Transfer and Articulation from Community Colleges to Four-Year Institutions: Hope on the Horizon

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the SOURCE on Community College Issues, Trends & Strategies

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Preface

It would take a book-length manuscript to delineate the vast number of relevant and meaningful collaborations going on between community colleges and four-year institutions that are making transfer and articulation processes more effective, more comprehensible, and overall easier for students. That’s the good news. The bad news is that this kind of work is not being carried out everywhere. This report focuses on the good news, that there is “hope on the horizon.”

Every reform, program, initiative and new development at the state level across the country, where most of the good news resides, could obviously not be featured here. Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas state public two-year and four-year institutional efforts were singled out in the most depth through interviews with the professionals who are leading these efforts and through a look at the latest literature about state-related progress.

In addition to progress being made at state public institutions, promising collaborations occurring between community colleges and four-year private institutions point to improvements underfoot at more privates than in the past. The people interviewed about this segment and some of the literature all point toward positive advancements and partnerships happening between community colleges and what are often considered to be highly selective four-year institutions.

The online education baccalaureate degree providers that continue to capture increasing segments of the marketplace of adult transfer students who have earned credits from community colleges through their academic histories were also duly noted. The transfer and articulation efforts of the non-profit Western Governors University, sponsor of this report, and of one of its for-profit competitor, American Public University, are presented here, along with a very brief mention of what some of the other online education providers are doing to attract community college students.

The further development of websites for state course equivalencies, also referred to as “portals,” is an important trend to help both students and advisors work through what courses articulate between community colleges and specific baccalaureate programs. Some prominent websites in this arena were touched upon throughout this report.

One important aspect of the topic of transfer and articulation that is not covered in any real depth is the issue of transferring credit earned through prior learning assessment (PLA). For more on this topic, see a recent article in Change, The Magazine of Higher Learning, by Anya Kamenetz, titled “The Transformation of Higher Education through Prior Learning Assessment” (http://www.changemag.org/Archives/Back%20Issues/2011/September-October%202011/transformation-full.html), as well as an October 2010 report published by the Center for American Progress and The Council for Adult & Experiential Learning, written by Rebecca Klein-Collins, Amy Sherman, and Louis Soares, titled “Degree Completion Beyond Institutional Borders” (http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/10/degree_completion_beyondBorders.html).

In addition, no national policy or standardized system currently exists to protect and assist community college students with transferability within or across state lines to four-year institutions that do not have any kind of articulation or transfer agreements with the previous institution(s) these students attended. This general issue is not covered in this report.
Inside all of these developments on the transfer and articulation front, and looming above all the good accomplishments, are dark clouds related to cost and affordability during tough economic times and high unemployment. This issue is brought out in the companion piece to this report, “Eight Transfer Students Success Stories in Progress,” where real-life stories reveal how transfer students are working hard to overcome the odds that rub against their pursuits to earn a bachelor’s degree. Despite the seemingly insurmountable cost and affordability challenges, this report does show that the efficiencies being developed under the transfer and articulation banner can help to decrease the nasty weather, so to speak.

Overall, this report touches the surface on all of these issues as well as presents many of the most effective and innovative initiatives taking place today. It can be a good starting point for further discussion and research about transfer and articulation from two-year to four-year institutions.

**Introduction**

We live in an age in which every American should be able to pursue a bachelor’s degree without having to go into deep debt and without having to wade through a stifling amount of administrative and overly rigid complexities. One very effective way of managing the debt picture is for students to start their academic careers at a public community college, where paying for a higher education is much more manageable than starting at a four-year college or university. Of course, this is nothing new, since more than 40 percent of all higher education students in the U.S. are already enrolled in community colleges.

The quest to eliminate administrative and overly rigid complexities that make life difficult and confusing for the community college student to move along a transfer pathway toward earning a bachelor’s degree at a four-year institution is also nothing new. Solving it will require reforms and new systems, processes, and collaborations that make transfer and articulation from two-year to four-year institutions easier and more efficient than what we have seen in the past and are still seeing today.

“Will this issue every go away?” asks David Longanecker, president of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, in the foreword of a report about transfer and articulation systems published last year. “Since substantial numbers of students began moving from one institution to another half a century ago, particularly from community college to four-year colleges, transfer and articulation practices have been an issue.”

But things are getting better. There is hope on the horizon, most notably at the state level, in Arizona, California, Florida, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Washington, for instance, where strong initiatives have been increasingly making transfer and articulation from community colleges to four-year institutions easier to accomplish. Since 2006, laws to improve transfer and articulation were passed in 29 states.

There’s also a rising recognition and willingness emanating from what can be considered highly selective four-year institutions to more readily collaborate with community colleges.
to increase transfer and articulation partnerships. Twelve four-year institutions profiled in a report on improving student transfer recently published by the College Board — including Georgetown University; Syracuse University; Virginia Tech; University of California, Los Angeles; University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; and Wheaton College — stressed a serious commitment to serve community college transfer students.4

Author of the report, Stephen J. Handel, senior director of Higher Education Relationship Development and Community College Initiatives at the College Board, says that these institutions, among a growing number today, “approach transfer from a very humbling perspective and feel that they would not be successful without really good community college colleagues working with them.” In short, Handel adds, “there are really good people out there who want to work with community colleges and do transfer work effectively.”

In addition, the continued enrollment growth at both for-profit and non-profit four-year institutions that offer online education programs is being partially accomplished by these institutions’ exceedingly concerted efforts to increase transfer and articulation agreements with two-year institutions across the country. In particular, these partnerships have a strong focus on facilitating successful transfers and pathways towards baccalaureate degrees for adult-learners who have earned credits at multiple institutions over the years and in a variety of ways, including competency-based programs and prior learning assessments.

Overall, “there are lots of people doing good work in this area, but there are still too many strange barriers that are roadblocks

“There are really good people out there who want to work with community colleges and do transfer work effectively.”
– Stephen J. Handel

in the way of possibilities,” says Mark Milliron, deputy director, higher education at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. “It’s a lot better than it was a decade ago, but it is still not great.”

A Prime Example

It’s a lot better, for instance, in Arizona, where 60 percent of higher education students are enrolled in community colleges.5 The relationship building and system integration that has been taking place between Arizona State University (ASU) and Maricopa Community Colleges, comprised of 10 community colleges, is an innovative articulation model that provides a view toward what the future could hold for institutions that are ready to more fully develop their transfer and articulation policies and systems.

