

**House Bill 2998 (2017)**  
**Best Practices in Student Advising**

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**Oregon Council of Presidents**  
**Oregon Community College Association**  
**June 2018**

**Executive Summary**

House Bill 2998 (2017) directed the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) and community colleges and universities listed in ORS 352.002 to improve transfer pathways between Oregon's public community colleges and universities. Section 7 of the bill specifically charged colleges and universities to report to the Legislature on best practices for advising students about:

- (1) Foundational curricula (FC) established pursuant to House Bill 2998;
- (2) Unified statewide transfer agreements (USTAs) established under House Bill 2998;
- (3) Methods for identifying a major course of study no later than a student's second year of post-secondary education;
- (4) Strategies and resources available to enhance student advising effectiveness and increase student access to information about USTAs; and
- (5) Academic support services, with an emphasis on assisting students enrolled in courses or major courses of study with high rates of incompleteness.

The following report is submitted in response to this directive and generally adopts the approach taken by the broader HB 2998 work group by focusing on transfer from community colleges to universities rather than transfer between colleges and between universities.

More specifically, this report summarizes data on Oregon's transfer students and describes the critical role that advising plays in supporting their success. Following a review of best practices for advising transfer students and a particular need for effective communications, the report highlights best practices that have been adopted in Oregon and responds to the specific provisions of HB 2998 noted above. Lastly, the report identifies next steps for improving the transfer process.

**Data on Transfer Students in Oregon**

Community college transfer students comprise one-quarter of resident undergraduate students at Oregon public universities (HECC, 2018). Nationally, community college students are much more likely to be low-income or the first in their family to attend college when compared to those who start at four-year institutions (NCES, 2011). This is also true in Oregon where transfer students tend to be older, more likely to be from a racial/ethnic minority population, or come from rural backgrounds (HECC, 2018).

A report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that most entering community college students, 81 percent, intend to earn a bachelor's degree or higher (Horn & Skomsvold, 2012). Yet currently only around 14 percent of community college transfers across the country earn a

bachelor’s degree within six years (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Students who enter a university as first-time freshmen graduate at higher rates than students who transfer to a university from a community college. In Oregon, of students who transfer with 45-55 credits, 57 percent graduate within six years of transfer. Of university first-time freshman who persist to their second year, 76 percent graduate within six years of admission (HECC, 2018a).

For those students who do successfully complete a bachelor’s degree after transfer, they are likely to accumulate more credits than first-time freshmen who complete a bachelor’s degree. A HECC analysis found that Oregon community college transfer students who completed a bachelor’s degree accumulated, on average, 9.9 excess credits when compared to the number of credits accumulated by students who began at a university. This credit differential creates several negative implications for students. As the HECC report stated, “...this credit differential represents millions of dollars of student tuition, financial aid, and state FTE appropriations spent unnecessarily” (2018a, p. 16) as well as forgone earnings when students are not in the workforce.

The amount of excess credit ranges by year of transfer, institution, and major. While the average accumulated credit amount is 9.9, this number varies between a high of 27.7 in Civil Engineering to a low average of -0.4 in Romance Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics (meaning that transfer and direct entry students finish with virtually the same number of credits). Among the first four USTA majors – Biology, English, Teacher Preparation, and Business – the average credit differential for transfer students completing the degree program ranges from a low of 7 to a high of 16 (2018a).

Figure 1 highlights the credit disparity between first-time freshmen entering a university and transfer students who enroll with varying ranges of earned credits. These data suggest that transferring to a university sooner has a positive effect on reducing the number of excess credits. Under HB 2998, USTAs will identify whether there is an optimal number of transfer credits other than 90 credits. Transfer students who enroll in a university with 45-55 credits tend to align more closely with the first-time freshman cohort and complete with fewer excess credits.

