Takes Two to Tango: Applying Insights from Highly-Effective Transfer Partnerships

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Takes Two to Tango: Essential Practices of Highly Effective Transfer Partnerships

John Fink and Davis Jenkins

Abstract

Objective: The objective of this study was to describe practices of 2- and 4-year institutional partnerships effective in supporting transfer student success. Methods: Using student records from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) for the entire 2007 fall cohort of first-time-in-college community college students nationwide, researchers identified partnerships of 2- and 4-year institutions that were more effective than expected (controlling for student and institutional characteristics) in enabling community college entrants to transfer to a 4-year institution and earn a bachelor’s degree. Based on this methodology, and in partnership with the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program, researchers visited six pairs of 2- and 4-year college transfer partnerships identified as high performers, interviewing more than 350 faculty, student-facing and senior-level staff, and transfer students. Results: From these in-depth interviews, researchers identified a set of essential transfer practices common among these highly effective institutional partnerships. The practices were grouped under three broad strategies: (a) make transfer a priority, (b) create clear programmatic pathways with aligned high-quality instruction, and (c) provide tailored transfer advising. Contributions: This study offers a set of essential transfer practices culled from national fieldwork to 2- and 4-year institutional transfer partnerships identified using NSC data as highly effective in supporting transfer student success.

Keywords

transfer, articulation, student services, institutional partnerships, leadership

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Essential 2- and 4-Year College Transfer Practices

1. Prioritize transfer student success
2. Create clear program pathways with aligned high quality instruction
3. Provide tailored transfer student advising

Wyner, Deane, Jenkins & Fink, May 2016; Fink & Jenkins, 2017
Recent CCRC Research on Transfer Barriers
Recent CCRC Transfer Research: Five Key Findings

1. Transfer outcomes low and inequitable, and some colleges and states do better than others.

2. Many bachelor-seeking CC students don’t transfer, let alone complete.

3. Transfer paths unclear.

4. Rampant, inequitable transfer credit loss leads to extra time-to-degree, extra cost, decreased likelihood of completion.

5. Despite credit loss, CC route to bachelor’s still cheaper (if students complete).
1. Transfer outcomes low and inequitable, and some colleges and states do better than others
Few Transfer, Even Fewer Complete

850,000 degree-seeking Community College entrants

80% intend to earn a Bachelor’s Degree

32% transferred to a 4-year in 6 years

34% of transfers earn award before transfer

14% earn BA within 6 years

Source: Shapiro et al. (2017); Jenkins & Fink (2016)
Equity gaps, by Race & Income

Fall 2007 CC Entrants

- All Students: 14%
- Lower-income: 10%
- Higher-income: 16%

Fall 2010 CC Entrants

- All Students: 16%
- Asian: 23%
- Black: 9%
- Hispanic: 11%
- White: 19%

Jenkins & Fink, 2016
Shapiro et al., 2017
Community College Cohort Bachelor's Completion Rates by State

Source: NSC Signature Report 13

NSC’s *Tracking Transfer* update: Fall 2010 Cohort

U.S. average: 13.3%
These are the bachelor’s completion rates for transfer students, by individual community college.

There’s a lot of variation.
2. Many bachelor-seeking CC students don’t transfer, let alone complete
Students make progress, don’t transfer

Bachelor’s Degree-Seeking 2-year Entrants in VA, Rate of Transfer to Four-year Colleges

- All two-year entrants: 77% (23% don’t transfer)
- Associate earners: 68% (32% don’t transfer)
- At least 60 college-level credits earned from CCs: 57% (43% don’t transfer)
- 40-59 college-level credits earned from CCs: 36% (64% don’t transfer)
- 20-39 college-level credits earned from CCs: 18% (82% don’t transfer)
- < 20 college-level credits earned from CCs: 5% (95% don’t transfer)

Source: Xu, Jaggars, & Fletcher, 2016, Table 9.
3. Transfer paths unclear
Transfer Networks are complex
Transfer Paths Unclear

Enrollment Patterns among ~100K Bachelor’s Degree Completers who Started at a Community College