According to “trends and outcomes” figures published by the Maricopa Community Colleges Division of Academic and Student Affairs, 27,668 former students from Maricopa Community Colleges were enrolled in one of three state universities in Arizona during the 2009-10 academic year: ASU, Northern Arizona University, or the University of Arizona. Eighty percent of those students [21,610] were enrolled at ASU. Statistics show that 65 percent of these students earn a bachelor’s degree within four years of transfer.6

Creating a Culture of Transfer

Driving these outcomes is an ASU and Maricopa Community Colleges collaboration for
“creating a culture of transfer” that started in 2004 and was signed into action under an official memorandum of understanding in December 2008. This led the Arizona Board of Regents to change state policy so students starting at Arizona community colleges would complete more credit [than what had been mandated in the past] before enrolling in any of the state’s four-year institutions.

**Arizona General Education Curriculum**

Prior to December 2008, if an Arizona high school graduate was not admissible to the university, they could attend their local community college and earn 24 credits with a minimum GPA of 2.0 in order to be guaranteed admission, but the student might not be eligible for every program offered at the university level. After December 2008, that was changed to students having to complete the Arizona General Education Curriculum (AGEC) with a 2.0 GPA, comprised of 35 semester hours of lower-division general education course work, in order to be guaranteed admission. AGEC completion also did not mean that a student would be eligible for every program offered at the university level.

As noted in the online ASU Academic Catalog:

> Many majors (e.g., architecture, engineering, business, fine/creative arts, or health professions) have significant prerequisites and/or program requirements that must be completed before a student may be admitted to upper-division course work. Community college students who are undecided about which of the universities they plan to attend or what program of study they intend to pursue are advised to explore educational options while they complete the AGEC. In all cases, students have the responsibility for selecting general education course work that is relevant to the requirements of their intended major and degree.”

**Maricopa-ASU Pathways Program**

On the heels of this change, during the spring semester of 2009, Maricopa Community Colleges — through its Center for Curriculum & Transfer Articulation (http://www.maricopa.edu/academic/ccta/artic/index.php) — and ASU jointly started to build the parameters of the Maricopa-ASU Pathways Program (MAPP). These are programs that build in the appropriate AGEC into fully transferable associate degrees, enabling students to transfer into ASU as “true juniors” with a maximum of 60 credits remaining to complete a specific bachelor’s degree.

As noted in ASU literature, “all of the credits on a MAPP both transfer and apply to the students designated major, making this a cost-effective and time-efficient pathway with no loss of credit if a community college student follows their MAPP.” In addition, the MAPPs “help the community colleges with their completion agenda because all MAPPS build in a completed associate degree.” They also help ASU “because they incent students to come academically prepared and thus more likely to persist to bachelor’s degree completion.”

**Office of Transfer Partnerships**

In July of 2009, Maria Hesse, former president of Chandler-Gilbert Community College, said, “We [Maricopa Community Colleges faculty and administrators in collaboration with ASU faculty and administrators] have tried to be very clear about these pathways [MAPPs], looking at every conceivable moment as to what could students take that would simultaneously be one of their requirements at the university while also meeting their degree requirement at the community college.”

— Maria Hesse
College, became ASU’s Vice Provost for Transfer Partnerships at the helm of a newly formed ASU Office of Transfer Partnerships (OTP) (http://otp.asu.edu/). “We [Maricopa Community Colleges faculty and administrators in collaboration with ASU faculty and administrators] have tried to be very clear about these pathways [MAPPs], looking at every conceivable moment as to what could students take that would simultaneously be one of their requirements at the university while also meeting their degree requirement at the community college,” Hesse explains.

The MAPP initiative is promoted to students in a variety of ways, including online through a special website called the Maricopa Community Colleges/Arizona State University “Alliance” (http://www.maricopa.edu/alliance/index.php). Since October 2009, 6,500 students have signed up for MAPPs. “That dwarfs every previous partnership program that the state has ever seen before,” Hesse says. The number of MAPPs available through Maricopa Community Colleges has grown from more than 20 in October 2009 to about 125 today. Plus more MAPPs are being developed at community colleges outside of the Maricopa district located throughout the state of Arizona.

**Partnerships Outside of Arizona**

In addition to working with ASU, the Maricopa Community Colleges system works hand-in-hand on transfer and articulation with North-
ern Arizona University and the University of Arizona, while continuously developing partnerships with colleges and universities outside of the state system and the state of Arizona, such as the online Western Governors University. Andrea Buehman, Maricopa Community Colleges executive director of Academic Affairs & Partnerships, explains how staff members at the Center for Curriculum & Transfer Articulation currently manage partnerships with more than 30 colleges and universities outside of the Arizona state system, and growing:

Many universities want to have agreements with Maricopa because we are big, and we are well known, and we have a good reputation. We have memorandums of understanding with each partner. We have expectations for the partners regarding what’s included in the agreement. We insist that they agree to accept our associate degrees; that they are not going to recruit students after they have completed a couple of courses; that they potentially might accept more than 60 credits. Many partners have dedicated advisors who serve Maricopa students in terms of questions about transfer, the applications process, and the features of their programs. They attend our transfer fairs. We have an expectation that they will be active partners, not just that they will list us on their website. We help facilitate their communications with our colleges and with our faculty. For example, if a university wants to develop a stronger partnership around a business program, we would help them make contact with our business faculty. Each discipline has a council in our system that has representatives from every college. We help the universities get in touch with the appropriate people in each discipline. So, there’s a good amount of just collaborating actively that goes into this.

California Community Colleges and The California State University System

Another example of transfer and articulation collaboration that is similar to ASU and Maricopa Community Colleges but on a grander scale exists in California, where 63 percent of its higher education students are enrolled in community colleges. The California Community Colleges has 72 districts and 112 colleges serving 2.76 million students each year. Other states often look toward California, which, like Arizona, can be considered a “bellwether” state in this arena, for guidance about transfer and articulation policy reform. Although California’s higher education systems have been forced to limit the number of student enrollments due to state budget cuts, progress continues to be made on the transfer and articulation front, particularly between the California Community Colleges Chancellors Office and the California State University system (CSU).