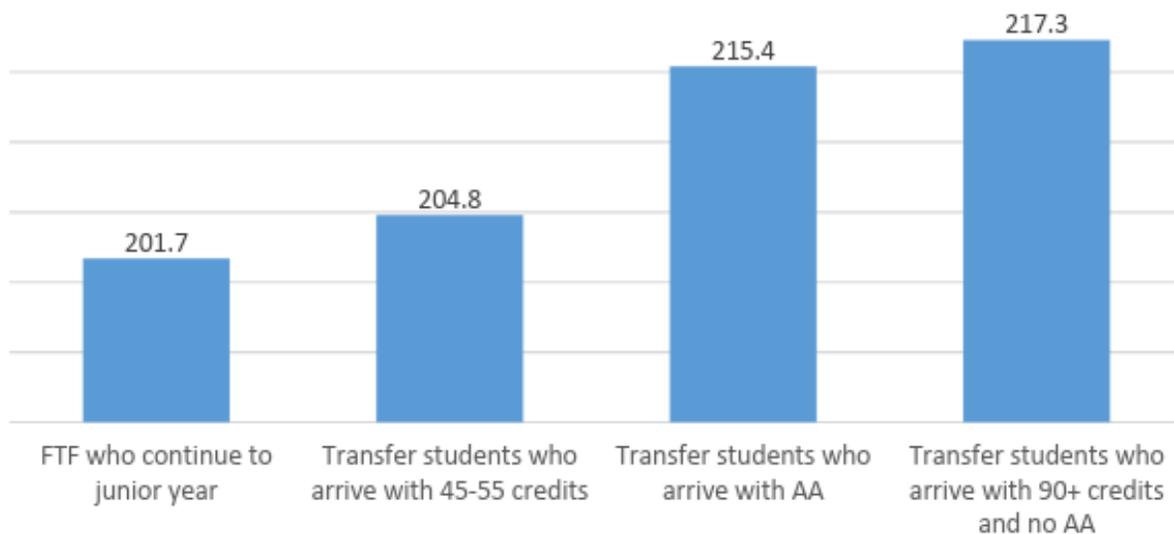


Figure 1: Average credits earned at graduation for resident first-time freshman and community college transfer students, by number of credits and degree at transfer, fall 2010 cohort, Oregon public universities (HECC, 2018).

## The Critical Role of Academic Advising

As Jayne Drake, a past president of the Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA), has explained, there are “four decades of research about student persistence that consistently points to three critical elements: the value of connecting students early on to the institution through learning support systems (tutoring and supplemental instruction programs, for example), first-year programming (learning communities and first-year seminars), and solid academic advising, with advising positioned squarely as the vital link in this retention equation” (Drake, 2011, p. 9). Without a clear understanding of why they are doing something or where they are going, people lose focus and may give up and end their educational journey. Our students are no different. If students do not have a specific goal and understand the means to achieve that goal, they may lose their motivation to remain in school and drop out. A key practice in postsecondary institutions to assist students with developing goals and designing efficient pathways is academic advising. According to T. R. Bailey, “Among the most important support services that can help community college students choose a program of study and stay on track are academic advising” (Bailey, et al., 2015 p. 57). Studies conducted by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) bolster that sentiment. Community college faculty and students “consistently report that advising is the most important student services that colleges offer” (CCCSE, 2018, p. 1). Academic advising is critical to community college students as well as students attending four-year universities. The timing of advising is also critically important. Research has shown that to be most effective, academic advising needs to be consistent and occur prior to students falling into academic, or other, problems (Karp, 2011).

In an ideal situation, students would have the same advisor for their entire time at an institution and develop a strong working relationship. “Good academic advising also provides perhaps the only opportunity for all students to develop a personal, consistent relationship with someone in the institution who cares about them” (Drake, 2011, p. 10). The importance of relationships cannot be overemphasized when it comes to student success and retention. Students who feel that there is someone at their institution who believes in them and will support them are more likely to persevere through difficult barriers in their educational pathway. “Academic advising is the only structured service on the campus in which all students have the opportunity for on-going, one-to-one contact with a concerned representative of the institution” (Habley, 1994, p. 10). A concerned, proactive advisor is instrumental in helping a student start and remain on an academic pathway, and they are often the first place the student will go when an issue with their academic progress arises. Even if an advisor cannot provide the specific assistance a student needs in every situation, they are a good place to start. A successful advising program should be a hub of resources for all student support. From guiding students toward learning support services, such as tutoring or a writing center, to encouraging them to meet with a financial aid counselor, an institution’s advising program should be a place for students to find helpful and accurate information as well as academic guidance and support. “By capitalizing on the benefits of quality advising, colleges can more effectively help students select the programs and courses that will help them stay in school and on track toward achievement of their education and career goals” (ACT, 2004, p. 18).

Nationally, one of the most prominent success stories on making investments in advising and other supports for students can be found in the City University of New York’s (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). As CUNY describes on its [website](#), “ASAP students receive the mentoring

and guidance they need to succeed. Each student is assigned an experienced advisor who meets with the student regularly and provides comprehensive academic, social, and interpersonal support. The advisor carefully guides each student's progress, steering students to make wise decisions about how to get the most out of their college experience, how to strategically plan for their futures, and how to address personal challenges. For ASAP students who choose to pursue further study after completing an associate degree, advisors support the selection, application, and transfer process to an appropriate baccalaureate program." ASAP students have access to career counseling from the moment they are accepted into the program, take the majority of their first-year classes in small, close-knit cohorts of 25 students who move through the program together by major, and receive financial support to cover any gaps between their financial aid and cost of tuition, as well as MTA Metrocards to mitigate any transportation challenges, and additional aid to cover the cost of textbooks.

