

CHUTES OR LADDERS?

Strengthening California Community College Transfer So More Students Earn the Degrees They Seek

Of students who enrolled in community college in 2013-14, completed at least 12 credits within 6 years, and attempted transfer-level English or math:

2.5% transferred in two years or less

23% transferred in four years or less

40% transferred in six years or less



To read the full report, visit <https://bit.ly/ChutesOrLadders>

Each year, over two million students attend one of the 116 community colleges across the state. In 2019-20, these students included almost a half-million first-time freshmen seeking to earn an associate degree and/or transfer to a four-year university. Unfortunately, if past trends persist, **only 2.5% will transfer in two years, and only 23% will transfer in four years.**

GOOD NEWS

In this report, we note the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) is improving the transfer pathway:

- 2,887 ADT pathways exist across the state's 115 degree-granting community colleges.
- Students earning ADTs graduate with **6.5 fewer excess credits** than students who earned traditional associate degrees.
- More than half of students who transfer to a CSU on a guaranteed ADT pathway are **graduating with their bachelor's degrees in two years**, and this share has been steadily growing.
- In 2020, 28,439 students enrolled at a CSU campus with an ADT in hand, and the proportion of transfer students enrolling on a guaranteed path is growing annually.
- More than half (54 percent) of Latinx students earning associate degrees from the California Community Colleges are earning ADTs.
- ADT enrollment has increased steadily at the CSU, but not all students with ADTs are on a guaranteed path, meaning they enroll without the benefit of junior standing.



BAD NEWS

As we celebrate the progress and role that the ADT has played, we also note that these improvements are not universal to all student groups, and significant room for growth remains:

- While the percentage of Black graduates who are earning ADTs has doubled over the past five years, **only 37 percent of Black community college students who earn associate degrees are awarded ADTs.**
- Students earning **ADTs still complete an average of 84 semester credits** at community colleges, despite the typical associate degree requiring 60 semester credits.
- Among incoming transfer students to the CSU, 21 percent have an ADT but are not on a guaranteed path.

Like Chutes and Ladders players, California community college students who want to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree are trying to make progress, but one bad roll of the dice can set them back several turns. Multiple barriers, including duplicative, ever-changing coursework requirements and a lack of unified, systemwide, transferrable course agreements between colleges and universities, have resulted in a complex transfer system. The Associate Degree for Transfer is a critical ladder to transfer and earning a bachelor's degree.

Limited major options for ADT earners

Lower-division course re-taking



Transferring to a low-performing for-profit university

Lack of course agreements between colleges and universities



Confusing course numbering systems

Remedial education

Transfer-level course placement

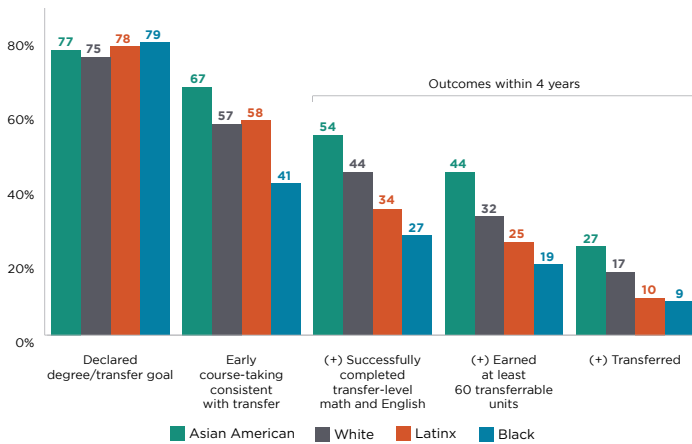
Guided Pathways

Associate Degree for Transfer

Racial and ethnic inequities develop early in the transfer process. Although students across different racial and ethnic categories who enrolled in the 2014-15 academic year identified their goal of earning a degree and/or transferring to a four-year institution at comparably high rates, early course-taking patterns, the successful completion of transfer-level math and English, the accrual of transferable credits, and ultimate transfer rates vary widely by race/ethnicity.

