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# POLICY BRIEF

POLICY BRIEF OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS



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### Save the Date

This Policy Brief is developed by the National Center for Teacher Education of the Maricopa Community Colleges

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## Articulation & Transfer

### Examining Current Collaboration Issues between Community Colleges & Four-Year Institutions

According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), 71 percent of students entering community colleges anticipate earning a bachelor's degree. However, only 25 percent of those students actually transfer to a four-year institution (2005). Considering that community colleges are increasingly being viewed as the main entry point into higher education for baccalaureate degree seekers, the above stated fact is a continuing issue.

Community colleges have always played a critical role in teacher preparation by providing the foundation for upper division coursework. In recent years, community colleges have expanded their programs in the field of teacher education to provide more options for preparing future teachers. In addition to offering the first two years of requirements for a baccalaureate degree, community colleges have added coordinated programs for transfer, new certificate and associate degree programs, and augmented support services, all of which have increased student access to, and completion of, teacher preparation programs. Some community colleges have even begun to offer their own teacher education baccalaureate programs.

As community colleges are in a unique position to address the growing need for highly qualified teachers, they are now being called upon to develop thoughtfully articulated programs with four-year institutions to fulfill this need. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) suggests several reasons why improving transfer of education majors from community colleges to baccalaureate

programs is important. First and foremost, community colleges may offer the only technology training and most of the general content area courses future teachers will receive. For instance, ECS indicates that four out of ten teachers have completed some of their math and science courses at community colleges (2004).

Secondly, community colleges have the ability to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce as they traditionally serve higher percentages of minority, low-income, and non-traditional students than four-year institutions. Community colleges typically meet the needs of the non-traditional student by offering convenient locations, varied class times, low tuition, distance education options, and more family services compared to their university counterparts. Finally, community colleges know how to serve their communities by responding quickly to changing social and economic trends, and the resulting education and workforce needs.

There continues to be a disparity between community colleges and universities as to what teacher preparation should consist of and what standards programs should adhere to. It is imperative that teacher preparation is no longer viewed as two years of upper division at a four-year institution, but rather as a four-year process including the content preparation that early childhood, elementary, and secondary teachers receive to become highly qualified, according to the No Child Left Behind Act. All four years must be a rigorous sequence of both content preparation and pedagogy skills.

# Current Issues

Community colleges generally find that many issues impede articulation and transfer with university teacher education programs. For example, community colleges offer both terminal (i.e., early childhood and paraprofessional associate of science or associate of applied science) and transfer credits in education. Students taking terminal degrees find it harder to transfer to four-year colleges, as most universities do not accept the courses in these programs. As these same students could potentially be candidates for four-year teacher preparation programs, this barrier causes student frustration and loss of time, and contributes to statewide teacher shortages.

In 2006, the National Association of Community College Teacher Education Programs (NACCTEP) conducted a survey in which community colleges identified current issues surrounding 2+2 articulation with universities. The issues fall into four general categories: state policy issues, general articulation issues, institutional issues, and faculty issues.

## State Policy Issues

Currently, community colleges are not considered in the accreditation standards for teacher education programs. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) only applies to teacher licensure programs, not lower division content standards. In its Teaching by Choice document, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) recommends that community colleges work with four-year colleges and universities to ensure that all pathways meet established state and national competency standards (2005). However, NACCTEP survey respondents feel that there is a lack of leadership at the state level to coordinate discussion between community colleges and universities and a lack of participation by all four-year colleges in the state to create articulation agreements, resulting in transfer agreements being developed on a one-to-one basis. In addition, ECS points out that teacher education programs often have narrow certification requirements and specifications (2004). The more complicated the requirements, the less likely a community college is able to offer an effective transfer program.

## Articulation Issues

The goal of an articulation agreement is to provide students with a seamless transfer from one postsecondary institution to another, while keeping communication channels open among faculty and administrators. An articulation agreement between a community college and a receiving four-year institution's education department indicates that courses are comparable (ECS, 2004). NACCTEP survey respondents, however, contend that the time and effort required to collaborate with partners and negotiate articulation agreements, transfer policies, and course requirements, are difficult to come by. Other general articulation issues identified in the survey include: lack of course availability, inconsistent requirements for teacher preparation programs, lack of formal agreements, lack of enforcement, and lack of uniform structures such as an articulation task force.

