



Transfer & Articulation

Postsecondary

Education Commission of the States

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Students on the move: How states are responding to increasing mobility among postsecondary students

By Maria Millard

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Once considered an infrequent occurrence, transferring between colleges is now common. More than one-third of all college graduates today transferred at least once prior to earning their degrees. The vast majority of non-traditional and lower-income students begin their college careers in community colleges, institutions designed to facilitate transfer for most of their enrolled students.¹

For these students, transfer policy is particularly critical. Community college transfers who have all or almost all of their credits transferred are two-and-a-half times more likely to graduate compared to students who had less than half of their credits transfer.²

The rise in mobility has increased pressure in many states to improve policies allowing students to easily move college credits from one institution to another. Many states have set ambitious college completion goals, making comprehensive, statewide transfer policies an important component for achieving these objectives.

ECS reviewed transfer and articulation policies in the 50 states to get a sense of how policymakers are responding in law to these changes. In the modern postsecondary environment, it is clear transfer policies are more important than ever.

[Find your state in the ECS database](#)

ECS' Transfer and Articulation database is searchable by state and by data point, including statewide common course-numbering, guaranteed transfer of associate degree and transferable lower-division core courses.

Key Takeaways

- **States are replacing fragmented transfer policies set by individual institutions with common, statewide policies to enhance consistency across institutions and systems.** Examples:
 - 36 states guarantee an associate degree earned at a public in-state institution will transfer to any other public institution in that state.
 - 35 states guarantee general education or lower-division courses earned at a public in-state institution will transfer to any other public institution in that state.
- **Florida, Louisiana and West Virginia** are among the states adopting, or seeking to adopt, innovative approaches to ensure transparency and efficiency. For example:
 - Louisiana policymakers approved a comprehensive transfer and articulation policy overhaul requiring statewide common course-numbering, guarantee transfer of associate degrees and a transferable core of lower-division courses, among other changes.

National Trends: Summary of Findings

Among states, the trend is toward replacing policies that left the determination of transfer credits to individual institutions with statewide transfer policies and procedures to enhance uniformity and consistency across institutions and across systems. ECS' 50-state policy database evaluates four components of statewide policies intended to enhance the seamless transfer of college credits. There is great variation among state policies. The information below provides a snapshot of findings while the database attempts to explain the nuances in each state.

- Statewide common course-numbering: 15 states
- Statewide credit by assessment: 16 states
- Statewide guaranteed transfer of associate degree: 36 states
- Statewide transferable lower-division core: 35 states

Statewide Common Course-Numbering

Fifteen states have statewide policies to ensure that a uniform system for numbering courses is used across public higher education institutions. States that recently adopted common course-numbering include **Arizona, Georgia, Indiana** and **Tennessee**. Some states, like **Minnesota and Colorado**, attempt to accomplish the same goal by using a common course equivalency system that matches courses by content rather than by a shared number.

Statewide Credit by Assessment

Sixteen states have consistent statewide policies for rewarding credit through tests or other academic evidence. This database examines policies around the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), College Level Examination Program (CLEP) assessment, Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB). States that have recently adopted or revised credit by assessment policies include **Hawaii, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Dakota, Oregon, Virginia** and **Washington**.

Statewide Guaranteed Transfer of Associate Degree

Thirty-six states have adopted statewide policies that ensure students who have earned an associate degree will have met all lower-division requirements and have junior standing at the state's public four-year institutions. Several states that have adopted or revised transfer of associate degree policies since 2010 include **Arkansas, Colorado, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland** and **Tennessee**.

Statewide Transferable Lower-Division Core

Thirty-five states have a transferable lower-division core of courses that meet public institutions' lower-division requirements. States that have recently adopted a common general education core include **Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina** and **Virginia**.