ASAP has undergone a rigorous evaluation by MDRC with remarkable results, as documented on CUNY's ASAP website:

- "There are large and significant differences between ASAP and comparison group students in terms of retention, movement through developmental course work, credit accumulation, and graduation rates. ASAP's current cross-cohort three-year graduation rate is 53% vs. 23% for comparison group students."
- "Students who start ASAP with developmental needs also graduate at high rates: After three years, 48% of ASAP students with developmental needs graduated vs. 21% of comparison group students with developmental needs."
- "Students from underrepresented groups appear to see even greater benefits from ASAP than other students."
- "When graduation and transfer are considered together, 63 out of every 100 students who began ASAP three years earlier have either graduated, transferred to a baccalaureate program, or both—versus 44 out of every 100 comparison group students."
- "Most importantly, ASAP students graduate at more than double the rates of non-ASAP students." (Scrivener, et al., 2015)

As is the case with many promising practices, there is a cost. ASAP is no exception. These exemplary results add up to an annual cost of \$4,700 per student, on top of the roughly \$8,000 CUNY spends each year to educate a full-time student (Fain, 2015).

### Highlights of Advising Best Practices for Transfer Students

To assist in the writing of this report a review of scholarly literature was conducted. While advising practices at two- and four-year institutions appear quite similar, differences exist (King, 2002). Since the HB 2998 work group initially focused on community college to university transfer, the review of the literature focused on transfer advising practices at community colleges and promising practices that may impact a student's transition from a community college to a university. Several important practices emerged from the literature review that impact the success of transfer students:

- Developing a culture of transfer that includes setting high academic expectations for all students;

- Collaborating with destination institutions to provide accurate, consistent information to transfer students;
- Requiring ongoing advising and developing personalized relationships; and
- Integrating career planning into advising.

### **Developing a Culture of Transfer that Includes Setting High Academic Expectations for All Students**

Students, especially those from traditionally underserved populations, benefit from experiencing high academic expectations from K-12 through post-secondary education. This begins with the idea that every student who begins at a community college and intends to transfer to a university, will transfer to a four-year institution and graduate. In addition to high academic expectations, knowledgeable and consistent advising practices also contribute to the culture of transfer. One means for building a culture of transfer across Oregon is accelerated learning and partnerships with K-12 (e.g., Advanced Placement [AP], dual credit, International Baccalaureate [IB]). As momentum builds for high school students to enroll in accelerated credit, communication between K-12 districts and postsecondary institutions to ensure that courses are taken with intention, rather than just to accumulate college credits, is critical.

### **Collaborating with Destination Institutions to Provide Accurate, Consistent Information to Transfer Students**

Successful transfer partnerships involve close collaboration and communication between community colleges and four-year institutions. It is critical that collaboration includes working together to ensure that advisors and students are getting accurate, consistent information about transfer requirements and support resources. Aligning sending and receiving intuitions to provide accurate and consistent information is only the initial step. While most students benefit from meeting with an advisor, there remains a large population of students who chose to self-advise. It is imperative that information regarding the FC, USTAs, and other transfer requirements and processes be accessible to everyone in a clear, understandable format.

Inconsistent information and lack of knowledge contribute to barriers for transfer students, especially first-generation students and those from traditionally underserved populations because they often lack exposure to the workings of higher education. Some experts refer to a “‘hidden curriculum,’ a collection of undefined cultural norms, processes, and assumptions essential to navigating the academic, social, and administrative elements of college life” (Venit, 2016). Transfer students who lack this inside information are more likely to be confused by the planning and processes needed to navigate a successful transfer and, therefore, are dependent on easily accessible and accurate guidance. Close relationships between sending and receiving institutions is a key factor in providing this guidance to students.

### **Requiring Ongoing Advising to Develop Personalized Relationships**

Students benefit from consistent, regular, and proactive advising, based on personal connections with advisors. The literature supports making advising mandatory and assigning each student to a specific advisor (Donaldson et al., 2016; Kolenovic et al., 2013; Rhine et al., 2000). Additionally, students benefit from developing relationships with others who can support their transfer goal, including faculty, staff,

and peers. Advisors need to develop awareness of students' backgrounds and life experiences in order to create a climate that is welcoming and effective for students of all backgrounds.

