's degree. Others transfer without completing a transfer curriculum, reducing the potential cost-efficiency benefits of completing lower division requirements in the lower-cost community college system. Finally, many students transfer to a four-year university without earning an associate degree, and those who do not graduate are left without any degree.

With budget cuts creating additional barriers to college completion for students and institutions, it is important to improve the transfer process so transfer students will move efficiently along a well-defined transfer pathway.

Complex Transfer Process Poses Hurdles for Students

The decentralized, segmental structure of California higher education and the strong tradition of local faculty autonomy over curriculum have set the framework for transfer policies and made it difficult to engage in comprehensive, state-level planning. The result has been campus-to-campus rather than system-wide course transferability agreements. Faculty at each college and university are responsible for setting each campus's program requirements, which leads to differing lower division major prerequisites, even within the same major within the same system. Each university system emphasizes a different general education pattern, contributing to the complexity of transfer options and requirements that are often confusing to students. With budget cuts and enrollment pressures leading to more crowded and "impacted" majors, community college students can find transfer admission requirements to have changed just when they think they have met them. In short, transfer requirements can present a blurry and moving target for students seeking to transfer. Such a complex process is especially confusing to under-prepared and first-generation students, who predominate in the community colleges. The community colleges do not have a robust network of support services, including an adequate number of counselors and advisors, to help students navigate through the complex transfer process. Recent reform efforts have seen little success and have arguably added more complexity to the transfer process because they have been limited to the traditional paradigm of local agreements rather than statewide patterns.

Lessons from Other States

For this report, transfer processes and structures in the following states were reviewed: Arizona, Florida, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Washington. These states are known for having statewide transfer patterns, for strong community college and public university relationships, or for being innovative with regard to student success. These states confronted similar issues in designing their transfer processes, including:

- Navigating governance issues to determine the appropriate entity for coordinating transfer policy statewide
- Finding the right trade-off between standardization and local autonomy across the state's higher education system
- Integrating lower division major requirements with standard general education curricula
- Deciding at what point transfer students should be expected to declare a major
- Targeting high-demand majors to meet specific workforce needs
- Designing and developing adequate advising tools and services to help students navigate the transfer process.

A review of these states points to several models that could be considered in the development of a more standardized, statewide transfer policy in California.

1. A set of statewide associate degrees designed for transfer in different fields, which would include general education and defined major requirements
2. A set of pathways that consist of a standard statewide general education curriculum combined with specific major lower division requirements, but with no corresponding transfer associate degrees awarded upon completion
3. Statewide general education curriculum for early transfer to a university with lower-division status, in order to take major prerequisites at the receiving university.

Recommendations

California's transfer requirements should be designed first and foremost to help students meet their educational goals efficiently so that California's postsecondary education system can keep the state's economy competitive. Specifically, they should be:

- *Effective* in creating pathways that lead to more community college students transferring to universities and earning bachelor's degrees

- *Efficient* in minimizing the number of unnecessary credits students earn on the path to a degree
- *Transparent* and easy to understand for students, families, and counselors
- *Robust* in accommodating the requirements of multiple major programs
- *Strategic* in targeting majors that meet high-priority state needs
- *Feasible* in balancing stakeholder desires for change with institutional interest in setting standards and requirements for transfer.

Legislation that accomplishes the following would satisfy the above conditions and produce a set of student-centered policies:

- Development at the California Community Colleges (CCC) of associate degrees for transfer that entitle students to admission to a public university and a guaranteed transfer of all degree credits
- Development of standardized general education and major preparation requirements across all segments for a common set of majors to serve as requirements for an associate degree for transfer in that field and transfer into that major, with allowances for minimal variations across institutions.
- A guarantee that students with an associate degree for transfer with major preparation are admitted as juniors, with allowance for the University of California and the California State University to require additional lower division major preparation courses if necessary *after* transfer
- Development of a degree audit system to allow counselors and students to determine how the courses students have completed match up to requirements for degrees/transfer and to allow the CCC to automatically issue associate degrees to students who have completed all requirements
- Authority for the CCC to continue to award non-transfer, terminal associate degrees or applied associate degrees.

California's Higher Education System is Producing Too Few Bachelor's Degrees

Workforce Shortages Pose a Threat to Economic Health

California's economic position among states is declining, as the state's ranking in the share of the population with a bachelor's degree falls steadily with each younger age group (Table 1). A recent series of analyses and reports by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) makes a compelling case that:

- Over the next fifteen years or so, the supply of workers with at least a bachelor's degree will not meet the projected demand in California's economy, due to the retirement of the highly-educated baby boom generation and demographic shifts in the workforce toward groups that have historically low rates of earning college degrees.¹
- The state will not be able to import enough college-educated workers from other states and countries to meet the demand, and must concentrate on producing more graduates among its own population if it hopes to address the shortfall.²
- By 2025, the state will have about one million fewer college graduates than are needed in the workforce under current trends, a gap that could be substantially narrowed through a combination of efforts to (1) increase college attendance rates, (2) increase transfer rates from community colleges to four-year universities, and (3) increase graduation rates at universities.³

Table 1
California is Becoming Less Educated than Other States

Age Group	Rank among States in Share of Population with Bachelor's Degree or Higher
65 and older	4 th
45 to 64	13 th
35 to 44	17 th
25 to 34	25 th

Source: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis (www.higheredinfo.org) based on data from the US Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey

The severe economic downturn that has swept the nation, and hit California particularly hard, may dampen the demand for all workers, including college-educated workers, in the short term. But California's weakening position relative to other states is the key issue that calls for action now and as the economy recovers.

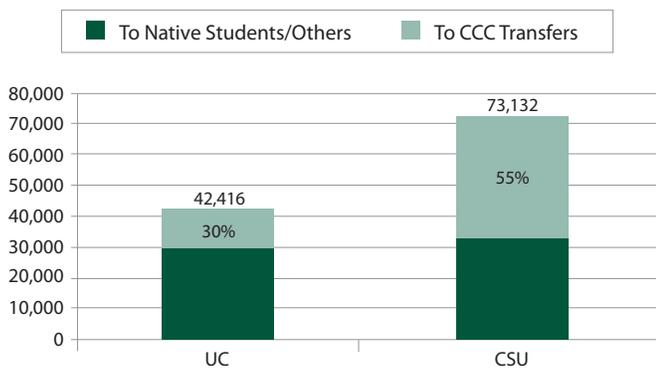
Community College Transfer is Key, but Too Many Students Fail to Transfer

The Obama administration has made it a national priority to recognize and bolster the role that the nation's community colleges play in economic development. Nowhere is this more important than California, because the state's community colleges play a bigger role in producing baccalaureate degrees than is the case in other states where a larger portion of students begin in four-year institutions. Under the California Master Plan for Higher Education, access to the state's public universities is limited to the top one-third of high school graduates, but all students are provided access to baccalaureate education through the California Community Colleges (CCC). The Master Plan specifically guarantees transfer (and priority in admissions) to a four-year public university for community college students who have completed a prescribed plan of study with a satisfactory grade point average.

California's policy commitment to using the community college system as a major access point to the baccalaureate is apparent in the numbers. In 2007-08, nearly 55,000 CCC students transferred to the California State University (CSU) and another 14,000 transferred to the University of California (UC).⁴ In 2008, over half of the bachelor's degrees issued by CSU were awarded to students who had transferred to the system from a community college, and 30 percent of the bachelor's degrees issued by UC were awarded to CCC transfers (Figure 1).

The large portion of UC/CSU graduates who transferred from a community college masks the problem that only a small percentage of students who begin in community college successfully transfer, a problem shared by many other states.⁵ While methods for computing transfer rates vary, several recent studies found rates in the CCC

Figure 1
Bachelor's Degrees Awarded, 2008



Source: California Postsecondary Education Commission, Custom Data Reports, Degrees/Completions—Source Institution, 2008

to be low relative to the number of students that likely enrolled with an intent to transfer. One found that about one-quarter of “transfer-focused” students transferred; another found that among students seeking a college credential, 18 percent transferred; and several others found transfer rates generally ranging between 20 and 30 percent using different assumptions about who should be included in the pool of potential transfer students. The CCC system’s own method for calculating transfer rates, which defines fewer students as seeking transfer than do these other computations, results in a finding that only 40 percent of students intending to transfer actually do so.⁶ Despite the large number of bachelor’s degrees awarded to former CCC students, the data on transfer rates suggest that the transfer process is not working effectively for students.