Despite similar rates of declaring a goal involving earning a degree and/or transferring, only 9% of Black students and 10% of Latinx students transfer in four years, compared to 17% and 27% of their white and Asian American peers, respectively.

Figure 1. Community College Transfer Related Outcomes by Race/Ethnicity

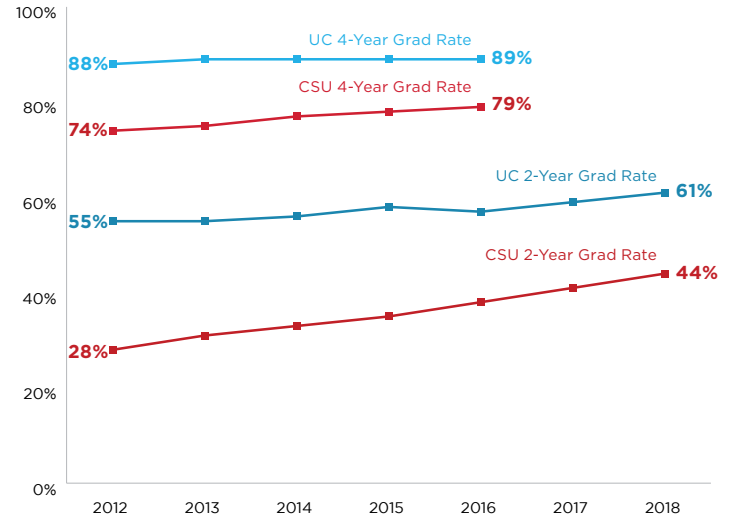


Source: Johnson, H. & Mejia, M.C. (2020). Increasing Community College Transfers. [Report]. San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Institute of California.

Although the two-year graduation rates at the CSU and the UC have improved for transfer students, not enough students are being supported to graduate within two years of enrolling at the University of California (UC) or the California State University (CSU) systems. At the CSU, less than half (44%) of transfer students are awarded a bachelor's degree within two years of enrolling at the CSU, and only 61% are supported to finish their degree within two years of transferring to the UC.

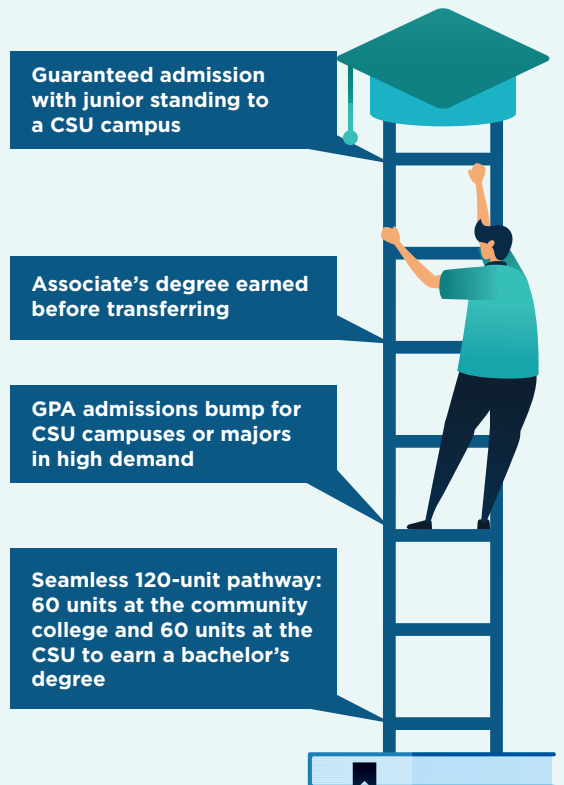
Two-year graduation rates are improving, but less than half (44%) of CSU transfers and less than two-thirds (61%) of transfers to the UC are supported to complete their degrees in two years.

