



## Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) at Ten Years: Student Convening 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 clear pathway for students and intersegmental collaboration on transfer. The ADT 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 those institutions with the coursework needed to earn an associate degree. 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 ADT has proven itself to be a successful and commonly utilized pathway to achieving transfer. As of October 2020, 280,000 ADTs have been conferred. Currently, over 40 ADT pathways exist at California's Community Colleges; it has been 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.

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 Current and Former Transfer Students

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 co-hosted a virtual convening with Assemblymember Marc Berman spotlighting students. The goal of this convening was to dive into nuanced issues related to the transfer experience with students having a seat at the table to inform the development of potential policy solutions. These students are instrumental to understanding the implementation of the ADT and are the leading experts on the lived experience of the transfer process.

In October of 2020, a convening specifically for students took place. This convening was focused on the lived student experience and highlighted various stages of the transfer journey. Five students joined the panel from the following campuses: San Diego Community College District, Ventura Community College District, CSU Sacramento, UC Berkeley, and University of the Pacific.

## Emerging Themes from Student Conversations

### *Communicating of the ADT and Transfer Pathways*

The students identified that there is not a clear understanding of the benefits that are embedded in an ADT. With a lack of consistent messaging across the segments many students feel confused as to what is needed to transfer to their preferred campuses.

- **Layered Transfer Pathways and 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, students called for comprehensive academic advising, and a more systemic and strategic approach around communicating available transfer pathways to students.
- **Intersegmental Coordination.** It was suggested that the CSU and UC explicitly message and advertise the ADT on all campus websites. This would allow for students planning out their transfer journey to easily connect how the ADT can be used as a steppingstone on their path to a bachelor's degree.

### *Inconsistent and/or Repetitive Course Requirements*

Students noted that getting into courses that they needed was frequently a challenge and some that had transferred described the tedious task of petitioning for credits they earned and even retaking courses.

- **Lack of Common Course Numbering and Course Descriptors.** To avoid students having to frequently petition for their credits to be accepted or being required to retake courses it is critical to establish a comprehensive, singular common course numbering system. Minor differences in course numbers can unintentionally set students back. 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 a guaranteed pathway to timely completion and must retake courses with repetitive course content in order to graduate.
- **Course Offerings.** It is imperative to have enough course offerings so that students can graduate in a timely manner. Including having courses accessible for non-traditional students who are working full-time or have dependents.

### *Academic Advising Gaps and Barriers to Success*

Many of the students spoke about the inability to transfer in a linear pathway due to not knowing what classes to take and what they needed to get to their goal.

- **Improving Advising.** Students don't always know what the bar/goal is for the program they would like to get into. Many discussed taking large amounts of credits that got them nowhere because they were unable to meet with academic counselors. Some even identified their counselors as giving them outdated information or not knowing the answers to their questions. It is critical to have enough counselors to support students, while also providing them with professional development to keep up with admission changes. It is also important to have counseling provided at more flexible times, so non-traditional students can access their services.

- **Diverse Faculty & Leadership.** The students on the panel pointed out that seeing faculty and leadership that looked like them played a critical role in their mindset. It was tangible evidence to students that they could achieve their goals to. They also stated that diverse faculty often had more diverse curriculum and teaching styles that resonated better and helped facilitate their success.
- **Eliminate Financial Barriers.** Financial aid played a pivotal role in student's ability to remain in higher education. Many students talked about not know how or when to apply to receive financial aid and sometimes being advised against applying. It is important that CCC students are given the proper tools to receive financial aid and that the Cal Grant system is prepared to accurately support them.

### **Accomplishing California's Promise**

The conference of 280,000 ADTs is an accomplishment the state can be proud of, but it is not enough. California's Master Plan outlined the ease of a two-year transfer process from a CCC to a CSU or UC. It is time to take tangible steps to delivering that promise to our students. The themes and solutions from the convening's series are derived from leaders doing the daily work across the state. It is time we listen to them and create transformative policy to ensure a transparent transfer process that eliminates barriers that students face.