Where Transfer Does Occur, It is Often Inefficient or Incomplete

The community college transfer process can be an efficient road to the baccalaureate, allowing students to complete lower-division courses at a lower cost to both students and the state. Under ideal circumstances, a student completes 60 semester credits at a community college, including all lower-division general education (GE) requirements and prerequisite courses for a

major, and then completes an additional 60 credits of upper-division coursework at a university for the typical bachelor’s degree requiring a total of 120 credits. However, few CCC students follow this ideal transfer path to the baccalaureate.

Many Transfer Students Graduate from a University with “Excess” Units

A CSU study showed that transfer students graduated with an average of 141 semester units.⁷ The excess units resulted from course-taking actions at both the CCC and CSU campuses. Transfer students often arrived at the CSU with more than the required 60 transferable CCC credits; a separate study found that transfer students earn an average of 75 CCC credits.⁸ The CSU study found that transfers earned an average of 76 credits at the CSU, with some of the extra coursework likely related to units taken at the CCC that did not count toward the degree.⁹ In a UC study, students reported that excess units taken at the CCC before transfer were related to exploring various fields, changing majors, poor advising, and preparing for multiple universities with different admission requirements.¹⁰ Excess units increase the cost of a degree to both students and the state, and limit access because students are taking up seats in courses that could otherwise be filled with additional students.

CCC Students Often Transfer to a University without Completing a Transfer Curriculum

There is reason to believe that published transfer rates overstate actual transfer success. Many students transfer to a university after earning far fewer than 60 units. Our analysis of a cohort of first-time CCC students¹¹ shows that, among students who transferred, nearly half (46%) did so without having completed a transfer curriculum. On average, such students had completed only 31 units upon transfer and one-third of them had completed fewer than 15 units. Most students who transferred without completing a transfer curriculum transferred to in-state private or out-of-state institutions, since UC and CSU have taken few lower-division transfers in recent years. Little is known about the degree outcomes of CCC students who transfer to private universities. It is reasonable to assume that outcomes are good for students transferring to private non-profit universities given the generally high graduation

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rates of students in many of those institutions.¹² However, there is reason for concern about outcomes among the growing numbers of CCC students transferring to for-profit universities, as available data indicate that graduation rates in some of those institutions are quite low.¹³

Some Transfer Students Do Not Complete Any Degree

More than 80 percent of CCC transfers to UC graduate within four years of transfer,¹⁴ and approximately two-thirds of transfers to CSU graduate within six years,¹⁵ a generous period of time for tracking graduation given that students generally enter with two years of credit toward the degree.¹⁶ That leaves a substantial number of transfer students in the public universities who do not ultimately earn a bachelor's degree. Since most CCC transfer students do not earn an associate degree before transferring,¹⁷ students can be left with no college credential despite a major investment in higher education by both the students and the state. More effective transfer pathways to public universities, and awarding the associate degree along the way, would help increase the number of students who earn college degrees.

Budget Cuts Raise Additional Challenges

The severe budget cuts included in the 2009-2010 state budget (and likely beyond) are resulting in sizeable, planned enrollment reductions in all three postsecondary segments. With the state already earning low grades for college participation and degree completion,¹⁸ California's colleges and universities face daunting challenges in striving to address the projected shortages of college-educated Californians. Although the challenge in California may be extreme, most states are in the same position of trying to raise education levels within shrinking budgets. Improving the efficiency of public postsecondary education systems is the only way that this agenda can be accomplished.

The Obama administration, in its focus on economic recovery, has highlighted not only the importance of community colleges, but also the need to improve college completion and efficiency so that states can more often and more quickly reap the benefits of their investments

in higher education. In California, improving the transfer process can contribute greatly to improved efficiency of the entire state postsecondary system. In the short term, with the CCC facing enrollment demand that far exceeds capacity and with UC and CSU likely accepting fewer transfer students, a streamlined transfer process becomes more important than ever: CCC transfer students should move efficiently along a well-defined transfer pathway and they should not be forced to repeat courses, at a university, that they have been told would transfer. Not only would such a process increase college completion rates, but it would free up much-needed space in colleges and universities by reducing unnecessary course enrollments.

Clearly, in the short term there will be tough choices to make if all fully prepared transfer students are to be accommodated at UC and CSU. We offer this analysis of the transfer issue in the expectation that circumstances will improve and that in the longer term the state will be well served by an efficient, student-centered transfer policy that will lead to more college-educated Californians. And in the short term, there is nothing to be gained and much to be lost by assuming that improvements to the transfer process must wait for better budget times.

This policy brief discusses the shortcomings of the current transfer process and explores what several other states have done to attempt to make their transfer processes work better for students. The goal is to draw on these other states' experiences to improve transfer in California. Each legislative session in California brings attempts to improve transfer. It is important that these efforts be informed by the good work that is underway in other states.

We cannot claim authoritatively that these other states produce better results than California does, although we do present some evidence of their effectiveness. There is no accurate way to compare transfer rates across states. The only basis for comparison is the federal reporting system, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), but that system has serious limitations that make the data unhelpful in understanding community college student outcomes.¹⁹ The most

glaring limitation is its inclusion of only first time, full-time students who make up a small portion of the community college enrollment in most states. Furthermore, transfer rates computed and reported by individual states reflect a wide variety of definitions and cannot be meaningfully compared. Nevertheless, we believe there are lessons that can be learned from these other states, particularly since California lawmakers and educators have struggled with the issue of community college transfer for so long and it still remains a complicated and frustrating process for students.

The Transfer Process Is Extremely Complex

Systemic Issues of Governance and Mission Have Shaped Transfer

Several structural characteristics of California's higher education system have established the framework for transfer and have posed real challenges for efforts to design a transfer process that appears seamless from the perspective of the student seeking to transfer.

Decentralization of Higher Education

The complexity of transfer is rooted in the segmental structure of higher education in California and the tradition of institutional autonomy. The fundamental feature of the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education is the formalization of three separate segments of higher education with carefully differentiated missions. While seen at the time, and valuable over the years, as a protection against institutional competition and wasteful duplication, the strict segmental structure has shaped policy and planning for higher education and limited the ability to engage in comprehensive planning on issues like transfer that span across segments.²⁰ Coordination among the three segments is further complicated because the community college system in California is not a true "system" but rather 72 local community college districts (comprising 110 colleges) each with its own governing board and faculty contracts, and considerable variation in curriculum. The transfer process within this decentralized system of higher education is based primarily on campus-to-campus, rather than system-wide, course articulation agreements resulting in complex transfer options and requirements that are confusing to students.

Local Faculty Autonomy over Curriculum

There is a strong tradition of faculty governance and control of academic issues at both the community colleges and the universities in California. The faculty at each college and university expect to set the requirements for each of their programs. For example, faculty at one CSU campus might argue that their undergraduate program in a particular discipline is unique and calls for different lower-division course prerequisites than would be appropriate for the program in that discipline at another CSU. The campus-to-campus articulation agreements for each major pose a significant challenge for CCC students

in understanding the different requirements to transfer to the 23 CSU and 10 UC campuses, particularly for students who enter college without knowing what major they want to pursue and which university campus they want to attend. They also pose a challenge for students whose plans about which university to attend change for personal or professional reasons. There is a natural tension between faculty interest in controlling their institution's academic programs and students' interest in moving efficiently through the process to earn a bachelor's degree. The pressing needs of the state's economy suggest it is time to give additional weight to student interests.