The most recent driver for change relating to transfer and articulation can be found in California’s Senate Bill 1440, passed on September 29, 2010. SB 1440 enacted the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act, which, starting in the 2011-2012 academic year, calls for the CSU system to “require a student that receives an associate degree for transfer to be deemed eligible for transfer into a CSU baccalaureate program when the student meets the prescribed requirements.” In addition, the bill requires the CSU system to grant a student priority admission to his or her local California State University campus and to a program or major that is similar to his or her community college major or area of emphasis, as determined by the California State University
campus to which the student is admitted. This bill would authorize the California State University to require a transferring student to take additional coursework at the California State University in specified circumstances, and would prohibit the California State University from requiring a transferring student to repeat courses that are similar to those taken at the community college that counted towards the units required for the associate degree for transfer.¹⁰

A California associate degree for transfer is comprised of 60 transferable units that include 18 units in a major area of emphasis and an approved general education curriculum from either the IGTEC (Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum) (http://www.csumentor.edu/planning/transfer/ge_igetc.asp) or the GE Breadth (General Education Breadth) (http://www.csumentor.edu/planning/transfer/ge_breadth.asp). As noted on the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office website, this is “good news for California students. . . This joint initiative with the California Community Colleges and California State University puts the needs of our state’s students first.” In short, the overall aim is to simplify the transfer process.

Roughly 50,000 community college students transfer annually to the California State University system. In the past, most community college students transferred with an average of 80 semester units when only 60 semester units are required. Then, upon arrival at the California State University, they often take excess units to make up for courses that did not transfer from their community college.

The old process was complicated and it was easy for students to get frustrated, confused and waste time and money when university admission requirements changed.

The new associate degree for transfer program launched in the fall of 2011 will continue to roll out over a two year period. The two systems have worked together to approve the framework for associate degrees for transfer to be offered in 16 majors as the first wave of pathways open to community college students wanting to participate in the program.¹¹

Five associate degrees for transfer have become available in the fall of 2011: Administration of Justice, Communications Studies, Mathematics, Psychology, and Sociology. “We expect that by the end of this year, we will likely have most colleges offering degrees in most of the top 20 majors for transfer students,” says Linda Michalowski, vice chancellor, California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office. “Our faculty members have been working very closely with their counterpart CSU faculty members to make sure that the all of the content of these degrees are agreed upon in disciplines throughout the state as providing the best preparation for transfer for our students.”

“It has been a fairly aggressive effort. The process is actually going rather quickly,” adds Jeff Spano, dean, California Community Col-

“Our faculty members have been working very closely with their counterpart CSU faculty members to make sure that the all of the content of these degrees are agreed upon in disciplines throughout the state as providing the best preparation for transfer for our students.”

— Linda Michalowski
leges Chancellor’s Office. Spano and Michalowski noted that helping to move the effort along is the continued development and implementation of a Course Identification Numbering System (C-ID) (http://www.c-id.net/) funded through a grant from the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office. C-ID has been building off of SB 1440 by creating descriptors of comparable courses available at community colleges throughout the state that have different titles and numbering structures. The descriptors become the basis for assigning common “supra numbers” to the comparable courses. The descriptors with corresponding supra numbers help to speed up the process of developing course and curriculum articulation agreements between the community colleges and CSU.

**Florida’s Statewide Course Numbering, 2+2, and DirectConnect Systems**

Florida can also be considered a bellwether state concerning transfer and articulation reforms, systems and policies. Florida’s well known Statewide Course Numbering System (SCNS) (http://scns.fldoe.org/scns/public/pb_index.jsp#), for instance, is frequently touted as an efficient model that other states should emulate. As noted on the Florida SCNS website:

> Created in the 1960s, it (SCNS) is a key component of Florida’s K-20 seamless system of articulation. The system provides a database of post-secondary courses at public vocational-technical centers, community colleges, universities, and participating nonpublic institutions. The assigned numbers describe course content to improve research, assist program planning, and facilitate the transfer of students.\(^1\)

Additionally, Florida has two significant initiatives that are directly responsible for making transfer and articulation from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities more efficient and uncomplicated: 2+2, and DirectConnect. 2+2 is the name for an approach to earning a bachelor’s degree that includes earning an Associate of Arts degree that is fully transferable. It guarantees that transfer students will have an “equal opportunity to compete against native university students to enter limited access programs” at one of Florida’s 11 state universities.\(^1\) Information about 2+2 is promoted through the [http://www.FACTS.org](http://www.FACTS.org) website (Florida’s Academic Counseling and Tracking for Students), which is sponsored by the Department of Education and the Florida Center for Advising & Academic Support. This free online advising website helps Florida students plan and track their education progress from middle school through college.

DirectConnect ([http://regionalcampuses.ucf.edu/directconnect/](http://regionalcampuses.ucf.edu/directconnect/)), launched in April 2006, is strictly for students transferring from Brevard Community College, Lake-Sumter Community College, Seminole State College, and Valencia College to the University of Central Florida (UCF). UCF is one of the largest universities in the country with a Fall 2010 total headcount enrollment of 56,337. The 2011-2012 academic year will see more than 10,480 community college students transfer into UCF.\(^1\) Through DirectConnect, many of these transfer students will not attend the UCF main campus in Orlando. Instead, they will be guaranteed admission into UCF and attend classes at one of 10 newly built regional
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campuses located throughout Central Florida. Students who sign up for DirectConnect are provided with a full slate of transfer and academic-advising services from both their community college and UCF advisors.

“We’ve aligned all of our processes,” says Joyce Romano, vice president for student affairs at Valencia College, which has an unduplicated headcount of 65,547. Students can take advantage of guidance services provided to them from both Valencia advisors and UCF advisors. Valencia students who have transferred into UCF baccalaureate degree programs through DirectConnect physically attend classes on one of two Valencia Regional Campuses: Valencia West (http://regionalcampuses.ucf.edu/campus/valencia-west/) or Valencia Osceola (http://regionalcampuses.ucf.edu/campus/valencia-osceola/). “We made it easy for stu-

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Growth of Baccalaureate Degrees Being Offered by the Community College

The creation of partnership arrangements with community colleges through the construction of regional campuses by UCF is part of a larger effort by the state of Florida that began in the 1998-99 academic year to bring about greater access to baccalaureate degree programs to students who are place-bound or have limited means to travel to the main campuses of Florida’s state colleges and universities. In 1999, the state legislature gave permission to community colleges to seek approval to grant baccalaureate degrees “in areas of high demand as a last resort when partnerships could not be established.”