Policies failing to span state systems

ECS has identified states with policies considered to be only partially statewide because they do not apply to the entire public postsecondary system:

- Common course-numbering: 12 states
- Credit by assessment: 12 states
- Guaranteed transfer of associate degree: 9 states
- Transferable lower-division core: 9 states

State Examples: Florida, Louisiana and West Virginia

Innovations in these states strive to ensure transparency and efficiency. In Louisiana, policymakers added additional reporting mechanisms, career and technical education provisions, and advisory groups. In Florida, institutions must now notify students of transfer requirements and identify performance metrics. West Virginia recently attempted to add more student-centered provisions and better communicate transfer policies.

Louisiana

Louisiana's college attainment rate has a history of being low – 49th in the United States with only 27.9 percent of adults holding a postsecondary degree. In 2008, enrollment at two-year colleges was growing rapidly, but transfer into four-year colleges was limited. State Sen. Ben Nevers – after hearing from students about the barriers to transferring – brought stakeholders together to develop and promote [S.B. 285/Act 356](#).³ The 2009 bill was a funded mandate that required the Statewide Articulation and Transfer Council (SATC) – part of the Board of Regents – to implement the policies listed above, as well as:

- Seamless articulation and transfer of credit at all educational levels, including secondary schools.
- Advisory groups of secondary and postsecondary faculty to consult with policymakers.
- Potential end-of-course testing for courses approved for transfer.
- Monitoring and reporting systems to ensure institutional compliance.
- An appeals process to resolve disputes between transfer students and receiving educational institutions.
- Priority admission for transfer students with an associate degree.
- Guaranteed statewide articulation of certain CTE and workforce development programs, and transfer of course credits between secondary schools and technical and community colleges.
- A common college transcript to establish consistency across institutions.
- A centralized database of courses and course substitutions that meet the prerequisite requirements for each postsecondary certificate, industry-based certification and associate and baccalaureate degree program.

Faculty collaborated with the SATC to develop and market the new transfer policies, creating buy-in and support.

Another innovate step for Louisiana came in 2013 with the passage of [Senate Bill 93](#) (R.S. 17:3163), which provides a career pathway between CTE, industry-based certification programs and academic degree programs. It requires the SATC to:

- Develop a process to award and guarantee the transfer of credit for the academic content embedded in CTE and industry-based certification courses
- Require the community college board to develop academic transfer modules for CTE.

According to the Lumina Foundation, Louisiana is making progress in degree attainment. Census data from 2011 showed the postsecondary attainment rate of young adults at 30.8 percent, more than two percentage points higher than that of the adult population as a whole. While still below the national rate of 40.1 percent, it demonstrates progress.⁴

Florida

Florida's community colleges historically have been the primary point of access to public postsecondary education. The state has held the spotlight for strong transfer and articulation policies, particularly its guaranteed transfer of associate degree policy.⁵ However, Florida ranks below the national average in college degree attainment.⁶ Continued efforts to create a seamless transition from community college to a four-year institution may positively impact the state's completion rate. In addition to the five statewide transfer policies listed above, recent legislation [H.B. 7135](#) further supports transfer and completion through a student-centered approach:

- Students entering an associate degree program must, within the first completed 30 credits, indicate a baccalaureate degree program of interest at a four-year institution. The institution must notify the student of the prerequisites for that program.
- Potential concurrent enrollment agreements.
- Performance metrics for the FCS must include transfer rates.
- An accountability plan for the State University System and each constituent university and possible funding modifications to reduce barriers and support the attainment of goals identified in institutional plans.
- Student-level data must be reported annually and include retention rates, transfer rates, completion rates, graduation rates, employment and placement rates, and earnings of graduates.

Florida's efforts are praised but low high school graduation rates pose another challenge to raising postsecondary completion rates in the state.⁷ Improving high school graduation rates, coupled with strong transfer policy, likely will boost attainment goals and strengthen the state's economy.

