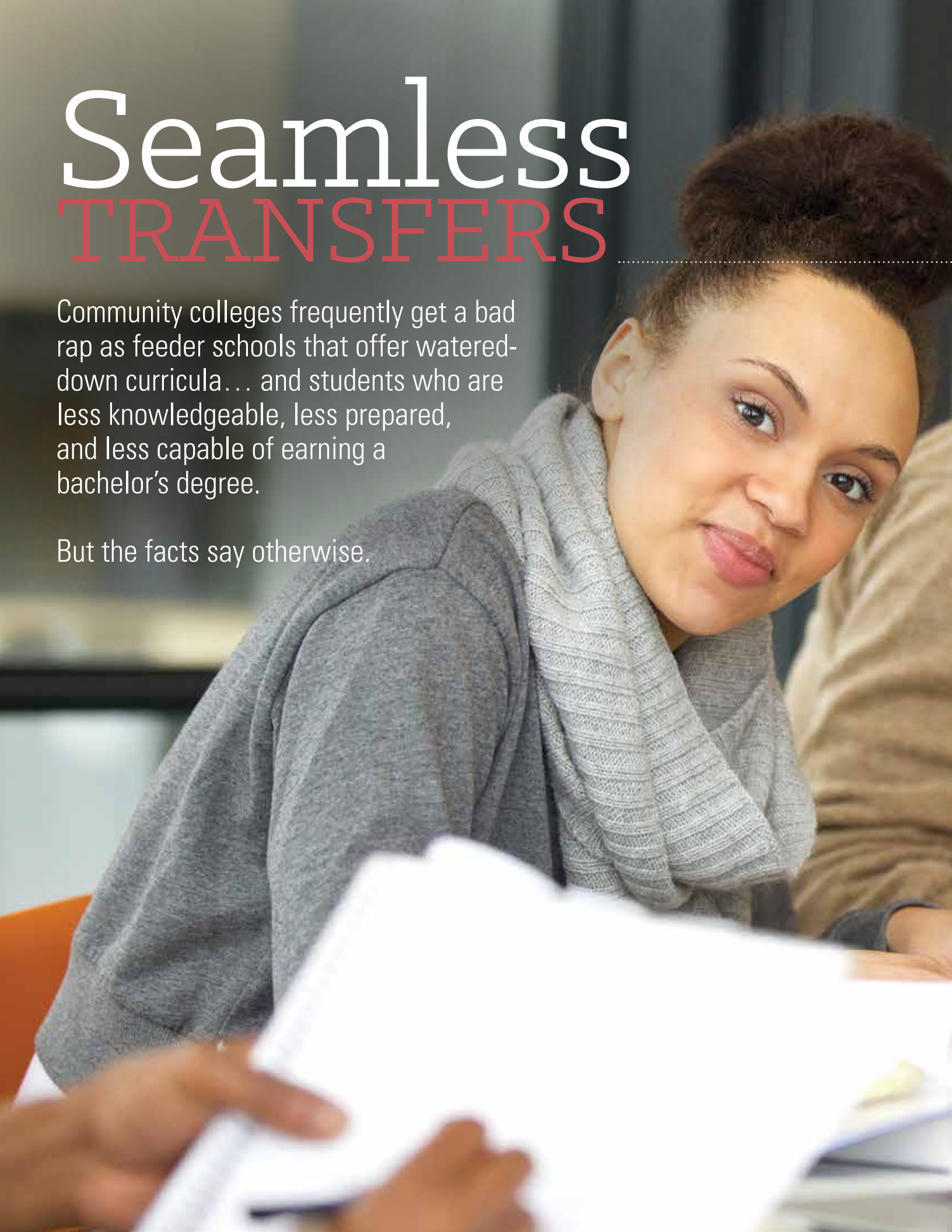


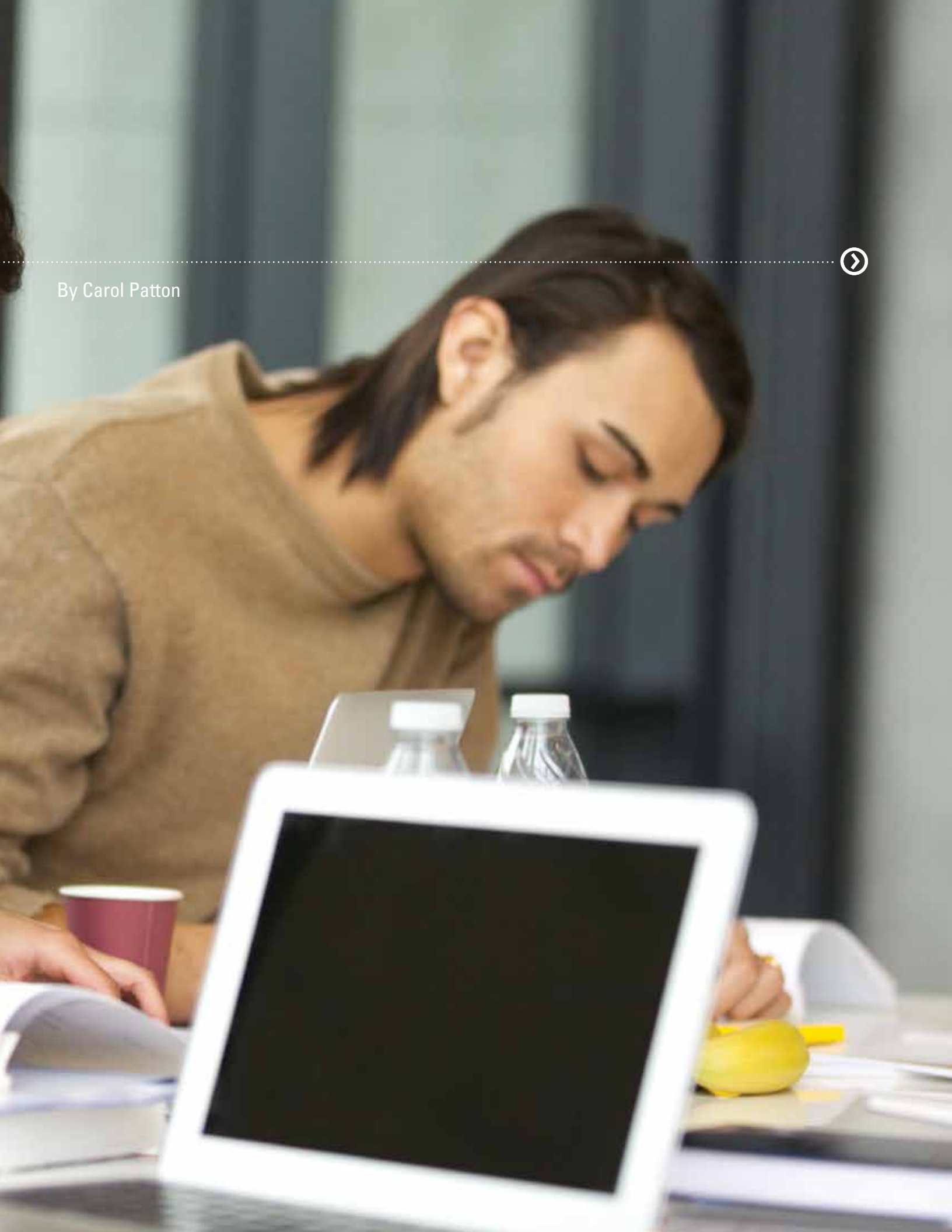
# Seamless TRANSFERS

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Community colleges frequently get a bad rap as feeder schools that offer watered-down curricula... and students who are less knowledgeable, less prepared, and less capable of earning a bachelor's degree.

But the facts say otherwise.





By Carol Patton





For more than a decade, community colleges have been overcoming stubborn myths or stereotypes. Many work with four-year schools to develop articulation agreements designed to focus more on learning objectives or student outcomes and less on course content to ensure seamless transfers.

In 2014, approximately 7.3 million undergraduate students (42 percent) were enrolled in community colleges in the US, the latest statistic offered by the Community College Research Center. At some schools, like Cleveland State University (OH), more transfer students graduated in 2014 with a bachelor's degree than students who entered four-year institutions as freshmen.

For more than a decade, community colleges have been overcoming stubborn myths and stereotypes. Many work with four-year schools to develop articulation agreements designed to focus more on learning objectives or student outcomes to ensure seamless transfers.

In some cases, adjunct professors also teach at both two- and four-year schools, minimizing potential gaps in student learning. Students no longer repeat core courses or wait another year or two to graduate.

Most importantly, such changes are paving the way for motivated students to earn four-year degrees and claim their place in a job market that lacks skilled workers.