Inadequate Student Support Infrastructure

Success in such a decentralized and complex transfer system is dependent on having either exceptionally savvy and well-prepared students or a robust network of support services to help students navigate the process. Neither of those conditions prevails in the CCC, which is assigned the mission of serving all students regardless of academic preparation, and which receives the lowest per-student support from the state among the three segments. The majority of CCC students are academically underprepared for college and many are the first in their families to attend college, giving them few resources for navigating a complex transfer process. The number of counselors at the CCC is grossly insufficient to help students choose among the complex options, with estimates of the ratio of counselors to students in the CCC as high as one counselor per 1,200 to 1,900 students.²¹ The colleges do not make widespread use of advisors and paraprofessionals who could supplement the services of professional counseling staff.

Navigating the Options is Difficult for Students

The maze of requirements facing a California community college student designing an individual transfer plan is frustratingly difficult to navigate. In order to ensure that the courses they take will transfer, students must identify early in their community college career the specific university and major in which they want to enroll, because the individual articulation agreements vary substantially across universities, even for the same major. By the time they identify a major and a university, many students

find they have taken courses that will not meet a specific requirement at that particular university. They end up having to take more courses than they need and want, extending the time to transfer, increasing their own educational costs, and reducing efficiency of the state’s postsecondary system. And, given the growing number of majors and campuses in the university systems that are considered “impacted” for purposes of admission,²² CCC students can find that just when they think they have met the requirements for transfer to a particular program, those requirements are changed so that additional courses or a higher grade point average are required. In short, transfer requirements can present a blurry and moving target.

Students face navigation complexities of two kinds: meeting general education requirements (about 39 units) for transfer and satisfying the lower division requirements for a specific major with the remainder of the 60 units.

Complexities in General Education Requirements

Each university system has its own general education pattern. The Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) is primarily used by UC, although it is also accepted by the CSU. The CSU-breadth pattern, while similar, contains some important differences. CSU Breadth is generally recommended for students who are certain they want to attend a CSU. Students who are not sure if they are CSU or UC bound are generally advised to follow IGETC. These two patterns are not the only options, with some major programs at UC and CSU recommending different GE patterns, especially those that require extensive lower-division major preparation (e.g., science and engineering programs). Table 2 shows the course patterns for IGETC and CSU-breadth, with the differences between them indicated in italics.

Table 2
Comparison of IGETC and CSU-Breadth Requirements

	UC IGETC	CSU-Breadth
English Communications	One course in English composition	One course in English composition
Critical Thinking	<i>Second composition course emphasizing critical thinking</i>	<i>Stand-alone course in critical thinking</i>
Oral Communications	<i>Not required</i>	<i>One course required</i>
Mathematical Concepts/ Quantitative Reasoning	One course required	One course required
Arts and Humanities	Three courses, at least one in arts and one in humanities	Three courses, at least one in arts and one in humanities
Social and Behavioral Sciences	Three courses from at least two disciplines	Three courses from at least two disciplines
Physical and Biological Sciences	Two courses, one in each area	Two courses, one in each area
American Institutions	<i>Not required</i>	<i>One course in U.S. history and one course in government*</i>
Foreign Languages	<i>Proficiency equivalent to two years of high school study</i>	<i>Not required</i>
Lifelong Understanding and Self Development	<i>Not required</i>	<i>One course required</i>
Certification of GE completion	<i>Complete package must be completed to be certified</i>	<i>Certification done area by area</i>

* The courses in American government and history are not technically part of CSU-Breadth GE requirements, but are CSU graduation requirements that most students complete as part of their lower-division coursework.

The Transfer Process Is Extremely Complex

Complexities in Lower Division Major Prerequisites

The ideal transfer pattern would prepare a student to enroll in a university as a junior with all lower division major requirements completed. The reality is far removed from the ideal because lower-division transfer requirements are defined by the receiving institution and vary by campus, even within the same system. For example, the lower division requirements for a psychology major at San Jose State are different from those at Sonoma State and Sacramento State – all campuses in the north state region among which a student might be choosing. Theoretically, the lower division requirements could be

different at each of the CSU and UC campuses. Such variation almost guarantees that students will end up having to take more than 60 transferable units unless they know early on to which campus they plan to transfer *and* they get admitted to that first choice campus.

To illustrate, Table 3 shows the lower-division major requirements for Psychology in three CSU campuses and three UC campuses.²³ Further complicating student planning are differences among these campuses' psychology degree requirements with respect to upper-division general education courses and residency requirements, i.e., which specific courses must be taken at that specific campus.

Table 3
An Example: Lower Division Major Preparation – BA in Psychology

CSU		
San Jose State	Sacramento State	Sonoma State
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ General Psychology ■ Introductory Psychobiology ■ Elementary Statistics ■ Human Biology or Human Anatomy ■ 3 units of any transferable psychology elective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Introductory Psychology: Basic Processes ■ Introductory Psychology: Individual and Social Processes ■ Methods of Psychology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Statistics ■ 6 units of lower division psychology (unspecified)
UC		
UC Davis	UC Santa Cruz	UC Merced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ General Psychology ■ Research Methods in Psychology ■ Elementary Statistics ■ Sociology or Cultural Anthropology ■ One of several options: (1) Introductory Biology or (2) Essentials of Life on Earth or (3) General Biology and either Human Evolutionary Biology or Introduction to Human Heredity or Exercise and Fitness: Principles and Practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Introduction to Psychology ■ Research Methods in Psychology ■ Introduction to Psychological Statistics ■ Precalculus ■ Introduction to Developmental Psychology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Introduction to Psychology ■ Two natural science or engineering courses, at least one with a lab, field or studio component ■ Cultural Anthropology or Intro. to Cognitive Science or Intro. to Economics or Intro. to Political Science or Intro. to Public Policy or Intro. to Sociology ■ Two other lower-division courses for the major could be completed after transfer: Analysis of Psychological Data and Research Methods

Numerous Reform Efforts Have Not Produced a Student-Centered Transfer Process

The transfer process remains exceedingly complex, despite numerous reform efforts over the years. In fact, one could argue that efforts to improve the process have contributed to the complexity, as suggested by the medley of transfer initiatives listed in Table 4. Many of the reforms have been instituted as an effort of only one of the three public segments, or have been required by legislation but never fully embraced or adhered to by all of the segments. Simplifying and standardizing the transfer process in a way that makes it more transparent for students would require leaders at the state level to think outside the “silos,” and would call on institutional leaders to concede some of their local control in the interests of better serving students and meeting the educational needs of the state.

Lower Division Transfer Patterns: An Example of Structural Impediments to Reform

The Lower Division Transfer Patterns (LDTP) project was initiated by the CSU several years ago based on legislation intending to provide more standardization of transfer requirements across the system and simplify the process for students (SB 1785, Chapter 743 Statutes of 2004). The LDTP for each major discipline includes, in addition to the 39 units of GE and 6 units of American history and government, 3 to 6 units of lower-division major course work that is standardized across all CSU campuses. The remaining units of the 60-unit transfer curriculum consist of campus-specific lower-division major requirements or elective credits. There are currently LDTP statewide patterns for 44 major disciplines that account for 90 percent of transfers into CSU. Beginning in the spring of 2010, CCC students will be able to enter into an LDTP agreement up to the time they have completed 45 transferable units, and such students will be given “highest priority for admission” in the form of a written guarantee of admission to the particular CSU campus and major specified in the agreement.

The LDTP project provides a good example of how the segmental structure of higher education policy and planning can constrain efforts to improve the transfer process. It is a project of the CSU, which has made a substantial investment of time, effort, and resources over the past five years in formulating the program and developing the more standardized course patterns for each major. But some groups within the CCC have resisted the program over concerns that CCC faculty, articulation officers, and other interests were not involved in its development, and that revising community college courses to meet LDTP requirements could potentially jeopardize articulation agreements with UC and with private universities.²⁴ There are also concerns that some CSU campuses are not honoring the statewide LDTP pattern as fulfilling specific requirements in a major, that the LDTP course descriptors do not reflect the requirements of courses provided by CSU to its own students, that individual campuses are allowed to set unique requirements, and that LDTP does not help a student keep options open between UC and CSU.²⁵

CSU is moving forward with LDTP, and is planning pilot efforts with two community colleges to match LDTP requirements with related associate degrees,²⁶ but it remains to be seen how widespread this transfer option will become once the LDTP agreements begin next spring. Even fully implemented, the LDTP program would leave students facing different lower-division major requirements across CSU campuses, and would do nothing for students wanting the option of transferring to a UC campus. This example illustrates how segmental, rather than statewide, efforts can fall short of the goal to better meet student needs, however well-intentioned.