### **Integrating Career Planning into Advising**

Students benefit from identifying long-term goals and having career planning integrated into advising, beginning in K-12 and continuing through their college and university experience. Students need support in selecting strategies to achieve their goals, including discussing careers and career-related issues with advisors.

## **Importance of Communications in Academic Advising for Transfer Students**

As mentioned above, communication between sending and receiving institutions, as well as directly with students, is critical to ensure that all parties understand transfer requirements and the support services may be available to students. Students must have access to this information in an easy to access and understand format.

The success of both the FC and the USTAs rely on accurate, timely and consistent communication. Students rely on their educational institutions (K-12, community colleges, and four-year institutions) to provide them with information, options, and opportunities that can assist them in reaching their goals. To provide this important academic guidance, academic advisors need thorough and current information about the FC and the USTAs to be proactively communicated to everyone who works in academic advising in Oregon higher education. "Academic advisors need to be aware of the countless dynamics that affect student success, particularly at the crucial time of entering college" (Nelson & Cooper, 2014). The more academic advisors are aware of and understand the FC and USTAs, the more these developments will ease student transfers and positively influence student retention and completion in Oregon higher education.

The HB 2998 work group has identified a need for a robust communications strategy to support the implementation and adoption of the FC and USTAs. While the need for communication plans at both the state and institutional levels is clear, much work remains for a statewide and institutional communication plans to be developed. It is unclear whether there are resources available at the colleges, universities, and HECC to fulfill this need.

## **Current Practices in Advising in Oregon Higher Education**

### **Survey of Post-Secondary Advisors in Oregon**

A survey was constructed to capture the current state of advising practices in Oregon public community colleges and universities. Academic advisors were provided standards and guidelines identified within functional areas of the Council for the Advancement and Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2015b), as well as NACADA Core Competencies (NACADA, 2017). The Aspen Institute's (Wyner, Deane, Jenkins, & Fink, 2016) evaluation of desirable practices for transfer between two- and four-year institutions similarly provided additional approaches for advisors to identify as current practices being implemented within their academic advising offices.

Based on the 55 academic advisor responses, most academic advising offices (both community college and university): employ full-time, professional academic advisors (53), utilize a degree audit software (51), assign students to an academic advisor within their area of study (40), and offer clear transfer mapping to or from at least one other Oregon school (40).

In looking at community colleges and four-year institutions distinctly, specific additional practices become apparent. Community college advisors (14) are intentional and proactive in their work: attending classes to present on academic goals and planning (9), assisting students with early identification on desired transfer destination schools [within first 45 credits] (8), and using an early alert system to help advisors identify at-risk students (9). University advisors (41) tend to focus more on progression of degree completion by assisting students in selecting a major early in their academic journey [within first 45 credits] (36), conducting advising appointments between 15 and 30 minutes (32), and intervening when students are off-track from their intended degree progress (30).

While many of the current practices found within Oregon higher education academic advising offices align with CAS Standards (CAS, 2015b), NACADA Core Competencies (NACADA, 2017), and the Aspen Institute's evaluation of desirable practices for transfer between two- and four-year institutions (Wyner, et.al, 2016), there was a noticeable dearth in the numbers of advisors. Specifically, few offices have a dedicated advisor working specifically with transfer students (18; 4 community college and 14 university), nor were most schools able to adhere to a NACADA suggestion of a lower student to advisor caseload (Robbins, 2013: 17; 3 community college and 14 university).

### **The Use of Technology in Advising**

Technology is one tool to help address some of the advising communication challenges with students, as well as alleviate some of the struggles caused by the state's higher student to advisor ratios. The key to any communication with students is to ensure it is easy to understand and access. A few institutions across the state are beginning to use text messaging as a way to "nudge" students to complete important deadlines, such as completing their FAFSA for financial aid. Research conducted by Dr. Benjamin Castleman and Lindsay Page (2014) found that texting can have significant effects on students' behavior, at a reasonable cost. They tested the impacts of texting on "summer melt" (the period of time after high school graduation when many students decide not to enroll in college after being accepted) and found that for a cost of \$10 per student, texting resulted in 70 percent of students enrolling in college versus 63 percent enrollment of students who did not receive the messages.

Some institutions use other forms of technology, such as requiring some students to enter a PIN when registering for classes. The PIN is provided to students after they have seen an advisor. This is an effective way of targeting at-risk students, such as those who have not declared a major by their sixth term, for mandatory advising to help ensure they are staying on track to complete their degrees.

The use of degree audit software is another way to guide and inform students along their academic pathway, especially after they have declared a major. If programmed correctly, this software provides accurate and up-to-date information to both the advisor and student to inform academic choices that keep the student on track.