In 2001, for instance, St. Petersburg Junior College was changed to St. Petersburg College and given the authority to grant baccalaureate degrees in nursing, education and information technology. In subsequent years, the junior college or community college nomenclature was changed to “college” at Chipola, Miami Dade, and Okaloosa-Walton, and all were granted the authority to confer a variety of baccalaureate degrees.*

This is another aspect of the state of Florida that is an outgrowth of transfer and articulation issues and challenges that is a growing trend across the country. For example, in 2010, the Colorado House of Representatives gave Colorado Mountain College permission to offer baccalaureate degrees. In 2006 and 2007, seven two-year institutions in the state of Washington – Lake Washington Technical College, South Seattle Community College, Bellevue College, Olympic College, and Columbia Basin College – started to offer baccalaureate degree programs. **

For more information, in general, about community colleges offering baccalaureate degrees, see the Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA) (http://www.accbd.org/), an Affiliate Council of the American Association of Community Colleges. CCBA strives to promote better access to the baccalaureate degree on community college campuses, and to serve as a resource for information on various models for accomplishing this purpose.


for the Study of Transfer Students. These include a number of transferability guarantees and aids, including the Texas Core Curriculum, the Field of Student Curricula, the Texas Common Course Numbering System, and a common application for transfer.  

**Transfer Success Summit Encourages Change**

In February 2008, a Texas “Transfer Success Summit” was held in which two-year and four-year college and university representatives from throughout the state, as well as guest speakers from Florida and North Carolina, came together “to align their knowledge and thinking about how to encourage the adoption of good practices that contribute to creating a ‘Culture of Transfer’ at colleges and universities.” The Success Summit’s aim was to “foster collaborative partnerships among colleges and universities for the purpose of facilitating the persistence and success of transfer students and actively encouraging students to continue their post-secondary education through the acquisition of the bachelor’s degree.”

One of the many results of the Summit was a 46-page “Report & Recommendations” document that featured syntheses of six discussion groups conducted at the Success Summit [Advising and Counseling, Assuring Rigor in Undergraduate Courses, Student Engagement and Success, Financial Aid, College Readiness and Developmental Education, and Institutional Opportunities and Student Intention] that were led by chancellors, presidents and their representatives from across Texas.  

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“The UCF DirectConnect advisors are really busy with individual appointments with students, and they are going into Valencia classrooms and presenting. They are doing workshops on our campus. We have just integrated them fully into what we are doing.”

— Joyce Romano
Reverse Transfers & College Acceleration at El Paso Community College

In addition to the development of state reforms and policies that make transfer and articulation less complicated for students, there are, of course, numerous one-to-one transfer and articulation partnerships happening across the country between community colleges and four-year institutions. An innovative and interesting partnership between the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and El Paso Community College (EPCC), for instance, features an automated reverse-transfer system whereby students who transfer over to UTEP with at least 25 percent of an associate degree completed are tracked by UTEP’s student information system and notified when they have earned enough university credit to be awarded an associate degree. They are then invited to the EPCC commencement held in December or May.*

“We may have been the first community college and university that addressed this,” says Richard Rhodes, former president of EPCC and recently appointed president of Austin Community College, who was instrumental in starting the reverse-transfer policy six years ago in partnership with UTEP President Diana Natalicio.

Additionally, Rhodes is proud of the advances made by EPCC in the area of college acceleration programs through Dual Enrollment and Early College High School initiatives, which are also developing quickly at community colleges across the country. Started six years ago, there are currently five early college high schools in El Paso that have a partnership with EPCC in which students start taking EPCC classes in the 9th grade. “The expectation for all students who attend our early college high schools is that by the time they graduate from high school they will have earned an associate degree,” says Rhodes.

Twenty-three of the first cohort of 125 students earned their associate degrees by the time they finished their junior year of high school. These students thereafter started taking upper-division courses at UTEP during their senior year of high school. An additional 42 students in the first cohort completed an associate degree during the first half of their senior year in high school and started taking UTEP upper-division courses during the spring semester prior to their high school graduation. “We do not charge tuition to these students while they are in high school, and they are primarily from low income families who are first generation college students,” Rhodes explains. “These are 16-year-old kids taking upper-division course work at the university. We are going to open a sixth early college high school next summer and the prediction is that within three years somewhere around 15 to 20 percent of UTEP’s junior class will be early college high school students, significantly dropping the average age of the UTEP junior class.”

For more information about Early College High School programs on a national scale, see the Early College High School Initiative coordinated by Boston-based Jobs for the Future, in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation at [http://www.earlycolleges.org/](http://www.earlycolleges.org/).

Identification of Low Transfer Rates Drives New Efforts

One of the more prominent statistics that was reported at the Success Summit was that the majority of students who were qualified to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution were simply not doing so. “We looked at the state data, and it was pretty abysmal. About 19 percent of qualified students were actually transferring,” says Martha Ellis, who was hired in July 2008 as the University of Texas (UT) System Associate Vice Chancellor for Community College Partnerships.

One initiative that Ellis directed early on in March through April 2009 entailed conducting student focus groups at eight UT System general academic institutions. The students from these eight institutions had transferred in from a total of 30 community colleges and were successfully progressing through their studies. They were equally divided between gender and ethnicity, with 84 percent full-time students enrolled in 26 majors. Fifty-two percent transferred 100 percent of their credit hours, and 48 percent reported that all the community college equivalent credit hours they had earned had applied toward the degree programs they enrolled in.

Need for Better Advising Services Brings About Transfer 101 Website

One of the key issues that came out of the focus groups dealt with students not getting enough transfer advising services from both the community colleges and the UT System institutions, which is not uncommon at many institutions, both public and private, in many states. “The number one barrier [identified through the focus groups’ responses] was that students could not access consistent and good information [about transfer and articulation],” Ellis says. Out of that disturbing piece of information, and more, came the creation of Transfer 101, a transfer-advisement website launched in late September 2009 (http://transfer101.org).

Transfer101 was “shepherded” by Ellis and ultimately created by the UT System in partnership with The Texas A&M University System and the Texas Association of Community Colleges. Since its launch, Transfer 101 has evolved into a web portal that, in addition to helping students, provides information to families and the military. Also, on the near horizon is a section for international students.