Interest in Reform is Growing

Despite the challenges, there is growing awareness that California needs new tools and a new commitment to make transfer work better. Reports have documented the failure of the current transfer practices in California to provide a clear, straightforward and consistent pathway for students.²⁷ Frustrated transfer students in California have shared their stories of courses not transferring,

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Table 4
A Medley of Transfer Initiatives

Initiative	Description
Articulation System Stimulating Interinstitutional Student Transfer (ASSIST)	Online transfer information system that provides students and college staff with information on what courses at one community college or university can be transferred to a specific program at another college or university
California Articulation Number (CAN) System	A now-defunct course identification system that attempted to assign a common course number to lower-division, transferable, general education and major preparation courses in all three segments in order to facilitate transfer
Course Identification Number (C-ID) System	A recent effort of the community colleges, in cooperation with faculty at UC, CSU and private universities, to develop a course numbering system to facilitate articulation and help students identify equivalent courses; during the pilot phase, 2007-2009, course numbers are being developed in 20 disciplines that are among the most frequently transferred
Dual Admissions Program (DAP)	A program that offered high school students who fell between the top 4% and 12.5% of the graduating class a guarantee of admission to a specific UC campus after completing a CCC transfer program; the program was instituted in 2002-03 but was eliminated when the governor cut its funding in the 2004-05 budget
Integrated General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC)	A series of courses that represent one option for CCC students to satisfy lower-division GE requirements before transferring; primarily used by students planning to transfer to UC but also accepted at CSU
Intersegmental Major Preparation Articulated Curriculum (IMPAC)	An effort that brought discipline faculty from each segment together regionally to discuss the lower division major preparation course requirements for transfer
Lower-Division Transfer Patterns (LDTP)	An effort within CSU to develop standardized lower-division coursework required for transfer into the 44 most common majors across the 23 campuses, which provides individual campuses the right to set up to 15 units of unique local requirements
On-line Services for Curriculum and Articulation Review (OSCAR)	A web-based computer system for the submission, review, and archival of course outlines for CCC courses proposed for articulation with CSU and UC
SciGETC	A variation of the IGETC GE pattern more appropriate for students interested in transferring into majors requiring substantial lower-division math or science preparation; allows students to defer a course in Arts/Humanities and a course in Social/Behavioral Sciences until after transfer to allow for more math and science coursework at the CCC
Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG)	Seven UC campuses offer guaranteed admission to CCC students who meet specific course and grade point average requirements and file formal TAG agreements; guaranteed admission is to a specific major at most campuses (some majors are excluded), but just to the campus at one university
Transfer Preparation Paths (TPP)	A new effort within UC to summarize the major preparation coursework required for transfer; Statewide and Campus paths summarize the requirements for similar majors across the UC campuses, and highlight the common requirements shared by a majority of campuses and the distinct requirements of specific campuses

having to repeat courses taken at a community college, and receiving inaccurate information from counselors and faculty at both the community college and university levels. Public decision makers' interest in the effectiveness of the transfer process is also motivated by reduced resources at the state level and a need to examine inefficiencies in the process including issues of time to degree, accumulation of unnecessary units, and rates of transfer and degree completion.

Recent legislative initiatives have sought to require the segments of higher education to adopt a range of solutions including common course numbering (SB 1415, Chapter 737, Statutes of 2004) and common lower-division major preparation curricula (SB 1785, Chapter 743 Statutes of 2004) in an effort to facilitate transfer. In the current legislative session, a bill under consideration would authorize community colleges to issue an associate degree in a major field of study designated as being "for transfer" to students who meet certain requirements (AB 440, Beall). The bill was intended to address the problem that many students transfer without earning an associate degree, because the coursework necessary to transfer differs from associate degree requirements. As of this writing, the bill is supported by the CCC Chancellor's Office and the League for California Community Colleges but opposed by the CCC Academic Senate, likely because it places degree requirements in statute that have traditionally been the prerogative of campus faculty.²⁸

The three segments have sponsored or supported projects to provide greater clarity and support for students seeking to transfer, including some described in Table 4. The CCC Chancellor's Office, with support from The James Irvine Foundation, is currently sponsoring the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Transfer Research Project to assess the opportunities and challenges for students pursuing CTE coursework to transfer to a university. Most recently, the leaders of the three segments of higher education announced in February the formation of a joint task force to develop plans to increase transfer.²⁹ While to date these kinds of legislative and segmental efforts have yielded limited success, they demonstrate the growing recognition that something must be done to improve the transfer process.

Fortunately, California can learn from the efforts of other states that have struggled with the issue of how to increase the number of community college students successfully transferring and completing the baccalaureate. A number of states have implemented reforms in an effort to achieve that goal. In the next section, we describe the efforts of several states to achieve more standardization in the transfer process in order to improve transfer success, and discuss some common issues faced by those states in developing and implementing those processes.

Transfer Policies in Other States May Offer Lessons for California

Like California, many states use institution-to-institution articulation agreements to manage the process of transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions, along with websites and other efforts to disseminate information to students about the process. But in an effort to find approaches that are more effective in increasing transfer rates, some states are developing statewide approaches to transfer. Most recently, the Arkansas legislature passed House Bill 1357, the Roger Phillips Transfer Policy Act. The bill requires the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board to develop a statewide transfer agreement by January 2010 to:

- designate the Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, and Associate of Arts in Teaching as transfer degrees
- require public universities to accept all credit hours for students completing an associate degree, and to give such students junior status and require no further lower-division GE courses
- require each public university to develop transfer guidelines for each community college within 50 miles (or, if none, the closest college), specifying the courses at that college that will prepare a student for each of its baccalaureate degree programs.

In developing this legislation, Arkansas is following the lead of other states that have turned to statewide structures in an effort to increase transfer success. To draw lessons for new reform efforts in California, we reviewed the transfer policies of eight states: Arizona, Florida, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Washington. We selected these states because they are known for having developed statewide approaches to transfer, because they have strong community college and public university relationships, or are viewed as being innovative in tackling student success issues in general. We began with an initial survey of university and system websites, which provided links to more extensive policy documents, curricular/catalog information, transfer guides for students, internal reviews and evaluations, and external national studies and assessments on broader transfer issues and state policy approaches to transfer.

The statewide policy approach in each of these states is different, but there are some common characteristics. Several of the states are using an associate transfer degree

(or set of degrees) while others are using a common statewide general education curriculum without an associate degree. Within these two general approaches, some of the common characteristics are as follows:

1. Associate degree(s) for transfer (Arizona, Florida, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, and Washington):
 - a statewide GE curriculum with specific unit requirements
 - guarantees of transfer and acceptance of completed units (all GE and the full 60-64 units) regardless of major or choice of institution
 - partial or total inclusion, within associate degree, of lower-division major prerequisites
 - minimal local “add on” options for four-year institutions (except in some specialized majors)
2. Standardized GE curriculum/major pathways (Ohio and Texas):
 - a core GE curriculum which sometimes permits “add ons” by individual universities
 - major pathways, transfer modules, transfer assurance guides, and direct transfer agreements used as vehicles for major preparation
 - some institutional differences in lower-division major preparation
 - statewide web sites and information systems.

While these characteristics generally describe the two approaches, each of the eight states we reviewed has taken a unique approach to developing and implementing more standardized statewide policies to facilitate transfer. Some states use both approaches; students can either complete a standardized GE core and have some assurances about transferability, or can complete additional requirements for an associate degree and have even more guarantees. Table 5 summarizes the approach in each of the states, including curricular design and mechanisms to provide transfer information to students.