In a similar manner, the best practice of using an early alert system can provide students with notifications if they stray from their academic pathway or signal an institutional representative to reach

out to them. Early alert systems also alert advisors to a problem in student progress while there is still time to work out solutions. However, these systems are most beneficial if employed prior to a student having difficulties and are most useful as proactive interventions to keep students on track from the start.

Many states are investing in common information platforms to assist students, parents, and advisors as they navigate community college and university pathways to degree completion. While state-to-state disparities in quality, accessibility, and approach exist, the developments that stand out generally include the following best practices (HECC, 2016):

- A web platform separate from the administrative agency that hosts the website/portal;
- Strong collaboration among institutions or centralized higher education governance;
- Advanced website development and interface; and
- Technical support from third parties such as College Source or College Transfer present.

While we know that direct advising between students and academic advisors is preferred, providing a tool that all students can access and utilize to clearly understand how their credits can transfer to schools in the state starts a much needed transparent communication process. Providing a website or portal where students can seek out and understand how credits will transfer also makes the limited time they have with advisors more productive.

## **Guided Pathways**

Community colleges across the nation have been striving to improve student outcomes for several years. This work has traditionally been implemented on campuses through initiatives that target a specific student population (e.g., TRIO services). While many of these initiatives have helped those students in the program, the reach has been limited and falls short of the goal of improving outcomes for all community college students. There was a sea change in 2015 when *Redesigning America's community colleges: A clearer path to student success* (Bailey, Jaggars & Davis) was published. This seminal work brought to light the work being done by some institutions to transform their colleges from the "cafeteria model" to "Guided Pathways to Student Success" (p. 15). Since the release of that book, literature and resources about Guided Pathways have proliferated. The American Association of Community Colleges and the CCCSE, primary champions of pathways implementation efforts nationwide, provide a condensed definition and summary of Guided Pathways:

*The [Guided] Pathways Model is an integrated, institution-wide approach to student success based on intentionally designed, clear, coherent, and structured educational experiences, informed by available evidence, that guide each student effectively and efficiently from her/his point of entry through to attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials and careers with value in the labor market. Central to the pathways model are clear, educationally coherent program maps- which include specific course sequences, progress milestones, and program learning outcomes- that are aligned to what will be expected of students upon program completion in the workforce and in education at the next level in a given field. Students are helped from the start to explore academic and career options, choose a program of study, and develop a plan based on the program maps. These plans simplify student decision-making, and they enable colleges to provide predictable schedules, frequent feedback, and targeted support as needed to help students stay on track and complete their programs more efficiently. They also facilitate*

*efforts by faculty to ensure that students are building the skills across their programs that they will need to succeed in employment and further education (CCCSE, 2018, p. 6).*

A State Policy Discussion guide for improving transfer, developed by a partnership including the Aspen Institute, SOVA solutions, Public Agenda, and the Community College Research Center (CCRC) highlights Guided Pathways as a means for colleges to develop holistic pathways for students from initial contact with students to completion including intentional academic and nonacademic services and supports. The guide goes so far to say, “...we recommend considering this framework [Guided Pathways] when creating pathways for transfer students” (Aspen Institute et al., 2017, p.7).

Guided Pathways implementation has four components: Clarify the Paths, Help Students Get on a Path, Help Students Stay on Their Path, and Ensure Students are Learning. By implementing each of these aspects of Guided Pathways, colleges aim “...to improve rates of college completion, transfer, and attainment of jobs with value in the labor market and achieve equity in those outcomes” (AACC, 2018, p. 1).

As of the writing of this report, Linn-Benton Community College, one of 30 colleges nationwide to complete the first AACC Guided Pathways Cohort institutes, has launched its seven programs of study and will be guiding students into them beginning fall 2018. In addition, five more Oregon community colleges have been accepted as participants in the first Oregon Pathways Project, a two-year endeavor to prepare colleges for Guided Pathways implementation. The institutes are facilitated by the Oregon Student Success Center. The first of four institutes for those five colleges is May 10-11, 2018. Further, a second cohort of the Oregon Pathways Project will kick off in spring 2019 with the plan for a third and final cohort to be launched in spring 2020.