Figure 2. Two- and Four-Year Graduation Rates for Transfer Students at the University of California and the California State University Systems.



Source: California State University Office of the Chancellor, Division of Institutional Research and Analyses, 2020, Graduation Dashboard. Available at: <https://www2.calstate.edu/data-center/institutional-research-analyses>

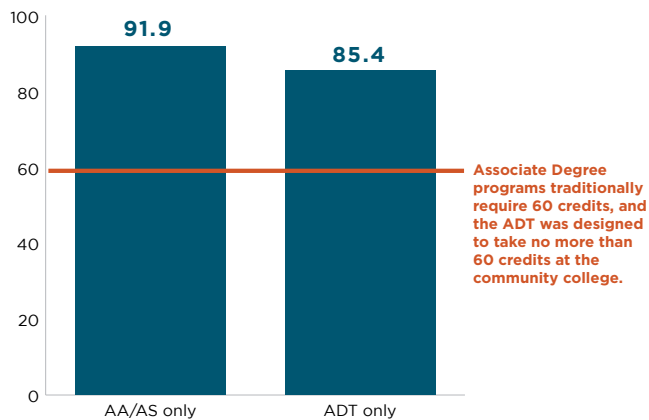
THE ASSOCIATE DEGREE FOR TRANSFER A Ladder to Success



THE ADT IS LIFTING COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS TO THEIR TRANSFER GOALS.

Students earning an ADT complete their degrees with 6.5 fewer credits than students earning AA/AS degrees.

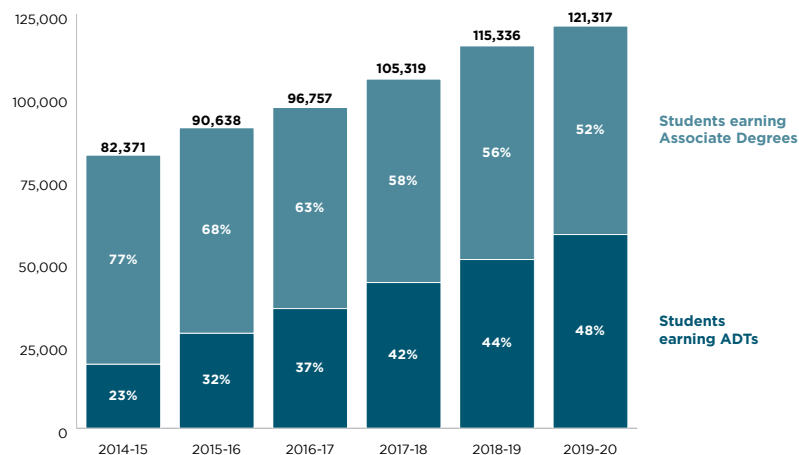
Figure 3. Credits earned by Degree Type



Source: Baker, R., Kurlaender, M., & Friedman, E. (2020). Improving the Pathway to the BA: An Examination of the Associate Degree for Transfer [Report]. Davis, CA: Wheelhouse Center for Community College Research and Leadership.

ADTs continue to grow as a share of associate degrees awarded at the California Community Colleges, but they are still not the preferred pathway for California's transfer students.

Figure 4. Students Earning Degrees, by Degree Type



Source: Cal-PASS Plus. (2020). Student Success Metrics, [Data Dashboard].

If ADTs accounted for 80% of all associate degrees conferred, California could save almost \$15 million/year in tuition waivers at the California Community Colleges.