Table 5
Summary of States' Approaches to Transfer

State	Policy Features
<i>States with Associate Degrees for Transfer</i>	
Arizona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Legislatively mandated task force developed the framework in 1996 ■ Arizona General Education Curriculum (AGEC) is a set of standardized GE patterns for different pathways: arts (AGEC-A), science (AGEC-S) and business (AGEC-B) ■ Transfer Pathways, including associate degrees, correspond with each AGEC option; 7 options depending on major discipline and certainty about choice of university ■ Completing AGEC guarantees admission (not to specific campus or major) and completion of GE ■ Completing a transfer associate degree (AGEC + Transfer Pathway) guarantees junior status, application of pathway credits to the major, and competitiveness for admission to programs ■ Arizona Transfer website guides students through the options
Florida	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Legislation in 1971 established the associate degree as a transfer degree; all public universities and many private institutions recognize the degree ■ Any AA degree guarantees admission to a public university (not a specific campus or major), with junior standing for registration purposes ■ Degree includes 36 GE units and 24 elective units; no explicit requirement for major preparation, but students recommended to complete pre-major requirements and the degree is offered in concentrations that parallel BA programs at public universities ■ Traditional articulation agreements specify courses for major preparation ■ GE requirements vary across institutions, but completing GE at one college guarantees transfer of GE as a block ■ Statewide Course Numbering System (SCNS) used at all public institutions ■ Florida's Advising, Counseling, and Tracking for Students (FACTS) website includes transfer requirements, articulation information, and a degree audit system to compare transcript to degree requirements
New Jersey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ New Jersey Comprehensive Statewide Transfer Agreement recently enacted (fall 2008) based on legislation passed in 2007 ■ Any AA/AS from a state community college receives full credit at a public university (60-64 units); some private universities establishing similar policies ■ Completion of AA/AS satisfies all GE but does not guarantee admission to a university ■ AA/AS will indicate that student has completed exactly half of the units required for BA/BS, unless a required major prerequisite course(s) is needed, which would increase the units required to complete the bachelor's degree ■ Students encouraged to complete AA/AS that aligns with their anticipated major ■ NJ Transfer website describes the statewide transfer agreement, degree requirements, and course equivalencies

Transfer Policies in Other States May Offer Lessons for California

Table 5 (continued)
Summary of States' Approaches to Transfer

State	Policy Features
<i>States with Associate Degrees for Transfer</i>	
North Carolina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) authorized by legislation in 1995 applies to all community colleges and public universities; 23 private universities also participate ■ Completion of CAA (44 semester units) guarantees transfer of the credits as a block and completion of GE, but not admission ■ Completing an AA/AS degree in addition to CAA guarantees admission to a public university (not a specific campus or major), transfer of all credits, and junior status for registration ■ AA/AS Pre-Major agreements in common majors require 64 units: 44 GE units and 20 units of major preparation and electives ■ Common course numbering across community colleges ■ No website specifically for transfer information, but it is included on the University of North Carolina website
Oregon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Joint Boards Articulation Commission developed transfer degrees in 1992 ■ Two transfer degrees: Associate of Arts/ Oregon Transfer (AA/OT) and Associate of Science Transfer in Business ■ AA/OT's 90 quarter units include 55 units of GE and 35 elective or lower division major units; 12 units of applied professional/technical coursework can be used as electives ■ Oregon Transfer Module (OTM) is embedded in the AA/OT; equivalent of one year of full-time study and offers an alternative for early transfer ■ AA/OT guarantees completion of GE, acceptance of all 90 units, junior standing for registration purposes but no assurance of standing in the major ■ Publications describe information for students, but no comprehensive website on transfer; Articulation Transfer Linked Audit System (ATLAS) is a degree audit system to compare transcript to degree requirements
Washington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Several transfer degree options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate of Science - Transfer Degree (AS-T) • Direct Transfer Agreement Associate Degree (DTA) • Applied Associate of Science in Technology (for transfer to Bachelor of Applied Science) ■ DTA includes 60 quarter units of GE and 30 units of major courses and electives ■ 4 Major Related Programs (MRPs) for DTA in business/accounting, elementary education, pre-nursing, and math education; several MRPs for AS-T in engineering and other science fields ■ Completing degree gives priority consideration in admission to public universities ■ No comprehensive website for transfer information at this point, but an Academic Guidance and Planning System (Academic GPS) is under development

Table 5 (continued)
Summary of States' Approaches to Transfer

State	Policy Features
<i>States with Standardized GE Curriculum but Not Transfer Associate Degrees:</i>	
Ohio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ohio Articulation and Transfer Policy revised and adopted by the Ohio Board of Regents in March 2007 ■ Ohio Transfer Modules (OTMs) outline GE requirements (36-40 semester units); adapted by each institution so there is a need for complex course equivalency systems; no statewide transfer module ■ Transfer Assurance Guides (TAGs) in 8 disciplinary areas describe major preparation coursework and course equivalencies across institutions ■ Completing TAG courses guarantees that courses will transfer and apply to degree requirements ■ Completing OTM and TAG courses does not guarantee admission ■ Website of the Board of Regents includes a section on Credit Transfer that describes OTMs and TAGs
Texas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Legislature mandated statewide core curriculum in 1987 for all public institutions ■ Core includes 36 semester units of GE and additional units for field of study curriculum (FOSC) or electives ■ 11 FOSC offered in high demand majors ■ Institutions may add requirements to the core ■ Completing the core GE and FOSC guarantees acceptance of all units; no guarantee of admission to a major or university ■ Only the new Associate of Arts in Teaching is a degree designed specifically for transfer ■ Common course numbering for lower-division courses across all public institutions ■ College for All Texans website provides some guidance on transfer, but there is no comprehensive transfer website

Transfer Policies in Other States May Offer Lessons for California

Some Positive Outcomes Are Being Documented

While only limited information is available about how well the statewide transfer approaches described here are working, several of the states we examined have conducted evaluations of their policies:

Florida: A recent report of analyses conducted using Florida's comprehensive student data indicated that the admission rate to state universities is higher for students with an AA degree than for freshman applicants (76% vs 57%), and that AA transfers in public universities graduate with a similar number of total credits as native freshmen, at 138 and 135, respectively.³⁰

Arizona: A 2007 study of Arizona's transfer policies concluded that policy changes had resulted in transfer students completing the bachelor's degree with nearly one semester less credit than was the case five years earlier.³¹ The study found that students transferring after meeting AGEC requirements (with or without completing an associate degree) were more likely to graduate within a specified time period than students transferring with community college credits but without having followed a specified transfer pathway, and those completing AGEC graduated with fewer total credits.

Washington: In an evaluation of its Associate of Science Transfer degree, which is intended to provide a better pathway to transfer for the sciences and engineering, Washington found that students earning the AS-T transfer to a university at a higher rate, complete fewer credits to degree, and are more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than students who follow the more general Direct Transfer Agreement with a science-related concentration.³² Also, the 3-year graduation rate for students transferring to a Washington public university with an associate degree has improved from 63% in the late 1990s to 71% in 2006-07,³³ perhaps indicating that the state's work on major pathways is helping transfer students arrive prepared to complete baccalaureate degree requirements more efficiently.

North Carolina: Data from North Carolina indicate that the number of transfers from community colleges to public universities as a percentage of community college FTE

enrollment in credit courses has increased in recent years, from 15 percent in 2000 to nearly 25 percent in 2007.³⁴

Comparative data and methods do not exist to draw any conclusions across states as to the effectiveness of these new degree/pathway approaches to transfer. This is in part because these policies are new but mostly because, as noted earlier (see endnote 5), there are no meaningful measures of transfer rates that are common across states.

Common Issues Arise in States' Transfer Reform Efforts

The states we examined confronted similar issues in designing their transfer processes, including:

- what organization or structure should be used to develop and administer a statewide approach to the transfer process
- how much standardization in transfer requirements and curriculum should be imposed across the state's higher education system
- whether and how lower division major preparation requirements should be integrated with a standardized GE curriculum
- when transfer students should be required to declare a major, and how best to provide related support services
- how to encourage students to transfer and earn degrees in majors related to high-priority state needs
- how to design advising tools and services to help students understand and navigate the transfer process.