Few graduates follow 2+2 pattern

Jenkins & Fink, 2016; Further disaggregation by authors
Community College Pathways to Computer Science Bachelor's Degrees

2016

1.8M community college students tracked 2007-2014

321 enrolled community college students surveyed

24 enrolled community college students interviewed

14 past community college students interviewed
Not representative of the greater community college population

1.8M 2007 community college entrants
- 51% male

3,290 who earned CS bachelor's
- 87% male

NO DEFINED PATHWAY to CS bachelor's degrees

1,213 unique pathways among 3,290 CS degree earners
Community college students who earned computer science bachelor’s degrees:

- More concentration
- Less concentration
- Tech hub

- Stayed at single college and four-year
- Went to college and four-year with good transfer support
- Lived near a tech hub
STEM Transfer Pathways

Students who successfully transferred in STEM more frequently took STEM transfer courses before transfer math courses — suggesting that it is helpful for students to get a 'taste' of STEM to keep them interested as they work through the math courses.

4. Rampant, inequitable transfer credit loss leads to extra time-to-degree, extra cost, and decreased likelihood of completion
Estimated Percentage of Credits Lost in Transfer, on Average, by Transfer Path, Academic Years 2003-04 to 2008-09

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education transfer and tuition data | GAO-17-574
Transfer Credit Loss

Just **58%** of students successfully transferred **90%** of their credits.

And **15%** can’t transfer any credits at all.

Students who can transfer **90%** of their credits were **2.5x** more likely to get their bachelor's degree, compared to those who transfer half or less.

Transfer Credit Inefficiency: Students Complete Bachelor’s with More Excess Credit

VA Fall 2004 Matched 2- and 4-Year Entrants, Total Credits Earned at Graduation

Average number of credits (any type)
- 4-Year Entrants: 126
- 2-Year Entrants: 136

Average number of college-level credits
- 4-Year Entrants: 125
- 2-Year Entrants: 133

Source: Xu, Jaggars, & Fletcher, 2016, Table 10.
Excess Credits Attempted among CC Transfers who Completed a Bachelor’s Degree

Excess Credits Attempted among CC Transfers who Completed a Bachelor’s Degree

Excess Credits Attempted among CC Transfers who Completed a Bachelor’s Degree

Excess Credits Attempted among CC Transfers who Completed a Bachelor’s Degree: Abbreviated Findings

More Excess Credit Associated with:

✓ Taking a 100-level math course after transferring
✓ Taking more 100-level courses before and after 60-credits
✓ Taking more 200-level courses after earning 60-credits
✓ Student Characteristics: More developed placements; Race/ethnicity: Black

Less Excess Credit Associated with:

✓ Taking more courses in statewide transfer library (State B)
✓ Taking more 300-level courses before and after 60-credits
5. Despite credit loss, CC route to bachelor’s still cheaper most of the time (if students complete)
How many credits can CC transfers lose but still save money on their BA compared to four-year entrants?

**State Alpha:** 61.2 average credits accepted
Average Savings (price) = $6,330
Likelihood of saving: 83.6%

**State Omega:** 29.4 average credits accepted
Average Savings (price) = $750
Likelihood of saving: 55.1%

Credit loss “Break even” point, State Alpha:
- 40 credits not transferred

Credit loss “Break even” point, State Omega:
- 20 credits not transferred
Recent CCRC Transfer Research: Five Key Findings

1. Transfer outcomes low and inequitable, and some colleges and states do better than others
2. Many bachelor-seeking CC students don’t transfer, let alone complete
3. Transfer paths unclear
4. Rampant, inequitable transfer credit loss leads to extra time-to-degree, extra cost, decreased likelihood of completion
5. Despite credit loss, CC route to bachelor’s still cheaper (if students complete)
How Can Community College and Four-Year Partners Achieve Strong Transfer Outcomes?

