



STRENGTHENING TRANSFER PATHWAYS

Beginning the postsecondary journey at a community college often is touted as a viable and more affordable route to a bachelor's degree.¹ For some students, the high costs of attending a four-year institution may feel insurmountable. Others find that family obligations and work responsibilities make the flexibility and ability to stay close to home appealing. Additionally, the opportunity to demonstrate academic ability in a college setting can help students gain confidence, while increasing their odds of admission to more selective four-year institutions down the road.² Unfortunately, the research on transfer pathways suggests that all too often, institutional barriers halt student progress.³ **Too few selective four-year institutions have transfer policies that meet the needs of aspiring community college transfer students,⁴ including many Black, Latinx, Indigenous, underrepresented Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students and students from low-income backgrounds.**

Two-year institutions provide college access to a diverse array of today's students: 50 percent of community college students are students of color, and 45 percent are from families making less than \$25,000 per year.⁵ The vast majority of these students intend to go on to earn a bachelor's degree, but few receive the support necessary to achieve this goal.⁶ As a result, only 25 percent of all community college students successfully transfer to a four-year institution within five years.⁷ White students who start at two-year institutions are approximately twice as likely as Black and Latinx students to go on to complete a bachelor's degree within six years.⁸

These statistics reflect the institutional actions—or lack thereof—that render transfer pathways difficult to navigate:



SELECTIVE FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS ENROLL FEW COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS.

Well-resourced, selective institutions that are positioned to invest in transfer students' success enroll very few of them. Just eight percent of students at highly selective public and five percent of students at highly selective private colleges have transferred from another institution.⁹



INSTITUTIONS PROVIDE INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION ABOUT TRANSFER PATHWAYS.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that nearly three in ten institutions do not list on their website the partner schools with which they have a transfer agreement. Of the institutions that do list partner schools, just two-thirds (63 percent) include specific information about their transfer agreements.¹⁰



CREDIT LOSS CAN WIPE OUT STUDENTS' PROGRESS TOWARD A DEGREE.

Receiving institutions often have discretion over whether to accept an incoming student's credits. The GAO estimates that approximately 43 percent of credits are lost nationwide through the transfer process,¹¹ and **students who transfer from community colleges to four-year public institutions lose one-fifth (22 percent) of their credits while transferring.**¹² Repeating coursework requires additional financial resources, time, and energy, and research shows credit loss can reduce students' chances of eventually obtaining a bachelor's degree.¹³

OPENING THE DOOR TO OPPORTUNITY: STRENGTHENING TRANSFER PATHWAYS

Creating a more equitable and just higher education system starts with implementing equitable transfer admissions practices.

INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS SHOULD:

ACTIVELY RECRUIT AND ENROLL COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS:

Not only can recruiting and enrolling transfer students provide more Black, Latinx, Indigenous, underrepresented AAPI, and low-income students with access to a bachelor's degree, it can increase diversity on campus and can boost an institution's enrollment and yield.¹⁴

PARTICIPATE IN – AND CLEARLY COMMUNICATE – ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS WITH TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS:

When implemented effectively, transfer articulation agreements can prevent credit loss and the subsequent cost burden. To be effective, institutions must communicate the details of those agreements to students.¹⁵ Flagship universities and other public selective universities should work with community colleges or state leaders to implement policies such as common transferable general education requirements, common course numbering, guaranteed transfer of an associate's degree, or reverse transfer.¹⁶

SUPPORT STUDENTS DURING AND AFTER THE TRANSFER PROCESS:

To help transfer students thrive after they arrive on campus, community colleges and four-year institutions should work together to offer tailored student supports, such as mentoring, academic advising, faculty engagement, transfer orientation and transition programs, and career counseling.¹⁷ Institutions should also review financial aid eligibility requirements to ensure transfer students have access to the resources necessary to enroll and succeed.

For full citations, please visit: www.ihep.org/mostimportantdoor/sources

1. Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2019.
2. Roska & Calcagno, 2010.
3. Jenkins & Fink, 2015.
4. Jenkins & Fink, 2015.
5. IHEP analysis of 2015-16 data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16).
6. Jenkins & Fink, 2015.
7. Jenkins & Fink, 2015.
8. Espinosa, Turk, Taylor, & Chessman, 2019.
9. IHEP analysis of Databases Compiled by Peterson's as part of the Common Data Set Initiative.
10. U.S. GAO, 2017.
11. U.S. GAO, 2017.
12. U.S. GAO, 2017.
13. Monaghan & Attewell, 2014.
14. EAB, 2016; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2017; Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin, Chiang, Chen, Torres, & Harrell, 2013.
15. Bautsch, 2013.
16. Francies & Anderson, 2020.
17. Education Commission of the States, 2009.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.IHEP.ORG



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