Table 1. Savings to State in Community College Fee (Tuition) Waivers For Increasing ADT Awards

% of associate degree earners with an ADT	Estimated additional annual savings from a 6.5-credit difference	Estimated additional annual savings from a true 60-credit pathway
48%		\$40,611,765
50%	\$666,748	\$43,874,834
60%	\$4,299,707	\$61,654,568
70%	\$7,932,665	\$79,434,303
80%	\$11,565,624	\$97,214,037

One of the goals of the ADT was to streamline the transfer process and ensure that students would not spend more time in community college than necessary. Evidence shows that **students who earn an ADT graduate with fewer excess credits than their peers who graduate with terminal associate degrees.** When examining data on students who enrolled in the 2017-18 academic year, researchers at the Wheelhouse Center for Community College Research and Leadership found that students who had earned an ADT carried an average of 85.4 credits, compared to an average of 91.9 for students graduating with AA or AS degrees—a difference of 6.5 fewer credits. While this is better, it is still far higher than the 60 credits required for an ADT.

As can be seen in Figure 4, the California Community Colleges have increased the number of students awarded degrees by about 50%, from about 82,000 in 2014-15 to just over 120,000 in 2019-20. Over this same period, ADT-earners have come to account for almost half of all associate-degree earners. In the 2019-20 academic year, 48% of associate-degree-earners earned ADTs.

This means that nearly half of the California Community College graduates are eligible to transfer to a CSU with automatic junior standing in their respective degree pathways. Additionally, community college credits cost \$46 each. **The Campaign for College Opportunity estimates that the state saved over \$10 million as a result of the 6.5-credits saved by ADT-earners in 2019-20 alone.**

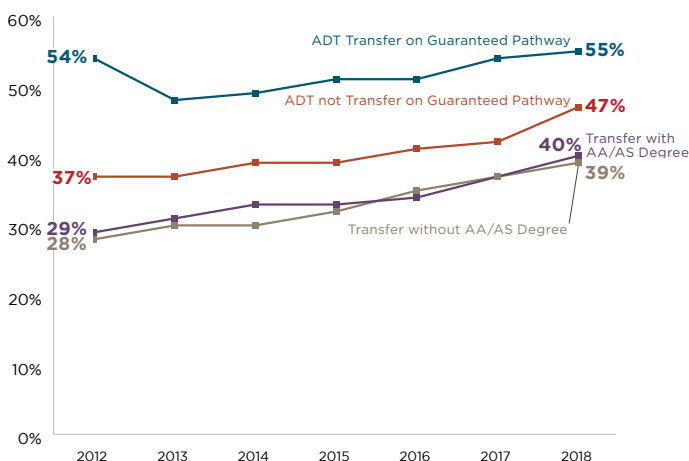
If ADTs were to make up 80% of associate degrees conferred, the state would save an additional \$11.5 million in community college fee waivers, just through the 6.5 credit reduction. This money could be invested in our campuses to provide greater access to high demand courses, advising, and student support services. **If the state and its public colleges and universities prioritized the ADT pathway and met the 60-credit goal for ADT-earners in 2019-20, California would have saved an additional \$40.6 million.**

THE ADT IS A LADDER HELPING CSU STUDENTS FINISH THEIR BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN LESS TIME.

The ADT pathway is helping ensure that more transfer students graduate in two years or less. Of the students who transferred to the CSU on a guaranteed pathway in 2018, more than half (55%) graduated within two years.

More than half of CSU students who have an ADT and are on a guaranteed pathway are graduating within two years of transfer.

Figure 5. CSU Two-Year Graduation Rates by Transfer Pathway



Source: California State University Institutional Research and Analysis. (2020). New Undergraduate Transfers from California Community Colleges or Other Institutions. Available from: <https://www2.calstate.edu/data-center/institutional-research-analyses>

