



Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) at Ten Years: Stakeholder Convenings Summary

Fulfilling the Promise: The Associate Degree for Transfer

California's Community Colleges (CCC) serve approximately 2.1 million students, providing educational opportunity to a diverse student body and promising an affordable path for students to reach their college and career goals. The Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) has become a cornerstone of the CCC transfer process and a critical component of California's transfer landscape. By allowing students more accessible reentry points to completing a bachelor's degree through an admissions guarantee to the California State University (CSU), the ADT provides students with an easily accessible onramp to expediently complete a bachelor's degree. The Associate Degree for Transfer was established in 2010 to create a streamlined transfer pathway for CCC students to the California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC) by aligning coursework necessary to transfer to a CSU or the UC with the coursework needed to earn an associate degree with the goal of ensuring CCC students earn an associate degree while on their path to transfer, streamlining the transfer requirements across the CCC system, reducing time and excess credit units for the benefit of the student and the state, and guaranteeing a student junior standing at the CSU so they can expect to achieve a Bachelor's degree within two years of transfer.

The Associate Degree for Transfer has proven itself to be a successful and commonly utilized pathways to achieving transfer. As of October 2020, over 280,000 community college students have earned an ADT. Currently, over 40 ADT pathways exist at California's Community Colleges, with the ADT being adopted as a viable transfer pathway to the University of California, private non-profit institutions in California, Western Governor's University, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities across the country, in addition to the California State University. These ADT pathways have provided significant financial savings to both students and to the state by reducing excess college credits accrued. With ADT earners accruing an average of six fewer excess units and a course fee of \$46 per credit at the California Community Colleges, the ADT accounted for over \$12 million in savings for students in 2018-2019 alone.

As California's Community Colleges continue to make progress under the [*Vision for Success*](#) toward improving student success and closing racial equity gaps, progress must still be made to improve the transfer process. While the Associate Degree for Transfer has made tremendous strides in simplifying transfer pathways and shortening the time it takes student to achieve a bachelor's degree, we are far from realizing the goal of having the ADT become the preferred transfer pathway for California's students and ensuring a student-centered transfer process.

Engaging a Coalition of Transfer Leaders

Recognizing the unique opportunity to celebrate the successes of the ten-year anniversary of the ADT, and to develop a new shared vision for addressing areas of ADT implementation and the transfer student experience that can be improved, the Campaign for College Opportunity hosted a series of virtual convenings with key stakeholders. The goal of these convenings was to dive into nuanced issues related

to transfer articulation agreements, enrollment and admission practices, and demographic data trends to ensure that institutional partners, educational equity advocates, and student leaders all have a seat at the table to inform the development of potential policy solutions. Many of these civil rights and education leaders were instrumental in the formulation and implementation of the ADT, and are leading experts in the transfer process and the transfer student experience.

Three convenings took place in July, August, and October of 2020. The first convening focused on establishing and communicating ADT pathways. The second convening focused on bridging the gap between ADT conferral to application and admission at a transfer destination institution. The third convening focused on ADT implementation at the California State University, addressing issues surrounding timely degree completion and demographic data of students enrolling with ADTs. These convenings brought together expertise and input from the following organizations: The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors, the California State University Chancellor’s Office, the California State University Academic Senate, the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU), the Student Senate for California Community Colleges, the California State Student Association (CSSA), the Los Rios Community College District, the Legislative Analysts Office, CSU Sacramento, National University, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), Public Advocates, Growing Inland Achievement, the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium (CVHEC), the Education Insights Center, and the RP Group, as well as Legislative staff representing Education Committees and individual members of the California State Assembly and Senate.

A series of convenings with campus practitioners also took place over March, April, May, and June of 2020. Over 40 faculty, administrators, transfer center directors and coordinators, and admissions and articulation officers from California Community Colleges and California State Universities gathered to discuss the successes and potential venues for strengthening the promise of the ADT program. These convenings focused on how to strengthen communication between K-12 partners, community colleges, and California State University campuses, as well as the challenges that arise when creation and maintenance of aligned general education and major requirements for ADT pathways are not consistent across all CSU campuses. These convenings brought together campus leaders and stakeholders from the following institutions:

California Community Colleges	California State Universities
Cerritos College	CSU Fullerton
Citrus College	CSU Long Beach
Clovis Community College	CSU Los Angeles
Coastline Community College	
Cypress College	
East LA College	
El Camino College	
Fresno City College	
Fullerton College	
Glendale City College	
Golden West College	
Irvine Valley Community College	
LA City College	

California Community Colleges	California State Universities
LA Mission College	
LA Southwest College	
LA Trade and Technical College	
LA Valley College	
Long Beach City College	
Mt. San Antonio College	
Orange Coast Community College	
Pasadena City College	
Pierce College	
Reedley Community College	
Rio Hondo College	
Saddleback Community College	
Santa Ana Community College	
Santa Monica College	
South Orange Community College	
West LA College	

Emerging Themes from Stakeholder Conversations

Communicating and Marketing of the ADT and Transfer Pathways

A consistent challenge raised by transfer stakeholders and institutional partners is the question of how we can effectively communicate guaranteed degree pathways at the front end of a student’s education journey, to ensure that students are put on a path to transfer early on in their community college journey. In order to strengthen the communication of guaranteed transfer pathways with K-12 partners, we can intentionally build on existing resources to distribute updated information about available ADT pathways, and consolidate communication efforts around fewer transfer pathways with a proven track record of supporting students – such as the ADT.