Wyner, Deane, Jenkins & Fink, May 2016

Fink & Jenkins, 2017
Essential 2- and 4-Year College Transfer Practices

1. Prioritize transfer student success
2. Create clear program pathways with aligned high quality instruction
3. Provide tailored transfer student advising

Wyner, Deane, Jenkins & Fink, May 2016; Fink & Jenkins, 2017
A National Movement: Colleges Implementing Guided Pathways
Start with the End in Mind

**STEP 4**

- Market program paths
- Build bridges from high school and adult ed. into program streams (e.g., strategic dual enrollment, I-BEST)

**STEP 3**

- Require exploratory or “meta-majors” for undecided students
- Integrate basic skills instruction into introductory college courses

**STEP 2**

- Clearly map out program paths
- Rethink advising around maps
- Use “eAdvising” to monitor student progress, provide feedback and support as needed

**START HERE**

- Align program outcomes with requirements for success in further education and the labor market

---

**CONNECTION**
From interest to application

**ENTRY**
From entry to passing program gatekeeper courses

**PROGRESS**
From program entry to completion of program requirements

**COMPLETION**
From completion of credential to career advancement and further education
Essential Pathways Practices

- Organize programs into “meta-majors,” map programs to career-path jobs and transfer in majors
- Help all students explore career/academic options and develop a full-program plan by end of term 1
- Make schedules and monitor progress based on students’ plans
- Integrate academic support into college program gateways
- Integrate experiential learning into every program
- Build pathways into high schools, starting with dual enrollment
What careers are in my future?

How do I get started in this program?

What will I learn?

Where can your credits take you?

Select a program from the filter below to see where your NWTC credits can transfer.

NWTC Programs

Supply Chain Management

UW Green Bay

NWTC Program: Supply Chain Management
Partner Program: BAS Individual Leadership Studies

UW Green Bay

NWTC Program: Supply Chain Management
Partner Program: BAS Individual Leadership Studies

UW Oshkosh

NWTC Program: Supply Chain Management
Partner Program: BAS Leadership & Organizational Studies-Organizational Studies
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<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credit</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Term Offered</th>
<th>Pre-Req</th>
<th>Options Available</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Credits</th>
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<td>Composition I</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Mathematics for Liberal Arts I</td>
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<td>General Psychology</td>
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Total Program Credits: 60
Total Pathway Credits: 60
Overview of program

Business Transfer DTA

GENERAL INFORMATION

This degree satisfies general undergraduate requirements for a major in economics through a university sciences or business. This degree meets statewide guidelines for transfer to the following Washington universities subject to exceptions and qualifications outlined in this guide: Central Washington University, University of Washington, Western Washington State University, Everett Community College, and several other schools.

Information on common transfer destinations

Notes:

- To earn a certificate or degree, the courses must be completed with a cumulative GPA of 2.0 (C) or better.
- Gonzaga requires a course equivalent to its BMIS 235, Management Information Systems.
- PLU requires a course equivalent to its Computer Applications CSCE 120 or MOS certification; CL 101 may suffice to fulfill this requirement.
- SPU requires a course equivalent to its BUS 1700 or MOS certification (MOS 77-420); BT 242 may suffice to fulfill this requirement.
- WWU requires a course equivalent to its MIS 220 Introduction to Computer Systems; CL 101 may suffice to fulfill this requirement. The WWU Manufacturing and Supply Chain Management program requires additional coursework, some of which may also be taken as elective credit at EvCC. Management program web site is www.wwu.edu/node/731/.

Program advisor information

Program-specific “degree-sheets”

BUSINESS TRANSFER—DTA/MRP DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Must earn a C grade (2.0) or better in all required courses. Courses may be subject to prerequisites.

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Quarter</th>
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<td>MATH 138 or MATH 144 or MATH 151 (or higher)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MATH 138 or MATH 144 or MATH 151 (or higher)</td>
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HUMANITIES (15 credits) with no more than 10 credits from any one discipline on the AAS DTA Humanities distribution list. No more than 5 credits of foreign language and foreign arts credits can be used. Two quarters at EvCC or two years in high school of the same world language is required for admission to all UW campuses. Students majoring in business should consult with the specific transfer institution regarding foreign language requirements.