## Responses to Requirements of House Bill 2998

### **Identifying Major Course of Study No Later than a Student’s Second Year of Postsecondary Education**

One of the strengths of the Guided Pathways framework is the use of interest areas, known as meta-majors or metas, to incorporate the undecided or undeclared students into common first-term course work while also aiding in their career planning process. Because metas are based on common interests, skills, and courses of study rather than a firm major or career path, it is less stressful and more realistic for a new college student to settle on a meta-major from the beginning with the belief that they will eventually find their chosen program of study within that meta. Thus, rather than have an undecided student take random courses and hope that they will figure out which program best fits their career goals, undecided students begin their college education as part of a pathway, even if it is as simple as being in a STEM meta versus Liberal Arts meta. They may not be ready to declare a major their first term, but the decision process is underway because they have settled on a meta. The student can then continue narrowing down the options with the aid of early career exploration and career planning.

Student development literature supports teaching students how to develop self-awareness, set goals, and make plans. The ideal process would be for advisors to “teach individuals how to examine their preferences and personality traits, align those traits with labor market options, and develop coherent plans for attaining career goals” (Karp, 2013, p. 7). Ideally, individualized, in-depth career counseling

would precede the selection of a program of study (i.e. the Guided Pathways framework). This is in direct contrast to current practice, in which institutional advising is underfunded and understaffed, and therefore frequently transactional in nature, particularly at community colleges (i.e. registering for next term) (Karp).

Dr. Rob Johnstone, Founder and President at the National Center for Inquiry and Improvement and expert researcher on Guided Pathways, believes part of the reason students so often change their major or program of study, directly relates to the fact that “students do not receive career services early enough in their community college trajectory” (Johnstone, 2015, p. 17). There are numerous tools and strategies to help students with career exploration as early as elementary or middle school. Ideally, all students would begin their post-secondary journey with a clear picture of the career they want, but we know that is not currently the case. Many times students are so unclear of their trajectory that they change their majors numerous times before graduating, which may lead to excess credits, time to degree and potentially more student loan debt. In order for students to identify their major course of study within their first year, it is important for them to have access to tools such as:

1. Career advising or coaches who can assist in developing techniques for career exploration such as conducting informational interviews, completing interest inventories, job shadowing, and internships and cooperative work experiences. This is particularly useful for students who enter an institution without a clear career or transfer goal. Rather than encouraging undecided students to take ‘general education’, which may or may not fit the student’s ultimate goal and could lead to excess credits, career advising assists the student in determining a career or transfer goal early, insuring she is on the right path that leads to her goal.
2. Career assessment software, such as CIS (Career Information System), to help identify skills and interests while also considering important factors such as job market and wages.
3. Courses on career exploration, life planning, or goal setting as an option or part of the first year curriculum.

Providing tailored transfer advising, including giving students clear transfer options and helping students determine field of interest, major, and preferred transfer destination as soon as possible, is key to student achievement of goals (Wyner et al., 2016). Setting the expectation for transfer early in a student’s academic career has also proven successful with traditionally underserved students. Community colleges in Texas with higher-than-expected performance rates for underserved students started with the assumption that students would transfer, providing degree plans for them even if they initially expressed interest in only completing a certificate (Smith et al., 2009). This type of early intervention, or proactive advising, gives students tremendous advantages, and increases student success and retention. This model requires a commitment to the advising culture on each campus, as well as dedicated advising resources.

### **Strategies and Resources Available to Enhance Advising Effectiveness**

There are a number of venues in which public university and community college academic personnel and faculty convene to address challenges that students may face when transferring between post-secondary institutions in Oregon.

### ***Academic Advising Associations***

NACADA was chartered in 1979 and maintains representation from members in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, Canada, and several countries as it aims for the “development and dissemination of innovative theory, research, and practice of academic advising in higher education” (NACADA, n.d.). NACADA strives to publish and encourage common best practices for academic advisors in hopes that students pursuing their education through public or private, community college or university systems, will be guided and supported throughout their educational journey in similar ways.

NACADA provides opportunities for advisors to further develop their professional skills through virtual webinars, local, regional, and global annual conferences. Membership has grown to over 13,000 globally. Approximately 1,000 NACADA advisors work within Oregon’s local Region 8, and more than 300 Region 8 members are employed within the state. NACADA’s regional conferences each year provide the opportunity for advisors in Oregon to connect and discuss topics pertinent to advising students within our local region – one focus as of late has been on transfer students.

The Oregon Academic Advising Association (OAAA) is another mechanism for advisors and those within the advising community to connect as it aims to “support the development and professional growth of academic advisors in higher education in Oregon” (OAAA, 2017). Since its creation in 2017, this allied NACADA member association has hosted two annual conferences and reaches over 500 members on its listserv. A focus on transfer student advising is a continual area of interest for this group.

Both organizations provide opportunities and structure to discuss advising best practices for transfer students. Professional advisors, faculty advisors, and other affiliated members of the advising community engage in dialogue on a global, national, and local level to evaluate transfer student advising in hopes to continue to enhance our practices.