Policy Development and Administration

The first requirement for any major statewide reform in the transfer process is having some organization or structural framework from which to develop and implement such policy change. Many of the states we reviewed used an intersegmental transfer and articulation commission or task force to develop strategies for improving the transfer process, with legislation formalizing the statewide transfer structures and processes. Most frequently these bodies are linked to higher education coordinating boards or governing

boards and frequently include as members administrative and faculty leadership in the system(s). Some commissions are administratively housed in one of the university systems and have taken the lead in periodic evaluations or studies of the effectiveness of the process.

Standardization across the System

The degree of uniformity of the transfer curriculum, in terms of both GE curriculum and major preparation, varies across the states. Florida is an example of a more uniform approach, with completion of any associate of arts degree offering a guarantee of admission to a public university at the junior level (at least for registration purposes). Florida's centralized governance for higher education may help the state maintain such a standardized transfer model, although the transfer policies pre-date the adoption of a single Board of Governors for all of higher education.³⁵ Other states have achieved substantial standardization without having centralized governance. Arizona has achieved agreement on shared structures in general education, associate degrees, major pathways, and a statewide advising/student information system despite having entirely local governance of its seventeen community colleges (a single Board of Regents governs the three public universities).³⁶ The Texas legislature mandates a core GE curriculum despite its complex governing structure: there are six governing boards for the public universities and 50 local boards for the community colleges. The state does have a strong coordinating board that pushed for the standardized GE curriculum.

Integrating GE and Major Preparation

States using standardized approaches to transfer are recognizing the importance of integrating major preparation and GE curricula. Associate degrees or statewide transfer patterns that involve a common GE curriculum combined with elective credits can leave students with upper division registration status but no admissibility to a major at the four-year institution. Or, if admitted, students may be left with substantial pre-major lower division coursework to complete and "excess" units from the community college for the elective courses that do not contribute to the requirements for completing the baccalaureate in a particular major.

The special need of math and science majors for extensive lower-division coursework in those subjects presents a particular problem. Some states are responding to this need by providing an alternative GE curriculum for students interested in transferring in math and science fields. Arizona's AGEC-S requires fewer units in the humanities and social/behavioral sciences, and leaves more room for additional math and science courses as preparation for the major. Washington's AS-T includes only 45 quarter units of GE (compared to 60 for the DTA) to allow more room for major preparation, with additional GE coursework required at the university after transfer. Washington has also developed Major Related Programs (MRPs) to make clear the lower-division major requirements for fields where demand is high and where transfer students typically have had to earn excessive units at the university to make up for under-preparation at the time of transfer.³⁷ Oregon is currently engaged in an assessment of the Associate of Arts/Oregon Transfer (AA/OT) degree, and is considering establishing an Associate of Science degree (AS/OT) with more limited GE requirements for math and science majors.

Declaring a Major and Related Support Needs

As part of the effort to address major preparation and limit excess units, states must grapple with how directive to be in requiring major declaration early in the community college experience and how rigidly to enforce such choices. Florida and Arizona recommend in their advising literature that students declare a major at 24 units, and Florida is reportedly considering making this a requirement. Other states post guidelines and "to do" lists for transfer students, which recommend selection of a major by the end of the first year in community college.

Oregon has developed a different strategy to address the problem of students completing a full half of their baccalaureate unit requirement without adequate lower-division major preparation. The Oregon Transfer Module (OTM) is designed for the significant number of students who transfer before obtaining the AA/OT degree, offering a shorter (in terms of units) but still definable curricular pattern for those who choose to transfer after one year at a community college. Oregon has found that more than half of their students transfer without the AA/OT and with a more random collection of courses, too many of which are

Transfer Policies in Other States May Offer Lessons for California

unrelated to major preparation. The OTM avoids the issue of requiring major declaration at the community college by allowing students to enter a university as a sophomore while there is still time to complete major preparation coursework while in lower-division status.

Targeting High-Need Majors

Some states are developing statewide associate degrees for transfer that focus on high-demand fields of study to meet specific workforce needs. Arizona and Oregon have developed degrees that focus on business, elementary education, nursing, and engineering technology. Related to this targeting for high needs is the move to encourage development of Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degrees that are transferable to universities within the state that offer the Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS), an approach being implemented in Arizona. Oregon permits 12 units of applied professional/technical coursework completed at a community college to be accepted as electives upon transfer. The Ohio legislature has recently required a process for linking career technical courses to Transfer Assurance Guides (notably in applied science and business).

Developing Advising Tools and Services

Multiple paths to transfer require clear communication to students who must choose among the options and make appropriate course-taking decisions. States are increasingly giving attention to websites with interactive elements to support their transfer strategies, allowing students to more easily plan their academic studies. One of the goals is to build more confidence and credibility in the self-counseling process, in light of declining resources to fund student support services.

While developing better websites and other advising tools can help students navigate a complex transfer process, an alternative approach would focus on simplifying the process enough to reduce the information burden on students. Research comparing the approaches of private occupational colleges to those of community colleges found that some private colleges were able to achieve higher completion rates by having simple, clear pathways to a credential and assuming greater responsibility for informing students, guiding their choices, and preventing mistakes through frequent mandatory advising.³⁸ To the extent that the transfer process is standardized and simplified, the need for informational tools to navigate a complex process is reduced.

Options and Recommendations for California

State Examples Point to Several Models

The state policies we examined in the last section, along with the issues the states have confronted in designing their transfer policies, point to several alternative models to consider in developing a more standardized, statewide approach to transfer policy in California.

1. *Associate degrees designed for transfer, including a core GE curriculum and defined major preparation pathways*

Associate degrees would be offered at community colleges in general/transfer studies and in either specific majors (e.g., accounting, biology, political science) or in broader discipline areas (e.g., business, science, social science). Completion of an associate degree in general/transfer studies would guarantee transfer of all degree credits and admission to a public university (but not to a specific campus, or in a specific major or with upper division status). Whether the guarantee of admission would be to UC or CSU would depend upon student academic performance (GPA) as it does under current policy. Completion of an associate degree in a major discipline would likewise guarantee admission and transfer of all degree credits and would *additionally* guarantee eligibility for junior status in a related major. Development of associate transfer degrees would not preclude the awarding by the CCC of non-transfer, terminal associate degrees or applied associate degrees.

2. *A statewide GE curriculum combined with major preparation pathways, but no transfer associate degrees*

A standardized GE pattern would be developed and applied across all public colleges and universities. All GE credits would transfer to all public institutions. Standardized major preparation pathways would specify lower-division requirements for each major/discipline with allowance for minor variation across institutions. Completion of both GE and major pathway courses would guarantee transfer of all credits and eligibility for junior status in a related major to those public universities whose pathways were followed, if admitted. Admission to a public university would not be guaranteed (a key difference from the first alternative) but students would receive some priority in admission.

3. *A statewide GE curriculum for early transfer to a university with lower-division status*

A standardized GE pattern would be developed and applied across all public colleges and universities, and students would be guaranteed transfer to a public university as sophomores and acceptance of GE credits. Major preparation would be completed after transfer while still in lower-division status.

The models are not mutually exclusive. For example, Oregon has two transfer associate degrees (AA/OT and AS for Transfer in Business), but also offers students the option of completing one year of GE requirements in the Oregon Transfer Module followed by enrollment in a university as a sophomore. Community college students in North Carolina can complete the core requirements in the state's Comprehensive Articulation Agreement and be guaranteed completion of GE if they transfer at that point, but students who also complete an AA/AS degree have a further guarantee of admission to a public university and junior status.

New Transfer Policy Should Meet Several Criteria

Several criteria should guide any choice among alternative models for improving transfer. Above all, the process should be designed to help students move efficiently through their degree programs, yielding more college-educated workers for the state's economy. Specifically, reforms should result in a process that is:

- *Effective* in creating pathways that lead to more community college students transferring to universities and earning bachelor's degrees
- *Efficient* in minimizing the number of unnecessary credits students earn on the path to a degree
- *Transparent* and easy to understand for students, families, and counselors
- *Robust* in accommodating the requirements of multiple major programs
- *Strategic* in targeting majors that meet high-priority state needs
- *Feasible* in balancing stakeholder desires for change with institutional interest in setting standards and requirements for transfer.

Options and Recommendations for California

Table 6 presents our attempt to evaluate how well each of the three alternative policy approaches satisfies these criteria

(high, medium, or low), given what we know about California’s higher education system and its political and policy environment.