## Institutional Issues

Entrance requirements vary by state and by college. Some four-year colleges are now requiring that community college transfer students pass basic skills tests or standardized pre-professional skills assessments (i.e., PRAXIS) for entry into teacher education programs. Some universities have even developed a proficiency test in technology as an admissions requirement for colleges of education. For example, in Illinois, students transferring to four-year colleges must pass the Illinois Basic Skills Test, which includes reading, writing, grammar, and math, as a university requirement for program admission.

Additionally, university education departments may perceive increased investments in community college teacher education programs as a threat to their own programs, and will put the need to improve their own programs before the need to support community college teacher education programs. NACCTEP found that other issues hampering articulation and transfer include the autonomy of universities and colleges; individual college policies that hinder the process; particular and/or different course requirements at various universities; disagreement on the number of hours and classes accepted and required to graduate; institutional infrastructures which are cumbersome or difficult to work with; and universities making changes to requirements without notifying community colleges.

## Faculty Issues

Faculty attitudes and perceptions continue to present barriers to the transfer process. These include resistance from faculty and administrators to accept general education and academic major credits from community colleges, institutions questioning the rigor and comparability of courses taken at other institutions, and many others (AASCU, 2005). Even with general statewide articulation agreements, community colleges and universities need to agree that specific classes in a student's major program will transfer to the university. Currently, university faculty will often accept a student's general education courses, but not major-specific courses.

Universities may also be concerned that community college coursework does not match the rigor and quality of university coursework. However, ECS cites that when community college students transfer to universities, they graduate at the same rate and succeed in their jobs at the same level as native university students (2004). Additional issues identified by the NACCTEP survey include philosophical disagreements on the preparation of teachers between two and four-year colleges; four-year colleges that are protective of their courses and have their own curriculum; varying teacher preparation programs among institutions and universities that are reluctant to give up control of or modify existing programs to accommodate transfers (faculty owned curriculum); and four-year institutions and community colleges competing for the same students.

# Access to the Baccalaureate: AACC & AASCU

In 2003, AACC and AASCU partnered to create Access to the Baccalaureate (<http://www.pathtocollege.org/>). Funded by the Lumina Foundation, the purpose of this initiative was to develop a national understanding of non-financial issues between two- and four-year institutions that affect access to the baccalaureate, to identify barriers and solutions to baccalaureate access, and to identify strategies that facilitate collaboration between two- and four-year sectors that address baccalaureate access.

The associations have identified the following ten barriers and possible solutions to transfer between two- and four-year institutions, and posted them on the website.

Barrier	Solution
<b>Academic and Articulation:</b> Without the existence of an articulation agreement, some four-year colleges require transfer students to retake courses they completed at the community college.	Articulation agreements between institutions help, but students must be aware that these agreements exist. Additionally, there must be communication between individuals responsible for course content and the transfer process at both the two- and four-year institutions.
<b>Institutional Bureaucracy:</b> The stringent rules, regulations, and requirements for transfer at some universities can keep students from transferring. Often times, overall GPA is the deciding factor for accepting the student, while the student's overall academic history is ignored.	Both institutions could make meaningful and comprehensive printed information about the transfer process available to students. The four-year institution could also review and revise any unnecessary bureaucratic procedures, and encourage personnel to reconsider selective admissions practices that limit community college students from transferring.
<b>Geography:</b> One of the conveniences of community colleges is that most students are within commuting distance of an institution. This is not always the case for four-year institutions.	In instances where communities are not located near universities, the state government can allow community colleges to offer a limited selection of bachelor's degrees in high demand fields. Currently, community colleges in Florida, Arkansas, Georgia, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, West Virginia, and Louisiana offer teacher education baccalaureate degrees.
<b>Economic Concerns:</b> There is a distinct cost difference between public community colleges and four-year institutions. For students from low-income families (a high percentage of community college students), university attendance is out of financial reach.	Both two- and four-year institutions could make information about financial aid opportunities readily available to students.
<b>Age:</b> The culture, programs, and services offered by four-year institutions tend to cater to the traditional college student. For adults, there may be uncertainty and apprehension about being in classes that are full of younger students, and a lack of confidence in their own abilities.	Through collaborative efforts, community college personnel, who work with adult students to a greater extent than those at four-year institutions, could share information with university advisors about specific services that serve the adult student.
<b>Race/Ethnicity:</b> For students who are in a minority group, the typically less diverse and larger four-year campuses may create a belief that the college has a non-supportive culture, and does not welcome those who are different.	Four-year institution could ensure that adequate student services exist to deal with the specific needs of minority populations. Advisors with a multicultural perspective, potentially gained through in-service or other forms of training, could assist in this goal.
<b>Occupational/Vocational Programs:</b> Four-year colleges may be hesitant about accepting a student who has been enrolled in an occupational or vocational program instead of a transfer-preparation program. Students who graduated with a terminal degree may also find more problems transferring than students with an Associate's degree.	The only solution to this concern is an articulation agreement, at a college or program level. As demonstrated by existing models, when course content is evaluated by both institutions, agreement about transfer credits can be achieved.
<b>First Generation Students:</b> First-generation college students often deal with academic and personal challenges that they are not prepared for.	Effective strategies include enhanced counseling, advising services, using faculty advisors, and Coordinated Studies Programs (CSPs). CSPs bring faculty from different parts of the college together for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching.
<b>Single Parents:</b> Simply attending an institution as a single parent can be a difficult task, let alone transferring to a four-year institution. Many universities do not have the specific student services needed by single parents.	University student services must address the specific needs of the single parent student. Besides the obvious child care concerns, colleges must be sensitive to the unique needs of these individuals.
<b>Accreditation:</b> Although the AACC definition of community colleges includes only those colleges with either full regional accreditation or candidacy status, not all two-year colleges are regionally accredited. Most four-year colleges will not accept transfer credits from a nationally accredited institution.	Two-year colleges must apply for and receive accreditation status from a regional association in order to successfully transfer students.

