

2021 Legislative Concept Proposal LC 599 - Credit Transfer

Problem

Transfer students who complete a bachelor's degree do so at the expense of greater time, greater number of credits taken, and greater cost. On average, transfer students who earn a bachelor's degree take eight more credits and are enrolled in school two semesters longer than university students who began as first-time freshmen. The number of excess credits varies substantially by field of study, with larger excess credits observed particularly in STEM fields.

The reasons students start at community college are varied, but include greater affordability, more open admission policies, and lower class sizes. Attractive to many, these reasons may hold particular salience for BIPOC students, who come disproportionately from lower-income backgrounds than white students, and who in general are not afforded the same opportunities for academic preparation and postsecondary enrollment as their white peers during elementary and secondary education. Although starting a postsecondary pathway at a community college should not result in a windier, more uncertain path to a bachelor's degree and the future earnings power it unlocks, the reality is that it does.

Background

In 2017, the Oregon Legislature passed HB 2998, which directs the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), community colleges and universities listed in ORS 352.002 to streamline transfer pathways. (ORS 350.400)

In the two years since the bill's passage community colleges, public universities and the HECC met the following required mandates:

- Core Transfer Maps (General Core and STEM Core): establishes a path for community college students to take courses guaranteed to transfer as general education at ANY Oregon public university.
- Developed three Unified Statewide Transfer Agreements (USTAs) now referred to as Major Transfer Maps (MTM): English, Biology, and Elementary Education
- Determined a measurable definition of "excess credit" in order to gather "apples to apples" data to further identify barriers to smooth transfer pathways

Progress on this work has been made. However, three years of experience has informed the staff's view that the structure of the law is not sufficient to resolve intractable cross-institutional issues. Though the legislation forced institutions into the room, and forced an examination of systemic transfer issues, the legislation does not set clear enough expectations for structural reform and course alignment, firm enough deadlines for definitive action, or provide for an accountability mechanism. Without these elements, some of the transfer work becomes an exercise

to draw a good map to describe transfer pathways to students, when the work should be about building a much straighter road.

Proposed Solution

HECC proposes to introduce a version of SB 1521 from 2020. This bill modifies the transfer student bill of rights and responsibilities to include HB 2998 transfer terminology, enshrines a role for the Oregon Transfer and Articulation Committee into law, strengthens reporting requirements, and develops expectations around establishing a transfer portal.

HECC recommends introducing this proposal to place some of these ideas and needs on the record for legislative debate. At the same time HECC staff are engaged with institutions and the Senate Education Committee on the possibility of other proposals to further the transfer work. In these discussions, HECC staff is promoting the principles of explicit expectations of curricular alignment, clear deadlines, and an accountability or trip mechanism if agreement cannot be reached.