

“Reverse Transfer” Degree

Fact Sheet

Spring 2012

Background

Today’s students move frequently between 2- and 4-year postsecondary institutions in pursuit of education, training and a degree. Some students transfer into 4-year universities before they complete an associate’s degree at a community college, with a percentage of this group gaining a bachelor’s degree eventually through a combination of credits from both institutions. A new pilot program between Oregon’s public community colleges and universities will begin to offer students the option of obtaining a degree through “Reverse Transfer.” This recognizes students’ achievements with an associate’s degree after they have transferred to a 4-year school and have accumulated the credits needed to fulfill the 2-year degree program requirements. It also recognizes the degree completion for the community college, which receives no “credit” for the degree through current data measures tracking completions¹.

Benefits of the “Reverse Transfer” Degree

Students who are awarded an associate’s degree through Reverse Transfer benefit in a number of ways:

- They are more likely to stay in school and finish a 4-year degree program. Some students can get discouraged after they transfer to a 4-year college/university and see more years ahead of them, still, before they get a degree. If they are awarded their associate’s degree while completing their bachelor’s degree, the accomplishment of this helps them stay motivated and on track to a 4-year degree. Statistics from recent work in this area show retention rates improve by 10% for those students who receive an associate’s degree through Reverse Transfer once they are at a 4-year institution².
- Graduates will have both an associate’s and a bachelor’s degree on their resume, reflecting a broader, more accurate view of their skills and training received over time. For those who do not complete a bachelor’s degree after transferring but receive an associate’s degree with accrued credits, they have at least the one degree to help them in their career goals and for job prospects; and if they return to complete their bachelor’s degree later it will be easier to re-enter and move more quickly towards completion.
- If the associate’s degree is in a more technical, applied area than the bachelor’s degree, this can be attractive to a potential employer who is looking for someone who understands both the hands-on and the theoretical aspects of a given field.

Colleges and universities also benefit from Reverse Transfer:

- Community college completions will more accurately reflect the investment of time, resources and support that 2-year institutions have in the students who transfer prior to degree completion. These institutions will

¹ Data on graduation rates nationally is collected by the National Center for Education Statistics for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, which counts only first-time, full-time students who finish a degree at the institution at which they began over a period of 3 years at 2-year institutions and 6 years at 4-year institutions. It is now recognized that this approach does not accurately reflect the behavior of today’s students who tend to move back and forth between community colleges and 4-year institutions.

² University of Texas, El Paso and El Paso Community College collaboration on reverse transfer

gain credit for the degrees in their completion outcomes, create closer transfer collaborations with 4-year institutions, and gain alumni who feel a greater connection to the community college.

- Community colleges that lose students today before degree completion have to count this as a “failure” even if students’ academic experience at that school leads them to a bachelor’s degree at a 4-year institution. Reverse Transfer will record the associate’s degree earned after transfer as a success and credit the community college with this when calculating their completions.
- The counting of completed associate’s degrees will more accurately reflect the graduation rates and achievements of community colleges; and will be represented in the state’s important 40-40-20 goal to increase educational attainment in Oregon.

Next Steps in Oregon

- After studying a successful model of Reverse Transfer in El Paso, Texas, Oregon’s public community colleges and universities are undertaking a pilot program with these partner institutions: Oregon State University and Linn-Benton Community College; Eastern Oregon University, Blue Mountain Community College, and Treasure Valley Community College; and Oregon Institute of Technology and Klamath Community College. Eventually, additional public institutions will be engaged in awarding associate’s degrees through Reverse Transfer, and private, nonprofit institutions as well.
- Pilot partners will be determining the administrative systems and technology they need in place to begin tracking and extracting student credit data from transcripts between the two or more institutions who are partnering. This is complex given the need to share information between two institutions in two different postsecondary sectors and will take some resources and a high level of commitment to accomplish. Partners will be exploring the possibility of foundation or other grant funding to help with implementation and technical system requirements.
- Outreach to students and the public at 2- and 4-year institutions about degree attainment through Reverse Transfer is an important part of successfully implementing this in Oregon and seeing fully the positive outcomes of the program for students and for the campuses. Partnering institutions will work together to find the best methods and channels to use to communicate the opportunity of Reverse Transfer to their students.

For More Information

For more information on associate’s degree attainment through Reverse Transfer and the pilots in Oregon, please contact:

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