Ellis adds that since Transfer 101 was launched there has been an increase in the number of community college students transferring into the UT System. “We are attributing that to the entire Transfer 101 initiative, which, in addition to the web portal, includes the work being done at the campus level,” she explains. “There is a heightened awareness of the importance of the transfer student and the barriers they face. Everyone is really working hard to reduce those barriers. It’s a systemic effort, and one thing will not fix it.”

Other States

Every state that can be considered a bellwether state, or a state on a strong pathway to becoming a bellwether state, was not covered in this report. Several other reports are cited below in order to provide a general feel for what’s going on in the field of transfer and articulation statewide across the country.

“There is a heightened awareness of the importance of the transfer student and the barriers they face. Everyone is really working hard to reduce those barriers. It’s a systemic effort, and one thing will not fix it.”

– Martha Ellis
An April 2011 report by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges, sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates and Walter S. Johnson Foundations, analyzed transfer associate degree programs that have been established in Arizona, New Jersey, Ohio and Washington for between 2 and 15 years. The report shows some of the positive results of transfer associate degree programs, referring to a good number of state studies that have concluded, for instance, that such degree programs:

- improve transfer rates
- better prepare students for upper-division work
- help to produce students with higher GPAs after two and four semesters than students who had not completed a transfer associate degree
- improved degree completion
- reduced time and number of credits to degree
- increased transfer and degree completion among populations that have been historically less successful in navigating transfer pathways
- lead to improved system efficiency and greater cost savings for states and students.

The June 2010 study by Hezel Associates and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) [cited in the quote by Longanecker in this report’s Introduction] that was sponsored by the Lumina Foundation for Education, highlighted policies and practices used by states in their approaches to transfer and articulation. The study described the following five “Commonalities in State Approaches” and included a table identifying which states have adopted them:

- 15 states implemented general education common core courses.
- 7 states had common course numbering systems.
- 22 states have statewide program-major-to-program-major articulation agreements.
- 20 states implemented block credit transfer practices that are typically applicable to general education or prerequisite courses to avoid course-by-course transfer and/or articulation agreements.
- 31 states had transfer associate degree programs.

**State Online Advising & Equivalency Systems**

The Hezel Associates/WICHE study also yielded an interesting research brief on state websites related to transfer and articulation. Similar to the previously noted FACTS.org website out of Florida and the Transfer 101 website out of Texas, it was noted in the study that “these tools make it easier to keep course equivalency information and transfer agreements current.” The study, which based its results on survey responses from 24 state transfer and articulation websites from a targeted list of 37 websites out of 118, also noted that these websites have been developed to:

- serve as a single entry point for accessing transfer and articulation information
- give students immediate access to resources that can help them understand their transfer options
• reduce the workload on faculty and advisors who are required to maintain up-to-date information on course equivalencies, degree requirements, and transfer agreements

• promote collaboration and cooperation between all institutional partners

The research brief noted that these kinds of websites are really nothing new, with some having been in place for more than 15 years. The South Carolina Transfer and Articulation Center (SC TRAC) (https://www.sctrac.org) is one of the newest, launched in April 2010 after four years of effort. “The most significant growth has been in the past five years, with one-half of the sites in the survey launched since 2005.”

Some additional transfer and articulation websites worth noting here include AZ Transfer (http://aztransfer.com/), California’s ASSIST (http://www.assist.org), the Virginia Education Wizard (https://www.vawizard.org/vccs/Main.action), and Alabama’s STARS system (http://stars.troy.edu/stars/stars.htm).

Additionally, The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), comprised of 16 member states, was awarded a four-year, $800,000 grant from the Lumina Foundation to build a website called The AdultLearner.org that will be designed to provide adult learners who have some college credit with information and online services that supports having them return to college and earn a degree. The new website is set to go live during the fall of 2011 and will include a clearinghouse of degree-completion programs and information about non-traditional ways to earn transfer credit. “There will be information published on this web portal about prior learning assessment; there will be information about CLEP examinations (College Level Examination Programs); there will be information about portfolio assessment; there will be information about the services provided by ACE (American Council on Education College Credit Recommendation Service),” says Bruce Chaloux, director of Student Access Programs and Services for SREB and manager of SREB’s Electronic Campus (http://www.electroniccampus.org). “We are trying to provide an array of services, and our base would be recognition of credit and helping adults move more quickly towards earning a credential or degree.”

**Community College Agreements with Private Institutions**

Community college students seeking to transfer to private colleges, particularly private liberal arts colleges, have historically run into barriers. Wheaton College, for instance, highlighted in the College Board report mentioned in the Introduction, is representative of a liberal arts college [almost 200 years old] that is steeped in a four-year, traditional time frame for students to complete a bachelor’s degree, making “it difficult for transfer students to find an entry point midstream.” This is not to say, however, that Wheaton College is anti-community-college-student-transfer. Wheaton College’s dean of admission and student aid, for instance, noted that “faculty are currently
plus, as noted on its website, the Foundation’s annual Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship “makes it possible for the nation’s top community college students to complete their bachelor’s degrees by transferring to a four-year college or university. The Foundation provides up to $30,000 per year to each of approximately 50 deserving students selected annually, making it the largest private scholarship for two-year and community college transfer students in the country.”

the Foundation’s Senior Program Director Emily Froimson explains:

Ten years ago it was unusual to talk about community colleges and elite private institutions in the same conversation, and people would not necessarily associate high-achieving students with community colleges. The fact is there are many high-achieving students at community colleges. There are many reasons why students start off in a community college. It is not just about remedial education and workforce development. For many students, it’s a step toward a baccalaureate degree, and the foundation recognizes that.

Pennsylvania Community College Increases Opportunities for Transfers

A good example of a community college that is working at increasing opportunities for its students to transfer into private four-year institutions can be found at Montgomery County Community College (MCCC) in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. MCCC President Karen Stout explains how “the whole idea of transfer and transition is part of our strategic plan and part of our student-success agenda,” adding that for many years MCCC has shaped college-by-college “core-to-core agreements” with four-year institutions.
“In the last couple of years we have taken some very successful models we developed and moved into working with what I would call selective transfer partners,” Stout continues. These partners include Bucknell University, Dickinson College, Bryn Mawr College, and La Salle University. “We want to expand our students’ thinking about transfer. We want to expand their thinking about what they are capable of achieving.” Stout adds:

There has been a lot of focus on community colleges in the last couple of years, and there is more awareness of student aspirations for transfer than ever before. I think that community colleges are looking at completion in a holistic way, not just completion of a credential or an associate degree, but, at least at Montgomery, looking at what happens to our students when they transfer. Do they complete the baccalaureate degree? So, I think there is more of an impetus for us to reach out and form partnerships, and I have to say that every time we have made an inquiry to a transfer partner, we have been well received.