West Virginia

Despite West Virginia's efforts to provide a seamless transfer experience for students, policymakers continued to hear that the process was too confusing and that students lacked sufficient information about which credits would transfer. In an effort to bring transparency and efficiency to the transfer process, Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin and his team crafted transfer provisions as part of West Virginia's [Senate Bill 409](#) (2014). They convened stakeholders – campus administrators, system leaders and the Higher Education Policy Commission – to gather input and create buy-in. Their collaboration resulted in innovative approaches focused on students. In addition to the five components of transfer policy listed at the beginning of this document, S.B. 409 included:

- Priority admission for associate degree graduates over out-of-state students.
- Guidance and counseling aimed at students who intend to transfer.
- Uniform data collection and reporting methods submitted to the governor and legislature annually.
- An appeals process for disagreements between transferring students and receiving institutions regarding transfer credits.
- The encouragement of policies to establish financial aid prioritized for transfer students.
- Institutional compliance policy enforced by a 5 percent reduction of general revenue appropriations.
- A requirement that all public institutions publish transfer policies, including courses eligible for guaranteed transfer, in course catalogs and on institutional websites.

West Virginia's transfer initiatives were part of a larger education reform bill that did not pass this session due to components related to the K-12 system. With strong support for the transfer and articulation component of the bill, there will be efforts to move those policies forward without legislation in the interim.⁸ West Virginia's efforts demonstrate that the state is working to increase transparency and better communicate policies to students.

Policy Considerations

Policies that are transparent and clearly communicated to students and their families better promote a seamless transfer process and may further support states' completion goals. Louisiana's transfer policies strive to bring transparency to the process by mandating reporting systems and a database that lists all course equivalencies. Legislation like Florida's mandated communication with students about transfer policy, and like West Virginia's counseling component, may work to increase community college transfer rates and minimize the number of courses that transfer students take that aren't counted for credit at another institution. Leading states recognize that if students don't understand the policies, or if they are not implemented or enforced effectively, then their impact will be limited.

Conclusion

ECS' 50-state policy review shows there is room to strengthen transfer policies in many states. Such states have an opportunity to further remove barriers for transfer students by creating more uniformity across the state. This issue has received attention from federal lawmakers. U.S. Rep. George Miller, D-California, is seeking to pass a bill – Transferring Credits for College Completion Act of 2014⁹ – to increase transparency and uniformity by requiring all public institutions to adopt common course-numbering, transferable lower-division courses and guaranteed transfer of associate degrees. The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia could have been speaking for many states when it acknowledged in its State Policy on College Transfer document, "This goal of smooth and orderly transfer has not been fully achieved, even though a number of community colleges and senior institutions have worked together diligently."¹⁰

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About the Database:

ECS' 2014 Transfer and Articulation Database is a 50-state analysis of transfer policy. It builds off the [2010 State Note](#) on transfer policy. We use primary resources, including state statute, rules and regulations, recently enacted legislation and executive orders. State agencies were asked to fact-check our analysis and their responses were incorporated where possible.

Related ECS products:

- *Recent state policies/activities - [Postsecondary Academic Affairs--Transfer/Articulation](#)*
- *[Transfer/Articulation](#) Issue Site*
- *Selected Research & Readings: [Transfer/Articulation](#)*
- *[ECS Postsecondary Issues](#)*

Appendix A: State counts on specific transfer policies

1. Does your state have a statewide common course-numbering system?

Yes: 15

Partial*: 12

Arizona	California
Arkansas	Connecticut
Colorado	Kansas
Florida	Kentucky
Georgia	Minnesota
Indiana	Mississippi
Louisiana	North Carolina
Montana	North Dakota
Nevada	Oklahoma
New Mexico	Vermont
South Dakota	Virginia
Tennessee	Washington
Texas	
Utah	
Wyoming	

2. Does your state have a statewide policy on credit by assessment?

Yes: 16

Partial*: 12

Arizona	Alabama
Florida	Colorado
Hawaii	Delaware
Kentucky	Indiana
Louisiana	Kansas
Maryland	Minnesota
North Dakota	Montana
Ohio	Nevada
Oklahoma	South Dakota
Oregon	Vermont
Rhode Island	Virginia
South Carolina	Wyoming
Tennessee	
Utah	
Washington	
West Virginia	

*Partial – Refers to policies that encompass individual campuses or institutions but are not uniform statewide.