### **A GROWING RECRUITMENT POOL**

Not surprisingly, many students attend community colleges because tuition costs are significantly lower. According to The College Board, tuition at public two-year colleges averages \$3,440, compared to \$9,410 at public four-year colleges.

Janna Whitaker, associate director of admission at Baldwin Wallace University (BW) in Berea, Ohio, confirmed that more students are saving money by enrolling at community colleges and then transferring to four-year

institutions to complete their degree. She said tuition at BW, for example, costs roughly 50 percent more than tuition at local community colleges.

Based on costs, some may argue that community colleges are taking students from four-year institutions. The reality is that they are serving a population that otherwise may not attend college at all. Four-year colleges should be looking to community colleges for recruits—ones who've already proved they are successful students.

Creating the path of least resistance from two- to four-year institutions benefits all parties, yet the biggest obstacle for seamless transfers are still four-year institutions, said Bart Grachan, interim associate dean for progress and completion at LCC in Long Island City, New York.

"Almost half of the nation's undergraduates are in community colleges (yet) they're the least talked about sector in higher education," said Grachan. He said not reaching out specifically to transfers is a missed opportunity.

He explained that many four-year schools' application processes don't reflect the differences between transfer students and incoming freshmen. Some also require SAT scores from students with associate degrees. In such scenarios, he said even SAT administrators would say the metric doesn't reflect student success—the requirement is useless.

A huge disconnect occurs when four-year schools aren't clear or won't discuss how receptive they are to transfer students. Students making plans to transfer need to know whether schools offer the same financial aid to transfers as they give to freshman, recognize associate degrees, and how credits convey. If this information isn't readily available, schools can miss out on this population of recruits.

“Often, there’s a need for transfers, but not an acceptance of transfers,” Grachan said. “(Some schools) don’t make transferring easy.”

Fortunately, some four-year schools are starting to recognize their importance, according to Nancy Lee Sanchez, executive director of the Kaplan Educational Foundation in NY, which works with roughly 25 community college students each year.

The public charity supports low-income students of color who demonstrate high potential. She said 87 percent earn an associate degree, while 92 percent transfer to four-year schools all over the country and are offered “amazing” financial aid packages. Just as impressive, 86 percent earn bachelor’s degrees.

She said her students have basically encountered two challenges: Paying the \$75 transfer fee, which only three schools in 10 years have refused to waive, and finding adequate housing. She explained that the average community college student (who is at least 25) tends to be older than the typical university student and may be married with children. However, not all campuses support family housing.

“(Community colleges) should act as a bridge to four-year institutions and make sure (they) come and recruit from this diverse pool,” said Sanchez, a former community college adviser. “It’s our responsibility to make sure that four-year institutions of all calibers understand the talent, diversity, and resiliency of community college students.”

## ARTICULATION TAKES A VILLAGE

### CUNY–LCC MODEL, NEW YORK

Part of the City University of New York (CUNY), LaGuardia Community College’s (LCC) three-year graduation rate among its estimated 20,000 students is roughly 20 percent, said Grachan. He said another 10 percent transfer to other schools before they earn an associate degree, while 67 percent of its graduates transfer to a four-year college.

For many years, CUNY has developed policies supporting seamless transfers to any four-year institution within its system, he said.

“CUNY has worked very hard to make sure those credits get used and don’t just move,” he said, explaining that some colleges count transfer credits as electives instead of using them to fulfill requirements toward a student’s major. “There’s an articulation agreement attached to every new program that is developed. If we decide to tomorrow to create a new major in philosophy, to get that major approved, four-year colleges have to accept the courses’ design and structure of the degree program.”

The same approach has also been applied to four-year private schools throughout the state. Grachan noted LCC supports a separate transfer services office that helps students find appropriate four-year schools, complete the application process, and apply for scholarships; facilitate and grow connections with four-year institutions; coordinate transfer fairs each semester, and help high school counselors better understand the benefits of community colleges along with the transfer process.

During the last two years, the college has also been training faculty and program directors on the meaning of articulation—how to create transferable courses and incorporate them into the process of academic planning.

### BACK TRANSFERS

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Articulation agreements should help both two- and four-year schools, said Joe Vainner, coordinator of special programs recruitment at Cleveland State University (CSU).