Growing Outreach to Community Colleges from Online Education Providers

While many states and private institutions are moving in the right direction toward making it easier for community college students to transfer into four-year programs, online education providers that offer baccalaureate degrees on a national level are also making headway into the marketplace for accepting community college credit and degree transfers, especially from adult, non-traditional-aged prospective students who have decided to return to college in order to boost their opportunities for career advancement [see companion report, “Eight Transfer Students Success Stories in Progress”].

“There has been a lot of focus on community colleges in the last couple of years, and there is more awareness of student aspirations for transfer than ever before. I think that community colleges are looking at completion in a holistic way, not just completion of a credential or an associate degree, but, at least at Montgomery, looking at what happens to our students when they transfer.”

– Karen Stout

Online, Competency-based Provider Grows Community College Partnerships

Western Governors University (WGU), for instance, is a good case in point of how an online education provider has placed a firm focus on reaching out to community colleges and adult learners who have transferable community college credit or full associate degrees. WGU is a non-profit, competency-based, online university that was created in 1997 by 19 U.S. governors. It currently services a nationwide enrollment of 25,000 students. The average age of these students is 36 years old.

Over the past year WGU has created state-endorsed subsidiaries in Indiana, Washington, and most recently in Texas. In late August of 2011, WGU announced that it received a $4.5 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation “to help leverage the online university’s state subsidiaries to expand access to affordable, competency-based education.”

A little less than one month later, WGU announced a partnership between the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) that is “designed to make it easier for the state’s community college graduates to transfer to WGU Texas [established on August 3, 2011] to complete a bachelor’s degree.” TACC President Reynaldo Garcia was quoted as saying that
“this agreement offers our graduates another opportunity for completing their bachelor’s degrees at a quality university that is affordable and accessible.”

Managing a Transfer Process
From July 2010 through June 2011, more than 2,430 students from across the country transferred in complete associate degrees they had earned into one of the many baccalaureate degrees offered through WGU’s four colleges: Teachers College, College of Business, College of Information Technology, and the College of Health Professions. Several thousand additional students transferred in credit they had earned at community colleges without having first earned an associate degree. Many of these transferrable credits had been earned several years earlier.

The management of all transfer processes is provided through WGU’s Office of the Registrar’s Transcript Evaluation Department, which claims to have “generous” community college transfer policies. As noted on WGU’s admissions website (http://www.wgu.edu/admissions/cc_transfer), students who have earned an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree “will typically enter WGU with upper-division standing and clear or waive at least 40 competency units (CUs), which are equivalent to credit hours.” Students who have earned an Associate of Applied Science, or a limited number of college courses, “may be able to clear course requirements through a course-by-course transcript evaluation.”

“We make certain assumptions about people who have an associate degree. If they don’t have an associate degree, we do a course-by-course evaluation, and we will award transfer credit based on the competencies and requirements we are looking for.”

– Tamara Howell

Third-Party Course Evaluation System Helps
The course-by-course evaluation process is accomplished by matching transcripts that list courses by codes to corresponding course descriptions. This is achieved through a third-party solution called the Transfer Evaluation System TES® provided by College Source, Inc. (http://tes.collegesource.com/), a San Diego-based digital catalog service that has partnerships with the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) and the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). TES is a hosted solution that gives its users [primarily transfer credit coordinators] access to over 40 million course descriptions and more than 50,000 cover-to-cover electronic college and university catalogues. As noted on the TES website, “TES® empowers users to quickly locate course descriptions; route and track the evaluation process; store, manage, group, and publicize the resulting equivalencies; and employ powerful algorithms to generate lists of likely equivalencies between institutions.”

“TES allows universities like us to access college and university catalogues at one convenient location,” says WGU Registrar Darin Hobbs. Otherwise creating and maintaining an internal library of numerous past and present
college and university catalogues would be a highly challenging and time-consuming logistical undertaking.

**Building Relationships with Community Colleges**

In addition to the work of its Office of the Registrar and its Transcript Evaluation Department, WGU’s outreach for the development of transfer and articulation agreements and partnerships with community colleges is handled through a Community College Partnership Program that WGU created in 2008 (http://www.wgu.edu/partners). Graduates from one of WGU’s community college partner members benefit from a $65 WGU application fee waiver, eligibility for a 5 percent tuition discount for the duration of their programs at WGU, and eligibility to apply for a Go Further with WGU Scholarship (http://www.wgu.edu/tuition_financial_aid/gofurther_overview) valued up to $2,000.

As of September 30, 2011, two-year institutions from 27 states were listed as members of the WGU Community College Partnership Program, including community college systems with multiple institutions such as the Ivy Tech Community College System, the Maricopa Community College District, the Florida College System, the Colorado Community College System, the Louisiana Community and Technical Colleges System, and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. WGU is actively seeking additional community college partners and plans to double the number of community college partners within the next two years.

“We have signed a good number of transfer agreements in various parts of the country. We are working on phase two, meeting with and educating transfer personnel at colleges about our programs, our policies, and our format to make them feel comfortable with us.”

– Craig Gilman

**For-Profit Online Ed Provider Creates New Community College Relations & Outreach Department**

American Public University (APU) is another online provider that created a special department to handle the development of partnerships with community colleges. APU is part of the for-profit American Public University System, which includes the American Military University (AMU) that offers 100 percent online associate, baccalaureate and graduate degree programs. The system has a current enrollment of 83,700 students with a medium age of 30 years old.

APU’s Community College Relations and Outreach Department was launched in 2011 (http://www.apu.apus.edu/lp/agreements/community-colleges) and is currently operating within the parameters of a three-phase approach, says Craig Gilman, community college outreach manager. “We really did not start to build momentum until the spring of this year,” Gilman adds. In phase one APU has developed what it calls a “block transfer policy” that enables community college graduates with an Associate of Arts or an Associate of Science degree to seamlessly transfer into a wide variety of APU programs with junior-level status. As of September 30, 2011, 34 two-year institutions had already entered into block transfer agreements through memorandums of understanding with APU. Each of these institutions is listed on the APU Community
College Relations and Outreach website with a link to information that precisely outlines what degree programs are completely transferable. Students who apply for admission and transfer through partnered institutions are not charged an application fee.