SOCIAL SCIENCE (15 credits; 10 credits in economics; 5 credits other than economics from the AAS DTA Social Science distribution list. BUS 8101 recommended as a social science distribution course.)

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<tr>
<td>ECNB 202</td>
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<td>BUS 101 (recommended)</td>
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</table>

NATURAL SCIENCE (15 credits; 5 credits in statistics; 5 credits each from the AAS DTA Natural Science distribution lists Part A.)
Select an area of interest

Select a major map for course sequence and prerequisites to finish in two years

Program description

COMPUTER SCIENCE, BACHELOR OF SCIENCE

Engineering and Computing
Campus: Modesto Maldique Campus

Program Description
The BCS degree presents a course of study that

Admission Requirements
Related Occupations:
Computer Scientist; Control System Engineer
Scientific Programmer Analyst.

Career Opportunities
Related Occupations:
Computer Scientist; Control System Engineer
Scientific Programmer Analyst.
Most of these occupations require graduate school. For
example, they may require a master's degree, and
some require a Ph.D., M.D., or J.D. (law degree).

Wages & Employment Trends for:

Florida Median income $90,910
Florida rate of growth +5%
National Median wages $106,360
National Projected growth +15 to 21%

Source and more information:
http://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/15-1011.00

https://mymajor.fiu.edu/
WEBSITE EXERCISE

Imagine you are a student about to register for classes at your community college.

You want to study biosciences and transfer to a local four-year university. Go to YOUR COLLEGE’S website, and find the information that you need to select your courses and transfer successfully. Try to figure out what courses you will need to in order to transfer and enter a biosciences program at the four-year institution.

Think about the following questions AS THE STUDENT:

**Getting Off on the Right Start:** What biosciences programs are available at nearby universities? What career options are available to you after you transfer and complete the degree? What do salaries look like for these career options? Is this information available to you on either website?

**Planning for Program Requirements:** What are the requirements for admission to the university’s biosciences programs? What classes will the student need to take at YOUR COLLEGE if you want to transfer into a bioscience program at the university? How easy or difficult was it to find this information? How many clicks did it take?

**Locating In-Person Help:** Who would you need to go at YOUR COLLEGE to get information on transfer in bioscience? Where would you go to on your campus to find that person? How easy or difficult was it to find this information on your website?
Getting Started:
Tools for Tackling Transfer

https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/
Transfer Playbook Institutional Self-Assessment

ESSENTIAL TRANSFER PRACTICE #1: PRIORITIZE TRANSFER

a. The college president and senior leaders emphasize improving transfer student outcomes is core to achieving the college’s mission.

How to use this tool: The Transfer Playbook institutional self-assessment systematically each subtopic to the regular operations and anticipated challenges.

Institution Name: ____________________________

Overview: This tool is designed to prioritize and improve transfer student outcomes. It is critical to the college’s mission to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to succeed.

We recommend that a team consisting of faculty and staff members engaged in transfer student services develop this tool and that the team should then engage others of faculty and staff. Identify key questions to be explored and anticipate challenges.

For help using this tool: Visit the Transfer Playbook website at ccrc.tc.columbia.edu.

ESSENTIAL TRANSFER PRACTICE #2: CREATE CLEAR, RIGOROUS PROGRAM PATHWAYS

a. Programs of study for transfer students are clearly mapped.

Stage of Adoption at Our College

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<th>Not Present</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Established</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. Programs of study for transfer students are clearly mapped.</td>
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Questions to Consider

- Do the transfer maps clearly indicate:
  - Recommended lower-division courses, course sequences, and progress milestones by academic term for specific four-year majors?
  - Clear information on differences in requirements among programs in the same major field at different institutions?
  - Information on career opportunities in each field?
  - Are the maps easily accessible on the college’s website?
  - Is there a mechanism for keeping transfer program requirements and maps up-to-date?

b. Coursework and extra-curricular activities provide students with rigorous preparation aligned to expectations for their junior and senior years.