States not listed do not have policies addressing this issue.

3. Does your state have a statewide guaranteed transfer of associate degree?

Yes: 36

Partial*: 9

Alabama	California
Alaska	Connecticut
Arizona	Illinois
Arkansas	Minnesota
Colorado	Nebraska
Florida	New York
Georgia	Pennsylvania
Hawaii	South Carolina
Idaho	Vermont
Indiana	
Kansas	
Kentucky	
Louisiana	
Maine	
Maryland	
Massachusetts	
Mississippi	
Missouri	
Montana	
Nevada	
New Jersey	
New Mexico	
North Carolina	
North Dakota	
Ohio	
Oklahoma	
Oregon	
Rhode Island	
South Dakota	
Tennessee	
Utah	
Virginia	
Washington	
West Virginia	
Wisconsin	
Wyoming	

*Partial – Refers to policies that encompass individual campuses or institutions but are not uniform statewide.

States not listed do not have policies addressing this issue.

4. Does your state have a policy on transferable lower-division courses?

Yes: 35

Partial*: 8

Alabama	Illinois
Alaska	Kansas
Arizona	Minnesota
Arkansas	Nebraska
California	New York
Colorado	Pennsylvania
Connecticut	Washington
Florida	Wisconsin
Georgia	
Hawaii	
Idaho	
Indiana	
Kentucky	
Louisiana	
Maryland	
Massachusetts	
Mississippi	
Missouri	
Montana	
Nevada	
New Jersey	
New Mexico	
North Carolina	
North Dakota	
Ohio	
Oklahoma	
Oregon	
South Dakota	
Tennessee	
Texas	
Utah	
Virginia	
West Virginia	
Wisconsin	
Wyoming	

*Partial – Refers to policies that encompass individual campuses or institutions but are not uniform statewide.

States not listed do not have policies addressing this issue.

Appendix B: Glossary

The term “statewide” refers to policies that apply to all public two- and four-year institutions. Policies that apply only to certain systems and voluntary agreements are not considered statewide.

Statewide transferable lower-division core of courses transfers in full across institutions meeting a receiving institution’s lower-division requirements. States refer to these types of policies by different names and may define the core by specific courses or only subject areas.

Statewide common course-numbering is a uniform system for numbering courses across public higher education institutions. A common course equivalency system matches courses by content rather than by a shared number but attempts to accomplish the same goal.

Statewide guaranteed transfer of associate degree guarantees students who have earned an associate degree to have met all lower-division requirements and attained junior standing at a public four-year institution. The particulars of state policies regarding the transfer of associate degrees vary but the general goals are similar.

Statewide articulation guide provides course requirements and transfer policies for students, advisors and faculty.

Statewide credit by assessment is a long-standing but recently expanding policy approach intended to provide college-level credit through tests or other academic evidence. This database examines policies regarding the following standard assessments: Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), College Level Examination Program (CLEP) assessment, Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB). This database does not include policies specific to PLA for military personnel.

Endnotes

¹ Hossler et al. [Signature Report 6](#). National Center for Educational Statistics. 2013

² Monaghan and Attewell. [The Community College Route to the Bachelor’s Degree](#). March 2014

³ [A Stronger Nation through Higher Education](#). Lumina Foundation. 2013.

⁴ [Louisiana’s Transfer Degree](#). College Productivity. Lumina Foundation. 2011.

⁵ Wellman. [State Policy and Community College-Baccalaureate Transfer](#). The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education & The Institute for Higher Education Policy. 2002.

⁶ [A Stronger Nation through Higher Education](#). Lumina Foundation. 2013.

⁷ [Goal 2025](#). Florida College Access Network.

⁸ Gov. Tomblin’s office. Email correspondence April 2014.

⁹ Miller, George. [The Transferring College for College Completion Act of 2014](#). Committee on Education and the Workforce. 2014.

¹⁰ [State Policy on College Transfer](#). State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. October 2004

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