# Strategies

Many states have adopted one of four generally accepted strategies resulting in more effective and streamlined approaches to articulation and transfer: statewide cooperative agreements, common course numbering systems, statewide common cores, and associates degrees with guaranteed admission.

“Statewide Cooperative Agreements consist of a series of course-by-course, department-to-department, or institution-to-institution agreements, generally without an enforcement mechanism.” States are also creating Common Course Numbering Systems, in which a “statewide body evaluates courses of participating institutions and assigns a course number based on content and rigor”. (AASCU, 2005).

In 1957, the legislation that created the community college system in Florida mandated strong articulation between two- and four-year institutions. Databases are centralized at the system level and use common course numbering systems. The two-year colleges are responsible for reporting on course and transfer patterns to four-year institutions, and the four-year institutions report on transfer students’ performance at their institutions. Data from the Florida State Board of Education show that those who transfer from a community college with an associate’s degree remain in school

and/or complete their baccalaureate degree work at slightly higher levels than freshmen students in the state university system.

The Statewide Common Core (also known as a General Education Common Core) is when states identify a general education core that transfers between state colleges and community colleges. A fourth strategy exists in which states have an agreement that a particular associate’s degree is guaranteed admission into state universities with no loss of credit. In Arizona, the Associate in Arts in Elementary Education is a statewide degree that is the result of such an agreement.

According to ECS, a majority of states have instituted policies to facilitate transfers. For example, as of 2001, 30 states had written transfer and articulation policy into legislation, and 40 states had established statewide cooperative agreements. Twenty-six states had developed statewide articulation guides to describe transfer requirements and procedures, 23 states had developed a common core of required courses, and eight states had adopted common course numbering systems. Some states have also created a forum in which faculty and administrators from community colleges and universities meet to discuss issues such as articulation and transfer policies (2004).

# Recommendations

Successful articulation programs are central to many dimensions of state higher education performance, including access, equity, affordability, cost effectiveness, degree productivity, and quality programs (Wellman, 2002). Similarly, teacher education articulation must provide an easy transition between institutions while assuring students with diverse backgrounds a high-quality education (ECS, 2004).

To ensure successful teacher education articulation, community colleges and universities must develop baseline information for statewide transfer performance and review currently developed policy as a benchmark to strengthen teacher preparation through articulation with institutions and faculty. Institutions must identify best practices of transfer policies at other institutions, address admission requirements and course numbering systems, and develop models for faculty to work together focusing more on curriculum outcomes than individual courses.

Effective implementation of the processes discussed in this document will ultimately ensure that we are fulfilling our duty to students by eliminating barriers to their success. By focusing on the effective transfer of courses and credits, we simultaneously address the needs of students by providing a clear pathway from a community college to a four-year institution, and eventually to a successful career as a teacher.

## Articulation & Transfer Resources:

American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) & American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). (2004). Improving Access to the Baccalaureate. [http://www.pathcollege.org/pdf/Lumina\\_Rpt\\_AACC.pdf](http://www.pathcollege.org/pdf/Lumina_Rpt_AACC.pdf)

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