### ***Joint Transfer and Articulation Committee (JTAC)***

The Oregon Joint Boards Articulation Commission (JBAC) was formed in 1992 by the Joint Boards of Education (the State Board of Education and the Board of Higher Education) to address issues related to student transfer and articulation. Membership shifted over the years but was generally comprised of personnel from student service offices, registrars, enrollment services, and instructors from community colleges and public and private not-for-profit universities. Over the past two decades, JBAC assisted in the development of the Associate of Arts/Oregon Transfer Degree (AAOT), the Associate of Science/Oregon Transfer Degree (ASOT) and the Oregon Transfer Module (OTM). JBAC also played an important role in various other activities including the recent work related to the creation of an alternative math pathway.

With the formation of the HECC and the dissolution of the Oregon University System, oversight of higher education in Oregon changed. The Joint Boards of Education ceased to exist and coordination of public universities and the community colleges shifted to the HECC. In May 2015, JBAC met to assess its history and status given the dissolution of its former authorizing body and agreed to continue meeting as the Joint Transfer and Articulation Committee (JTAC). JTAC currently meets quarterly to act as an advisory group to the HECC with a focus on transfer, articulation and system alignment for student success and degree completion.

### ***University Provosts Council and Community College Chief Academic Officers***

Oregon's community colleges and public universities each have councils comprised of academic officers from all of their campuses. For the colleges, that group is the Chief Academic Officers. For the public universities, that group is the Oregon Provosts Council. From time to time, as key cross-sector issues arise, these councils meet jointly. Most recently, in 2017, they met to discuss principles around easing student transfer from colleges to universities and prior to that they convened to confer about accelerated learning. While the two councils do not have regular meetings, their joint meetings provide a venue to address emergent matters that impact students or institutions from both sectors.

### ***Initiatives Pursuant to Senate Bill 418 (2015)***

[Senate Bill 418](#) (2015) directed the HECC to recommend and implement ways to encourage students to become ready for college, take courses for college credit, and transition from high school to post-secondary institutions of higher education. Nearly \$7 million was appropriated to fund these efforts. A work group, convened by the HECC to accomplish the requirements of SB 418, recommended the following priority outcomes with corresponding activities, resources and tools:

- 1) Create aligned, accurate, and accessible advising habits and practices that span the P-20 education system;
- 2) Support students as they plan for success using human resources and effective tools and support programs leveraging emerging technology;
- 3) Redesign placement testing practices and developmental education strategies, tactics, and tools; and
- 4) Focus on math that supports and guides the development and proliferation of relevant math pathways that increase degree completion and focus on student success.

Funding activities to achieve these outcomes resulted in several initiatives, two of which are highlighted below, that serve as a resource for enhancing the effectiveness of advising, particularly for transfer students. One of the key success outcomes of SB 418 was the ability to start a conversation, engage with partners, and gather together education staff across secondary and post-secondary institutions to collaborate on collective goals.

Regional Achievement Collaboratives (RAC or RACs): Launched in 2013, Regional Achievement Collaboratives were formed to bring together representatives of schools, community organizations, businesses, and local leaders to drive communities to actively support improving education outcomes beyond the classroom. RAC members work with their community to review local achievement data, identify underlying problems that impede education, and focus on collective impact strategies to boost educational outcomes. RACs have served as a natural venue for colleges, universities and a variety of other stakeholders to discuss and develop approaches to easing student transfer.