“We have signed a good number of transfer agreements in various parts of the country,” Gilman explains. “We are working on phase two, meeting with and educating transfer personnel at colleges about our programs, our policies, and our format to make them feel comfortable with us. In phase three we work at getting on their invitation list to attend their transfer fairs in order to meet with students [face-to-face] and address questions that students might have.”

Other Online Ed Providers
Of course WGU and APU are not the only online education providers who are increasingly reaching out to community college graduates. Capella University, for instance, has a Community College Alliance Program (http://www.capella.edu/about_capella/community_college_alliances.aspx) that, as of September 30, 2011, had 15 member institutions listed on its website. The University of Phoenix has online guides for course-by-course and program transfer [through 2 + 2 agreements] on its credit transfer website (http://www.phoenix.edu/admissions/transfer_information/transfer-guides.html). National University has developed credit transfer information accessible online for more than 110 California community colleges (http://www.nu.edu/Admissions/Undergraduate/TransferInformation.cfm). Ivy Bridge College, a relatively new provider of fully online associate degree programs formed through a joint venture agreement between Altius Education and Tiffin University of Ohio, has established transfer agreements with 100 four-year colleges and universities (http://ivybridge.tiffin.edu/transfer-programs).

A Critical Issue that Needs to be Resolved
While all the work reported here stresses great strides already made and on the horizon, the one critical issue that higher education has yet to reinvent, especially during these tough economic times and record unemployment, relates to cost and affordability. Community colleges remain the best option for students to save money, but once they transfer over to a four-year institution, the cost to attend becomes prohibitive for many.

While the growth of fully online degree programs helps to give many students more flexibility, and, in some cases, more economical options — allowing these students to remain at full time jobs as they move forward on a pathway toward a degree — such options are geared more specifically toward adult, non-traditional-aged students. For younger, traditional-aged students [and their parents] who want to physically attend college classes and learn from the valuable social aspects that four-year colleges and universities provide, the cost and affordability picture looks bleak.

Consider the following:

- As state budgets decrease, tuition at most higher education institutions will increase by more than double the rate of inflation.32

- Students not receiving grants or tax benefits are paying on average of 7.9 percent more in tuition and fees at public four-year college this year than they paid last year.33

- Total net charges covering tuition, fees, room and board at public four-year colleges and universities are about $600 higher after adjusting for inflation, than they were five years ago.34
Two Guidebooks About Transfer for the Student and/or Student Counselor

There are two excellent books that can help students and advisors with transfer and articulation issues: “Community College Transfer Guide,” by Don Silver (2009: Adams-Hall Publishing) and “Transfer Student Companion,” by Thomas J. Grites and Susan Rondeau (2009: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company). Both are easy reads, loaded with valuable and timely information, and both include workbook-and-task-oriented tools for community college students to utilize as they chart their pathways toward a bachelor’s degree and their careers.

Silver says that his transfer guide “grew out of frustration with my son transferring from community college.” As a veteran writer of guide books, Silver adds that his job entails “breaking down complex topics into something that is understandable to everyone,” which is exactly what he accomplished with the “Community College Transfer Guide.” “I tried to enumerate everything I could find, and ran the book by outside experts to see if there was anything else I should include.”

Martha Ellis, associate vice chancellor for Community College Partnerships at the University of Texas System, who is also quoted in the Texas section of this report, wrote a brief review of the “Community College Transfer Guide,” acknowledging that “it’s very helpful for counselors and advisors themselves, and when working with students one-on-one, or as a text for transfer workshops and orientation classes.”

Grites and Rondeau, both seasoned student advisors, teamed up to write the “Transfer Student Companion.” Combined, they have more than 65 years experience in the field, Rondeau at Pima Community College and Grites at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. Both have extensive first-hand know-how related to counseling transfer students individually, as well as for leading courses and seminars to groups of students and counselors about the transfer process.

Rondeau explains that she has always counseled students to be more conscious of how they are personally moving forward and making choices for themselves as they take courses at the community college. She advises students to repeatedly evaluate their aspirations rather than make a hurried choice, for example, to major in business or engineering, only because the evidence points to relatively higher earnings in those fields. “Ask yourself if that has anything to do with you who you are, and what’s in your heart, and what you feel,” she says. “We encourage students to not let only external information drive their decisions. If you pick something that is big right now, by the time you graduate, it might not be big. Most of the students who are in school today are going to work in careers that have not been invented yet.”

“Major in what you like to study,” adds Grites. “That is the only place you are going to do well; and whatever that is, learn career-transferable skills along the way” (e.g. communication, critical thinking, presentation, ability to work in teams, etc.).

For helping students explore their choices about majors and career pathways, Rondeau recommended the University of Washington Division of Student Life website at http://careers.uw.edu/ and the University of North Carolina Wilmington Career Center at http://uncw.edu/stuaff/career/.
• Family incomes have declined or stagnated and the assets many families have saved to pay for higher education have diminished in value.35

• From 1999-2009 tuition increases out-paced median family income in states where community colleges are most critical to higher education opportunity and to achieving a baccalaureate degree. Plus, financial aid by itself will not address affordability as costs exceed family incomes.36

So, yes, there are impediments, but there is also great hope on the horizon. All the innovative accomplishments under the transfer and articulation banner that have been touched upon in this report are helping to address the affordability issue because they are all geared toward making the pathway toward completing a bachelor’s degree more efficient, quicker and obviously less time consuming, and consequently less costly.

Students who pay close attention to their academic pathways and take advantage of the transfer and articulation advisement services being offered to them in concert with the policies and agreements that have taken place between numerous community colleges and four-year institutions can experience a smooth transfer process and save on cost by attending a community college for their freshman and sophomore years and then entering a four-year institution with full junior status. More solid community college pathways to a bachelor’s degree exist today than ever before, including quality online options, and they are growing in number, pointing to a bright future for those students with a strong work ethic and self-disciplined desire to succeed.
Endnotes:


8. ASU. (January 2001). *ASU Community College Partnerships Executive Summary.*


   http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/Events/TransferSuccessSummit.

   http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/Events/TransferSuccessSummit.