Table 6
Analysis of Three Alternative Models for Student-Centered Transfer

Associate Degrees for Transfer		
Criteria	Rating	
<i>Effective</i>	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Provides clearer pathway to transfer + Aligning associate degree requirements in various fields with BA/BS lower-division requirements would prepare students for transfer into majors + Research suggests students who earn associate degree before transfer are more likely to complete BA/BS³⁹ + The guarantee of admission (with minimum GPA) would provide a strong incentive for students to choose the associate degree option + Students who don’t transfer or transfer but don’t finish the BA/BS at least end up with an associate degree for their (and the state’s) investment
<i>Efficient</i>	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Would minimize excess units by standardizing curriculum across institutions within each substantive associate degree – Inadequate advising resources could limit the positive impact on reducing excess units
<i>Transparent</i>	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Having standardized lower-division requirements within a major (or groups of majors) would make the process simpler for students and advisors + Having the same requirements for both transfer associate degrees and for transfer in most subject areas would eliminate much confusion for students and the general public about transfer and the role of the “two-year” sector
<i>Robust</i>	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + There would be a transfer associate degree appropriate for every major – some with specialized degrees and the others under a general transfer associate degree
<i>Strategic</i>	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Could target associate degrees at areas of high need – Students who receive inadequate early advising about major preparation may choose majors with few pre-major requirements rather than those of higher need and value
<i>Feasible</i>	Medium/Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Would increase degree completion in the CCC, to the benefit of their accountability reporting + Should be appealing to governor and external stakeholders (e.g., business) who favor increased efficiency and degree completion – CCC faculty, who now control associate degree requirements, would have to conform to UC/CSU transfer requirements or gain agreement with UC/CSU faculty on new requirements – Challenge for some majors in fitting adequate GE and pre-major preparation into a 60-unit associate degree – Getting cross-segment faculty approval of standardized lower-division requirements for each discipline could be difficult

Table 6 (continued)
Analysis of Three Alternative Models for Student-Centered Transfer

GE Core + Major Pathways		
Criteria	Rating	
<i>Effective</i>	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Provides clearer pathway to transfer in specific majors, but those pathways are only clearer for students who decide early where they want to transfer – Many students who transfer but don't complete BA/BS have no college credential
<i>Efficient</i>	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Could minimize excess units if requirements for transfer into majors are more standardized across the system – Is more dependent than the transfer degrees alternative on accurate advising in order to minimize excess units
<i>Transparent</i>	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + To the extent that lower-division major requirements are standardized across universities, it would simplify process for students – There may be more pathways for students to consider than under the associate degrees alternative, placing a higher burden on students to understand their choices
<i>Robust</i>	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Pathways could be developed for at least the most highly enrolled majors at the public universities
<i>Strategic</i>	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Could target major pathways at areas of high need – Students who receive inadequate early advising about major preparation may choose majors with few pre-major requirements rather than those of higher need and value
<i>Feasible</i>	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + CSU/UC faculty have already worked on LDTP and TPP, offering a starting place for pathway development + Should be appealing to governor and external stakeholders (e.g., business) who favor increased efficiency – History of resentment in CCC over LDTP process may serve as barrier to new efforts – Getting cross-segment faculty approval of more standardized requirements for each discipline could be difficult
GE Core with Early Transfer		
Criteria	Rating	
<i>Effective</i>	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Provides straightforward pathway to transfer + Research shows students in 4-year institutions more likely to complete BA than similar students with BA intentions in 2-year institutions,⁴⁰ so getting students to a university earlier may increase the likelihood of completion
<i>Efficient</i>	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Greater likelihood of completing BA/BS would increase efficiency – Moving to university after one year in CCC would result in greater costs to the student and the state for the sophomore year
<i>Transparent</i>	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + A one-year GE core for transfer could be simpler for students and advisors than two-year program with major pathways – It could be confusing for students and advisors to know under what circumstances this option is preferable to transferring as a junior
<i>Robust</i>	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + One-year GE core would easily transfer into most majors
<i>Strategic</i>	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – One-year GE core is not targeted at particular majors + Earlier transfer could allow more students to get on a path to high-priority majors at the university
<i>Feasible</i>	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Master Plan tradition emphasizes transfer occurring after completion of 60 units (and meeting academic criteria) – CCC would fear loss of enrollment with students transferring out earlier – UC/CSU may resist idea of transfer after only one year at CCC due to limited enrollment capacity – Would not be supported by political leaders in this economic environment

Options and Recommendations for California

Recommendations

The success other states have had in making their transfer policies more student-centered, and the evaluation of the alternative models against important criteria, suggest that efforts to improve California's complex transfer process could yield benefits in increased transfer rates and more degree completion. With so many underprepared and first-generation students in the California Community Colleges, the adoption of simpler, student-centered policies would seem to hold promise for increasing rates of transfer and baccalaureate degree completion.

We recommend that the Legislature enact legislation that:

- Directs the CCC to develop associate degrees for transfer, working with UC and CSU, and designates that the completion of such a degree entitles students to admission to a public university and to guaranteed transfer of all degree credits (criteria related to GPA would determine whether guarantee is to UC or CSU; no guarantee of specific campus)
- Directs that CCC and CSU, and requests that UC, work together to develop standardized GE and major preparation requirements across the segments for a set of common majors to serve as requirements both for an associate degree for transfer in that field and transfer into that major, with minimal variations across institutions within majors
- Specifies that students completing an associate degree for transfer with major preparation are to be guaranteed junior status upon admission, with UC/CSU able to require additional lower-division major preparation *after* transfer if necessary in particular disciplines
- Requires the development of a degree audit system to allow counselors and students to determine how the courses they have completed match up to requirements for degrees/transfer, and to allow the CCC to automatically issue associate degrees to students who have completed all requirements
- Specifies that the development of associate degrees for transfer does not preclude the awarding by the CCC of non-transfer, terminal associate degrees or applied associate degrees.

Standardizing transfer requirements across the university systems, and ensuring that the requirements for associate degrees for transfer at the CCC match those requirements, could help to increase rates of transfer and degree completion. Complete standardization of transfer requirements is likely impossible and unnecessary, but as has been demonstrated by other progressive states, compromises can be found that help students by taking reasonable steps towards greater standardization.

As noted earlier, the state's segmental approach to policy and planning, its emphasis on local autonomy, and its strong tradition of faculty governance of academic issues offer particular challenges to developing and implementing statewide transfer policies. While decentralized structures have not prevented other states from implementing more standardization, the size of California's higher education system, the breadth of programs offered in its colleges and universities, and the diversity of the communities and students served make the task a particularly difficult one. In addition, the tendency of executive branch leadership to focus on K-12 rather than postsecondary issues, the dearth of legislative leadership owing to term limits, and the relatively weak coordinating role of the California Postsecondary Education Commission have so far prevented comprehensive action to adopt student-centered transfer policies.

Some developments that could more closely align the interests of colleges and universities with the interests of students in having seamless transfer are the growing emphasis on accountability and the trend toward funding institutions in part for performance instead of solely for enrollment. Several states have adopted, or are actively considering, revisions to their funding formulas to reward institutions for completions of courses, degrees, or some threshold of student progress.⁴¹ A transfer process built around transfer associate degrees and aligned curriculum across institutions would increase measurable performance within the CCC in a number of areas: number of associate degrees awarded, the graduation rate, the number of transfers, and the transfer rate. It would also likely increase the graduation

rate of transfer students at UC and CSU and reduce the units to degree taken by transfer students who earn bachelor's degrees. As pressure mounts to account for student success, opposition to a statewide approach to transfer may subside.

Even with a confluence of interests around student success, reshaping transfer in California will not be easy. However, it will be a test of a collective commitment to California's students and its future that must be passed. The consequences of business as usual approaches to transfer, and to transfer reform, are untenable.