- **Challenges with A Degree with a Guarantee Website.** Senate Bill 440 (Padilla, 2013) required that the California Community Colleges and the California State University develop a student-centered communication and marketing strategy in order to increase the visibility of the associate degree for transfer pathway, including displaying this degree pathway prominently in community college course catalogues and the development of a website to publicly advertise the ADT pathways available to students. As a result, the *A Degree with a Guarantee* website was established, and is maintained by the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office. Throughout our stakeholder conversations, many concerns were raised about the website, including that it focused on pathways to the CSU without focusing as heavily on UC or AICCU institutions, and that degree listings often become outdated and inaccurate without regular updates.
- **Elimination of Duplicative Local Degrees.** For many students, the large number of transfer pathways and degrees available adds to the challenge of easily achieving transfer. In order to address this, a number of our participants suggested phasing

out duplicative local associates degrees, and focusing advising efforts around conveying accurate and timely information around available ADT pathways. That is, if an academic major is offered for both an ADT and a local associates degree, phasing out these duplicative local degrees that do not come with the benefits of transfer admission guarantees would simplify the pathways to transfer for students.

Inconsistent and/or Repetitive Course Requirements

In many of our conversations over the last nine months, the challenge of misalignment in lower division coursework requirements was raised as a significant barrier to timely transfer. Students shared that they often need to take repetitive course content due to misalignment of transfer requirements in general education pathways or lower division major preparatory coursework, or slight variations in course numbers that are acceptable to transfer institutions.

- **Lack of Common Course Numbering and Course Descriptors.** Students, administrators, and advocates generally agreed that confusion remains for many students around the specific courses required to be placed onto a guaranteed path for completing a bachelor's degree, after successfully transferring with an ADT. Without a comprehensive, singular common course numbering system, differences in course numbers can unintentionally set students back. Participants described how, for example, Math 101 may fulfil a requirement to earn an ADT – but different CSU campuses may require Math 101 or 102 to complete a bachelor's degree, even though similar course content is taught in both classes. For students who earned admission after completing Math 101 and enrolling at a campus that requires Math 102, they are forced off of a guaranteed pathway to timely completion, and must retake courses with repetitive course content in order to graduate.

Academic Advising Gaps and Challenges

As California continues to maintain and expand the number of transfer pathways available, students are currently forced to navigate a transfer maze that is patched together by individual campus and regional partnerships, that lacks state or systemwide collaboration. Staff and faculty seeking to advise students are still operating within this framework held together by regional patchwork and local transfer agreements, rather than being supported by systemwide consistency and statewide transfer goals.

- **Improving Advising.** CSU campuses have inconsistencies for specific courses to be required for admission on a guaranteed ADT pathway. This confusion stems from two main decision points – which general education pathway a student will complete to be eligible for transfer admission, and which major courses will be required by different CSU campuses to fulfill ADT major preparation. Participants generally cited advising staffing challenges as a critical barrier to providing timely and accurate educational planning to students, and also widely agreed that regional partnerships between local CCCs and CSUs create stronger admission pathways in the absence of stronger statewide coordination and consistency.

- **Early Advising for ADT.** Many students don't know about the value of an ADT, or learn about this after already starting coursework at community college. Participants agreed that there is a need to systematically communicate better with K-12 partners to improve early commitment to ADT, and to ensure that marketing and communication efforts begin with K-12 partners as students begin to explore their college options.
- **Advising Around Impaction.** Some counselors and advisors shared that they place students off of ADT pathways to help them get a better shot at admission on their desired campus. This can be because of UC campuses not utilizing the ADT as an admissions guarantee, or because CSU campuses and/or majors are "impacted", with students standing a better chance at admission to their desired CSU campus by declaring a different major or entering on a different, non ADT pathway.

As we continue to build upon the demonstrated success of the ADT to continue providing California's students a streamlined pathway to transfer and attain a bachelor's degree, it is clear that there remains a great deal of work to do to strengthen implementation of the ADT. In order to ensure that the promise of the ADT is fulfilled for the benefit of all students and the state, a renewed focus and ongoing monitoring of implementation is critical. The state must continue to strengthen communication and outreach of these degree pathways, streamline lower division course requirements to ensure systemwide consistency and coordination, and ensure that regional disparities in implementation strength are systematically reduced to allow all students equitable access to opportunity through the ADT.