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34. Ibid.

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Interviewees

Many thanks go out to all of the people listed below who took out the time to be interviewed about transfer and articulation.

Andrea Buehman, Executive Director of Academic Affairs & Partnerships, Maricopa Community Colleges

Bruce Chaloux, Director, Student Access and Programs and the Electronic Campus at Southern Regional Education Board

Martha Ellis, Associate Vice Chancellor, Community College Partnerships, Office of Academic Affairs, University of Texas System

Michael Falk, CEO of Degreeseekers, LLC

Paul Feist, Vice Chancellor, Communications, California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office

Emily Froimson, Senior Program Director, Jacke Kent Cooke Foundation

Craig Gilman, Community College Outreach Manager, American Public University System

Tom Grites, Assistant to the Provost, Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

Beth Hagan, Executive Director, Community College Baccalaureate Association

Stephen J. Handel, Executive Director, Higher Education Relationship and Development and Community College Initiatives, The College Board

Maria Hesse, Vice Provost for Transfer Partnership, Arizona State University

Richard Hezel, President of Hezel Associates

Darin Hobbs, Registrar, Western Governors University

Tamara Howell, Manager of Transcript Evaluation, Western Governors University

Carol Lee, Transfer Director/Articulation Officer, Imperial Valley Community College

Janet Marling, Executive Director of the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students

Linda Michalowski, Vice Chancellor, California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office

Mark Milliron, Deputy Director, Higher Education, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Brian Muys, Director, Public Relations, American Public University System

Pat Partridge, Vice President of Enrollment, Western Governors University

Richard Rhodes, President of Austin Community College

Joyce Romano, Vice President for Student Affairs, Valencia College

Susan Rondeau, former Student Counselor, Pima Community College, Freelance Writer

Bob Rustad, Director of Partnership Programming, Western Governors University

Sandy Shugart, President, Valencia College

Don Silver, Author of “Community College Transfer Guide”

Jeff Spano, Dean, California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office

Karen Stout, President, Montgomery County Community College
About The SOURCE on Community College Issues, Trends & Strategies

This is the fifth report published on the website of The SOURCE on Community College Issues, Trends & Strategies inside The SOURCE Library section, published by Lorenzo Associates, Inc.

These reports are written and designed by George Lorenzo. They are created through in-depth, yet informal, telephone interviews, along with deep research that focuses on the most recent scholarly literature, as well as recent feature articles and news stories published by today’s most respected education news media organizations and companies. The end result is like an extraordinarily long feature article, with very timely and informative quotations from leading experts in the field, combined with a synthesis of scholarly insights with cited endnotes, along with the added benefit of live links to numerous relevant resources throughout the publication, highlighted in color.

In addition, these reports are designed in a way to be easy to read and follow, with relatively large type and wide line spacing, in a two column format. Graphic images and/or photos are added, as well as sub-headlines and side-bar articles, to make everything a bit easier on the eyes. We hope you like our style. It is a fairly simple graphic design, but it is also challenging and time-consuming to make it all look right.

The mission of The SOURCE is to provide free, timely, accurate, and highly informative resources to community college faculty, staff, administrators and students. In addition to publishing reports like this one, The SOURCE aggregates and publishes an enormous number of links to outside news, feature articles, reports and organizations related to the community college sector inside ten, topic-related SOURCE Silos: Miscellaneous News, Reports, Articles & Stats; College Readiness; Remedial Education; College Completion & Retention; Workforce Development; Technology Adoption; Data Analysis & Assessment; Funding; Organizations; and our newly created Transfer & Articulation Silo.

In addition, The SOURCE publishes a free, self-subscription-based electronic newsletter, “SOURCE Updates,” that aggregates all the links that are posted to The SOURCE website every other week.

All this and more, is freely available through The SOURCE website at [http://www.edpath.com/thesource.html](http://www.edpath.com/thesource.html).
Western Governors University: Partnering for Community College Student Success

When 19 U.S. governors established Western Governors University in 1997 they had a vision—little more than a dream—that technology coupled with excellent academic quality would open doors of opportunity for countless individuals who might otherwise be unable to pursue their education and career goals. Today, in 2011, the vision is reality.

Like America’s community colleges, nonprofit WGU serves a diverse student body. Of WGU’s 25,000 students spread across all 50 states, most are working adults, and their ages range from the early 20s to 60s. They come to WGU because they want a great quality education at a very affordable tuition. They want flexibility, support, and knowledge and skills that will fit what the job market is demanding. And they want bachelor’s and master’s degrees that are respected by academia and industry.

But given that online education is so widespread today, what makes WGU different?

“Students choose WGU for a host of special reasons, including WGU’s low tuition and flexibility,” notes Patrick Partridge, Vice President of Enrollment at WGU, “but most also value WGU’s unique competency-based academic model that allows students to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities through rigorous assessments on an individualized pace not tied to traditional semesters.”

The WGU approach is particularly well-suited to the community college graduate or student who has completed substantial college already—even more so if the student has additional experience or competence in their degree area.

WGU does not compete for transfer students who want to attend state four-year institutions. Rather, Partridge notes, “WGU is a transfer option for community college students whose life situations—such as work, family, and income—puts the traditional campus education out of reach. Often that’s an older student, but the same situation applies to many younger students too.”

WGU also assigns a mentor for each new student whose primary job is to provide ongoing personal support, including weekly calls at first. “Our mentors are basically ‘success coaches,’” says Chris Mallett, Associate Provost for Mentoring. “Their job is to be part personal coach and part academic advisor.” The one-on-one mentoring model is also applied to support students in each online course.

As for the low tuition mentioned earlier, for most WGU programs tuition is less than $6,000 a year. Many students take advantage of WGU’s flat-rate tuition of $2,890, which covers ALL the courses that a student can complete in six months, to accelerate the time to complete a degree. Sometimes the saving in time and money can be dramatic.

Noted Harvard Business School guru Clay Christiansen considers WGU one of the leading “disruptive innovators” in higher education. The praise is appreciated, Partridge says, “but we want everyone to understand that our innovations are always student focused.”

Western Governors University has developed marketing partnerships and articulation agreements with community colleges all across the U.S. to provide a meaningful option for students whose needs might otherwise go unmet. To learn more, visit the WGU website at www.wgu.edu/partners.