Endnotes

- ¹ Reed, D. (2008). *California's future workforce: Will there be enough college graduates?* San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California
- ² Johnson, H. & Reed, D. (2007). *Can California import enough college graduates to meet workforce needs?* San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California
- ³ Johnson, H. & Sengupta, R. (2009). *Closing the gap: Meeting California's need for college graduates.* San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California
- ⁴ California Postsecondary Education Commission, Custom Data Report for Enrollment—Full-year Transfers to Public Institutions, 2008
- ⁵ Roach, R. (2009, May 14). The community college transfer problem. Diverse Online (www.diverseeducation.com). While many states are working to raise their transfer rate, there is no accurate way to compare transfer rates across states. The most comparable data is for first time, full-time students but that represents a small portion of the community college enrollment in most states. Further, states use a variety of definitions for determining "intent to transfer," which determines the denominator of a transfer rate computation. Even the notion of a "transfer" can vary widely across states because of different state policies for when students can, or are encouraged to, transfer.
- ⁶ Sengupta, R. & Jepsen, C. (2006). *California's community college students.* San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California; Shulock, N. & Moore, C. (2007). *Rules of the game: How state policy creates barriers to degree completion and impedes student success in the California Community Colleges.* Sacramento, CA: Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy; California Postsecondary Education Commission (2007). *California higher education accountability: Goals – student success, measure: California Community College students' degrees and certificates awarded and successful transfers.* Sacramento, CA: Author; Driscoll, A.K. (2007). *Beyond access: How the first semester matters for community college students' aspirations and persistence* (Policy Brief 07-2). Berkeley, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education; Horn, L. & Lew, S. (2007). *California community college transfer rates: Who is counted makes a difference.* Berkeley, CA: MRP Associates, Inc.; California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2009). *Focus on results: Accountability reporting for the California community colleges.* Sacramento, CA: Author.
- ⁷ The study was conducted in about 2003-04, and involved reviewing the transcripts of nearly 2,000 transfer students who graduated from CSU in 1999. A summary of the findings can be seen in a 2004 document of the Academic Senate at <http://rheth.csustan.edu/aa/docs/QAfor45-15.pdf>.
- ⁸ Horn, L. & Lew, S. (2007). *Unexpected pathways: Transfer patterns of California community college students.* Berkeley, CA: MPR Associates, Inc.
- ⁹ Many CCC students enter college unprepared for college-level coursework, and must take basic skills in English and/or math. These courses carry "credit" but not credit that is applicable to a certificate or degree, and the credit is not transferable to a university. These basic skills credits were not counted in these studies of "excess units."
- ¹⁰ University of California Office of the President (2005). *California Performance Review – ETV 15 – Unit accumulation at transfer study: Phase I results: Student focus groups.* Oakland, CA: Author.
- ¹¹ The cohort represents all first-time CCC students in 2000-01, tracked over 7 years. The data were provided to us by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office.
- ¹² The average graduation rate for students attending universities that are members of the Association for Independent California Colleges and Universities are generally higher than for CSU students and comparable to UC students (see http://www.aiccu.edu/images/stories/aiccu/pdf_docs/wip2may08.pdf and http://www.aiccu.edu/images/stories/aiccu/pdf_docs/wip2jan09.pdf).
- ¹³ The California Postsecondary Education Commission shows a summary of graduation rates for full-time freshmen enrolled in public and private universities in California at <http://www.cpec.ca.gov/StudentData/GradRates.asp>. The rates are those calculated by the National Center for Education Statistics. The University of Phoenix, one of the institutions enrolling growing numbers of CCC transfer students, has a 6-year graduation rate of first-time, full-time freshmen of less than 5%. See also, Loonin, D. & Devanthery, J. (2005). *Making the numbers count: Why proprietary school performance data doesn't add up and what can be done about it.* Boston, MA: National Consumer Law Center.
- ¹⁴ See the UC Statfinder at <http://statfinder.ucop.edu/>
- ¹⁵ See the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange graduation rates at <http://www.asd.calstate.edu/csrde/index.shtml>
- ¹⁶ Direct comparisons of graduation rates of university freshmen and transfer students are not appropriate because transfer students have already completed up to 2 years of coursework at the time of enrollment in a university. A CSU study that "equalized" freshmen and transfers enrolled in the system found that graduation rates for the two groups are very similar (notes on the study are available at <http://www.asd.calstate.edu/csrde/index.shtml#ftf>).
- ¹⁷ Among all students who transferred in the 2000-01 CCC cohort we examined, only 20% had earned an associate degree.
- ¹⁸ Moore, C. & Shulock, N. (2009). *The grades are in – 2008.* Sacramento, CA: Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy
- ¹⁹ Offenstein, J. & Shulock, N. (2009). *Community college student outcomes: Limitations of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and recommendations for improvement.* Sacramento, CA: Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy.
- ²⁰ Shulock, N. (2004). *On the durability of the Master Plan in the 21st century, or "If it's breaking, why isn't anyone fixing it?"* Sacramento, CA: Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy.
- ²¹ Woodlief, B., Thomas, C., & Orozco, G. (2003). *California's gold: Claiming the promise of diversity in our colleges.* Oakland, CA: California Tomorrow.
- ²² An "impacted" major at UC or CSU is one that receives more applications during the initial filing period from fully eligible students than there are spaces in that major, leading to the imposition of supplementary admission criteria.
- ²³ Retrieved from each campus website, July 28, 2009
- ²⁴ As an example of CCC concerns, see the Articulation Newsbrief for May-June 2007 at <http://www.sdmesa.sdccd.cc.ca.us/articulation/pdf/NewsBriefMay-June07.pdf>
- ²⁵ Personal communication with staff working on transfer issues in the CCC Chancellor's Office
- ²⁶ Redden, E. (2009). Finding the 'perfect 60' for transfer. *Inside Higher Ed*, March 21.

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- ²⁷ Sengupta and Jepsen, 2006; Shulock and Moore, 2007; California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2007
- ²⁸ Senate Committee analysis of AB 440, as amended July 2, 2009 and AB 440 Factsheet: <http://www.collegecampaign.org/assets/docs/AB-440-Fact-Sheet-07-14-09.pdf>.
- ²⁹ See *UC, CSU, Community College Leaders Announce Joint Effort to Boost Transfer to 4-Year Institutions* at http://www.calstate.edu/PA/news/2009/csu_uc_transfers.shtml
- ³⁰ The Florida College System (2009). *Statewide articulation agreement – effective and comprehensive*. Zoom newsletter (Edition 2009-01, April).
- ³¹ Hezel Associates (2007). *Evaluation of Arizona’s transfer articulation system*. Syracuse, NY: Author.
- ³² Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board (2006). *Consolidated transfer report: Transfer policy and upper-division baccalaureate capacity*. Olympia, WA: Author.
- ³³ Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board (2009). *Transfer and articulation in higher education*. Olympia, WA: Author.
- ³⁴ Data gathered from the University of North Carolina system’s *Statistical Abstract* for 2000-01 and 2007-08. The data presented do not represent a “transfer rate”, which would involve observing the transfer behavior of individual students tracked over time.
- ³⁵ Until 2000, Florida had a segmental governance structure for higher education, with a statewide governing board for the four-year institutions and a coordinating board and local governing boards for the community colleges.
- ³⁶ The recently reinstated Arizona Community College Council provides a platform for the districts to meet and discuss the needs of community colleges and the role the colleges can play in educating Arizona residents. The duties of the Council include providing recommendations for governance of the community college system and establishing statewide goals and performance measures for the system.
- ³⁷ Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2009
- ³⁸ Rosenbaum, J.E., Deil-Amen, R., & Peterson, A.E. (2006). *After admission: From college access to college success*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- ³⁹ Wellman, J. (2002). *State policy and community college – baccalaureate transfer*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy; McCormick, A. & Carroll, C.D. (1997). *Transfer behavior among beginning postsecondary students: 1989-1994*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics; Grubb, W.N. (1991). The decline of community college transfer rates. *Journal of Higher Education* 62(2), 194-222.
- ⁴⁰ Long, B.T. & Kurlaender, M. (2008). *Do community colleges provide a viable pathway to a baccalaureate degree?* (Working Paper #14367). Washington
- ⁴¹ Arizona, Indiana, Ohio, Texas, and Washington are among those states implementing or debating funding formula changes.



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