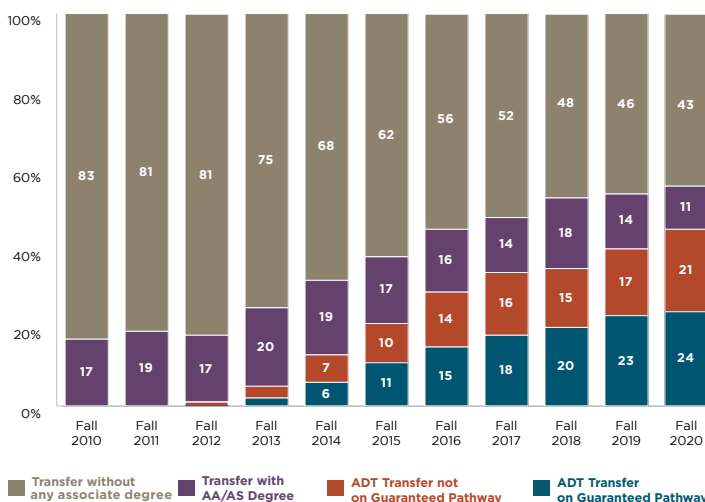
Even among students with ADTs who were not on guaranteed paths, 47% graduated within two years. As noted earlier, the overall two-year graduation rate for students who transferred in 2018 was 44%.

Two-year graduation rates at the CSU for students who transferred with a terminal associate degree are comparable to those for students who transfer without any associate degree.

The CSU is currently the primary recipient of transfer students with ADTs. One recent report showed that, among students who enrolled in community college in 2014-15 and earned an ADT within four years, 73% transferred to a CSU, 9% to a UC, and 8% to other colleges (independent nonprofits and private, for-profits colleges, as well as out-of-state colleges). As Figure 6 shows, the share of incoming CSU students on guaranteed pathways has been growing, but still less than a quarter (24%) of incoming transfer students at the CSU were on an ADT-guaranteed path in fall 2020.

Almost a quarter (24%) of CSU transfer students were on an ADT-guaranteed path in fall 2020.

Figure 6. Transfers to the CSU by Transfer Pathway



Source: California State University Institutional Research and Analysis. (2020). Graduation and Continuation Rates, California Community College Transfers. Available from: <https://www2.calstate.edu/data-center/institutional-research-analyses>

THE PATH TO THE UC IS STILL A MIX OF CHUTES AND LADDERS.

The provisions and guarantees built into the ADT do not apply to the UC. This means that California Community College students intending to transfer often must make a decision early in their trajectories on whether to apply to the CSU or the UC, instead of both. In California's K-12 system, students in high school can take one curricular pathway (A-G) with different grade point average requirements to be qualified for admission to both systems.

By not aligning the ADT with UC admissions and not creating an admission guarantee for ADT earners, the UC is adding to the complexity of transfer. Though the UC has recognized the academic value of the ADT and has used the ADT as a framework in strengthening the pathway to the UC, the degree does not guarantee admission to the UC system.

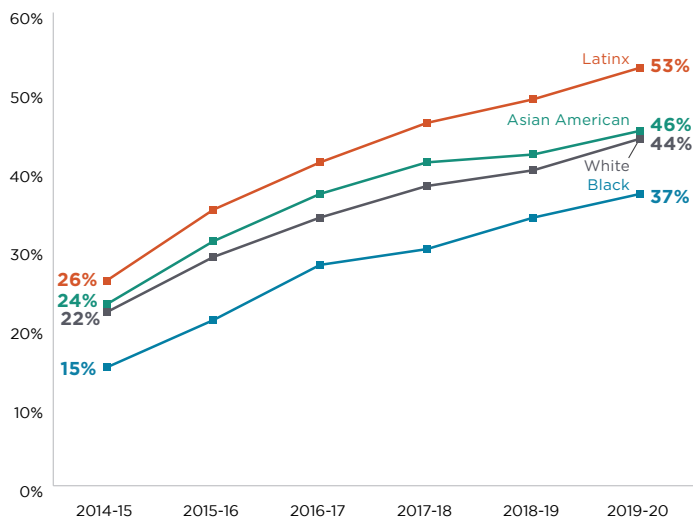


BLACK CALIFORNIANS ARE NOT AS WELL SUPPORTED ONTO ADT PATHWAYS AS THEIR PEERS.

As Figure 7 shows, the share of Black associate-degree-earners who are awarded ADTs has more than doubled since 2014-15, but still scarcely a third (37%) of Black graduates with associate degrees are awarded ADTs.