Stage of Adoption at Our College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Present</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
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<th>Advanced</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

- How does the college ensure that your programs adequately prepare students to succeed in upper division coursework? What data are gathered to assess this?
  - Are activities in your four-year curriculum actively involved in reviewing the content and quality of your offerings?
  - Is there a process for university partners to communicate to your faculty needed improvements in lower-division instruction?
  - When the college identifies areas for improvement, how quickly are these challenges addressed?

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ESSENTIAL TRANSFER PRACTICE #3: SUPPORT STUDENT TRANSITION TO FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTION

c. Alternatives to 2+2 transfer pathways have been developed for circumstances where those are not the best routes to a bachelor’s degree.

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- For which students or programs do 2+2 arrangements work best? For which does the 2+2 arrangement work least well?
  - What new structures have been put in place to improve outcomes (e.g., 1+3, 3+1; reverse transfer)?
  - Through what channels or mechanisms do students who enter through non-traditional entry points (ABE students, CIT students, non-degree seeking at entry) have exposure to or on-ramps to programs of study that lead to transfer?
Tools for Gathering Transfer Data

Table 2.

Table 5.

Table 6.

Table 7.

Percentage of Completions in Broad Degree Fields and Bachelor’s Degrees at Four-Year Receiving Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Degree Fields</th>
<th>Percentage of Completions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health professions</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, humanities, &amp; English</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social &amp; behavioral sciences</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science &amp; mathematics</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture &amp; natural resources</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer &amp; information sciences</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied technology</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public services &amp; administration</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resource: Planning and Conducting Transfer Student Focus Groups

When the goal at hand is to improve outcomes for transfer students, it is important to start by talking with transfer students themselves. As your team plans for your transfer workshop, student focus groups can help provide your planning team with valuable qualitative data, which contains rich detail and cues that are not captured by quantitative data.

Findings from the focus group can help institutional leaders identify the ways in which students’ experiences do not map to the intended design of a particular program or intervention. When conducted in advance of a state-wide workshop on transfer, these focus groups can serve as a valuable opportunity to identify areas where there is the greatest need for improvement then incorporate these lessons into the workshop goals and content.

What follows is a resource to help you plan for your transfer student focus groups. We highlight important guidelines to keep in mind before, during, and after a focus group. In addition, we include a sample protocol geared to a conversation about transfer; as well as guiding questions for a facilitator. We encourage you to adapt these protocols to fit your needs. For more on how to develop good focus group questions, please see Krueger’s 2008 “Developing questions for focus groups.”

Guidelines for Before, During, and After a Focus Group

Before a focus group:

- Be clear about your goals for the focus group, and develop questions for your protocol accordingly. Likewise, it is important to proactively think about creating a respectful environment when discussing sensitive issues. When developing questions, attempt to minimize the possibility that students might feel stigmatized or uncomfortable during the conversation.
- Recruit a diverse group of participants. Make sure to include as many students who have struggled or failed as students who have succeeded. Don’t rely on “easy access” students (e.g., student government leaders), and hold focus groups at times when many different students can attend. Always recruit with the expectation that 80% or less of confirmed participants will show up.
- Choose a facilitator who is neutral, credible, and unfamiliar to the students.
- Provide context that helps students feel comfortable sharing their experiences candidly. Be clear about anonymity but also keep opening instructions fairly short and neutral, to avoid creating bias in students.
- Choose a space in which all participants can see and hear each other, and have comfortable conversation.
- Use a digital recorder rather than (or in addition to) a notebook to ensure that there’s no bias in the information captured.
- Let the conversation flow, and allow students to ask questions.

1 This resource has been adapted slightly from the 2012 “Student Focus Group Resource Guide” by Public Agenda and West Ed. http://www.publicagenda.org/knowledgecenter/resources/student-focus-group-resource-guide
Discussion Questions

• How well aligned are our programs (including transfer paths) with career opportunities in our region?

• Why are so many cc students still enrolled with no degree after 6 years? What are their goals?

• Why don’t more cc students transfer? Why don’t more transfer with cc credentials?

• How well are articulation agreements / transfer pathways working? Do most of our students know about them?

• How can we better help students identify major program transfer goals early and ensure they take courses that will apply to their intended majors?
Thank you!