Vainner explained that in The Cleveland State – Cuyahoga Community College (tri-C) dual admission program, launched in 2009, students can be enrolled at both schools simultaneously, take classes on both campuses during a semester, and access CSU’s advisers, library, technology services, and some student services. CSU also sends “back transfers” to community colleges, which he believes is an essential component of articulation agreements.

“If students transfer to CSU under this program, we’ll send their transcripts back to their community college,” Vainner said. “If they meet their associate requirements, they can get their associate degree based on that combination of CSU and tri-C classes. That’s a key part of our program... and the piece a lot of four-year school administrators don’t think about.”

Slightly more than half of CSU’s 2,000 incoming students each year represent transfer students. The majority enters as sophomores or juniors. The six-year graduation rate in 2014 for transfer students was 57 percent compared to 34 percent for students who entered as freshmen that same year.

That’s “counter-intuitive” for people who still think community college students are not high performers, Vainner said. He believes community college students enter four-year schools better prepared to learn than freshmen.

“If you can get students an associate degree and to plan to get a bachelor’s degree in only two additional years,” said Vainner, “then you have a really good program that’s going to attract students who are successful.”

### USHE MODEL, SALT LAKE CITY

“Our two- and four-year institutions share the same or similar learning outcomes,” said Phyllis (Teddi) Safman, assistant commissioner for academic affairs at the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) in Salt Lake City, which is comprised of eight Utah public colleges and universities.

Nearly 20 years ago, the USHE created policies to ensure seamless transfers between its public institutions. Back then, she explained, there were about five community colleges. The transfer rate to four-year institutions was approximately 60 percent. Since then, all but one of those schools became four-year institutions, dropping the rate to roughly 30 percent.

Among the first steps to ensure seamless transfers, she said, was bringing the faculty together from both two- and four-year schools to address learning outcomes, expectations, and student assessments. Without doing so, she said schools can only work around the edges and never support “whole transfers.”

Safman advised insisting that academic advisors and registrars help develop programs and contribute their expertise. She added that those who resist participating need to understand they’re an important part of the big picture—student success.

There is one group of individuals Safman said should never be involved: “You do not want lawmakers who know *nothing* about curricula to come out with laws having to do with curricula.” She continued, “You don’t want intrusion from lawmakers on academic issues, academic programs, academic

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curricula, academic learning outcomes, or assessments. That has to be done by faculty.”

Meanwhile, she said, the USHE's Interstate Passport Network has caught fire. Managed by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), the program started roughly seven years ago, enabling seamless transfers between schools in seven western states. The full program went into effect this year, covering all general education curricula, such as English and science courses. Two- and four-year public institutions in 13 states nationwide currently participate.

They have to wait several years for program results, but the National Student Clearinghouse will be responsible for gathering national student data and comparing the success of Passport students to nonparticipants.

“Nothing starts out perfectly,” said Safman. “As we gather data from Passport, we'll make adjustments over time. (We expect) faculty to learn more about constructing proficiency criteria to demonstrate that (students) are proficient in learning outcomes.”

### OHIO MODEL

About 10 years ago, Whitaker said the state of Ohio implemented the Ohio Transfer Module, a group of classes that roughly mirror the general education requirements of universities. By completing that module, students fulfill those requirements and enter universities as juniors.

BW, which supports 3,800 undergraduate students, participates in the Ohio Transfer Council, which developed an articulation agreement that mirrors the state's standards so private schools can become more transfer-friendly.

“Over the last 20 years, we had long-standing articulation agreements with the three main community colleges in the Cleveland area,” Whitaker said. “But when the module came along, our registrar felt like we needed to be more competitive and drafted an articulation agreement that would allow these three community colleges to follow the module.”

Since then, the agreement has been expanded to any accredited community college in the region. Whitaker said it's very easy for community college students to transfer to BW, focus on their major, and earn a bachelor's degree in two years.

Whitaker added that these seamless transfer programs have required an across-the-board commitment from faculty; advisors; the offices of admission; registrars; communications departments; and recruiters who visit community college campuses no less than three times each semester.

Adjunct professors at BW also teach at community colleges, which helps ensure consistency of coursework. Likewise, university staff meet with faculty and academic advisers at community colleges to review not only courses, but also BW's online transfer guide and its articulation agreement.

Whitaker said the key to success “goes back to communication and finding one person who's passionate about transfer students on our campus who can be a force for change.”

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Visit the transfer section of the NACAC website at [www.nacacnet.org/transfer](http://www.nacacnet.org/transfer) for more information and resources.

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