More than half (53%) of Latinx associate-degree earners were awarded ADTs. Only 37% of Black associate degree-earners were awarded ADTs in 2019-20, meaning only a third of Black associate-degree earners were guaranteed admission with junior standing to the CSU.

Figure 7. ADTs as a share of Associate Degrees by Race/Ethnicity



Source: California State University Institutional Research and Analysis. (2020). New Undergraduate Transfers from California Community Colleges or Other Institutions. Available from: <https://www2.calstate.edu/data-center/institutional-research-analyses>

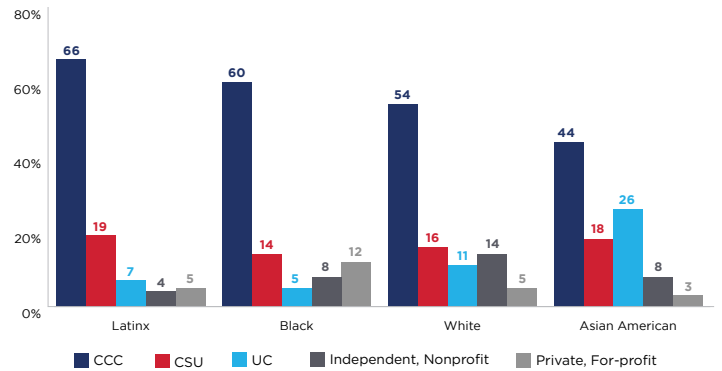
Figure 7 also shows the dramatic variation in ADT conferral. Latinx graduates earning associate degrees are earning ADTs at higher rates than students from any other racial or ethnic background. **Indeed, the percentage of Latinx associate-degree-earners who are earning ADTs has doubled over the past six years, with more than half (53%) of Latinx graduates earning ADTs.**

A ROBUST TRANSFER LADDER IS PARTICULARLY CRITICAL FOR CALIFORNIA'S BLACK AND LATINX STUDENTS.

A robust transfer pathway is critical to California's economic future. The California Community Colleges enroll the majority of undergraduates in California, and, as shown in Figure 8, 66% of Latinx students and 60% of Black students enrolled in a California community college as a freshman student.

The California Community Colleges enroll the largest share of freshmen students across racial/ethnic subgroups, with two-thirds (66%) of Latinx students beginning their college journey at a community college.

Figure 8. Racial/Ethnic Composition of First Time Freshmen in California's Higher Education Systems, Fall 2019



Source: California State University Institutional Research and Analysis. (2020). New Undergraduate Transfers from California Community Colleges or Other Institutions. Available from: <https://www2.calstate.edu/data-center/institutional-research-analyses>

Ensuring Latinx and Black students have the opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree requires a robust pathway from the California Community Colleges to the CSU and the UC.



ASSEMBLY BILL 928 (AB 928) CURRENTLY BEING CONSIDERED IN THE CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE WILL STRENGTHEN TRANSFER IN CALIFORNIA.

Assembly Bill 928 (Berman) takes a crucial step in transforming the game of chutes and ladders for community college students, creating a student-centered transfer roadmap and ensuring that California makes progress toward closing racial equity gaps in transfer attainment in the following ways:

- **Intersegmental Implementation Committee:** AB 928 establishes critical oversight to ensure segments of higher education and key stakeholders are in lock step to establish goals to improve racially equitable transfer and strengthen the ADT.
- **Singular General Education Pathway:** By charging the CSU and UC to consolidate to a singular general education pathway, AB 928 eliminates a significant point of confusion in the transfer preparation and academic advising processes for community college students.
- **Default ADT Pathway Placement:** AB 928 establishes more accessible reentry points to higher education, rather than the current system of pathway placement that unintentionally maintains hurdles to reentry. With a default pathway placement that ensures equitable access to ADT pathways for students declaring a goal of transfer, students have a much easier path to completing a bachelor's degree.



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