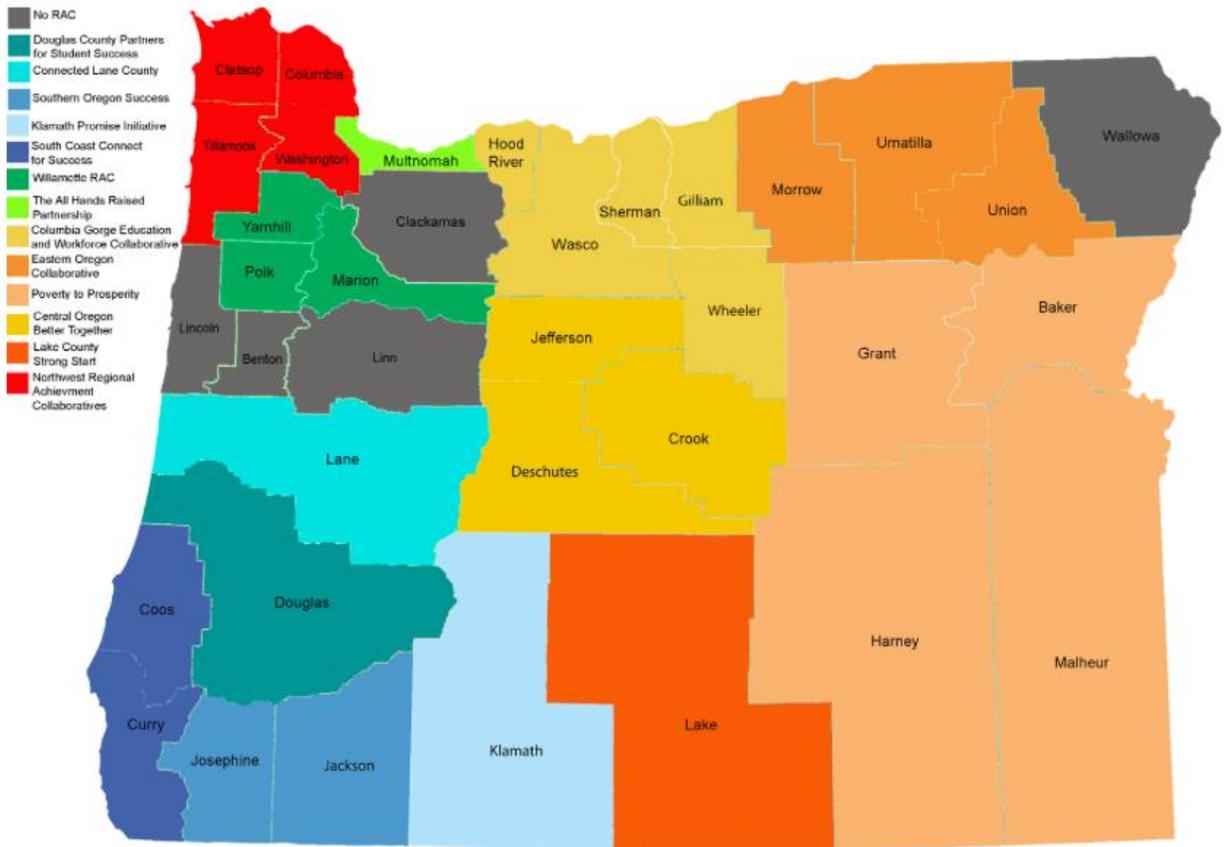


Figure 2: Distribution of Oregon RACs

The SB 418 work group made recommendations to invest over \$4 million of the funds that had been appropriated to fund RAC initiatives deemed important to supporting student transitions between high school, higher education, and future career paths. A critical focus of SB 418 was collaborations among K-12 and post-secondary sectors, specifically around counseling and advising. Funds from SB 418 were used to hold the Reach Higher Summit in the summer of 2016 where RACs convened with direction to improve and strengthen alignment between high school counselors and community college/university advisors to further support key K-12 to post-secondary transitions for students. RACs and Education Service Districts (ESDs) submitted plans and proposed budgets to the Chief Academic Office. The plans were reviewed and approved by an inter-agency work group and distributed across the state based on a formula that considered the total number of high schools served in each region. Grants to RACs and ESDs ranged between \$30,000 and \$50,000 for the 2016-2017 fiscal year. Implementation examples include:

*Eastern Oregon Collaborative RAC* (serving more than 6,000 students across 17 school districts and three counties): The Eastern Oregon Collaborative focused primarily on seamless systems, partnerships, and mentoring in their action plans. Their goals included the selection and development of professional development opportunities that span multiple and differing audiences. With respect to partnership and mentoring, the RAC planned to hold regional meetings both in the fall and spring to encourage and support collaboration between instructors across the K-12 and post-secondary spectrum.

*Connected Lane County RAC* (serving more than 14,400 students across 16 school districts in Lane County): Lane County's RAC looked to increase college preparation and career readiness among the students they serve by expanding partnerships, scaling and sharing best practices, and building strategic connections between K-12, post-secondary, and industry sectors. Work in the area of college preparation included exploration of early warning/early indicator and intervention systems, including how to identify students in need of supports or additional resourcing earlier. The RAC also wanted to bolster the professional development and learning opportunities for counselors by strategizing how to share materials, ideas, and curriculum/best practices across multiple county entities.

*Better Together RAC* (serving more than 10,600 students across eight school districts and three counties in Central Oregon): The Better Together RAC planned to expand several programs to increase student access and further support college preparation, career readiness, and seamless transitions between grades 11-14. Some of these plans included the expansion and alignment of CTE programs and pathways with associated college-level curriculum (including Central Oregon Community College with Oregon State University-Cascades). The RAC also looked to expand access to college preparation programs. Collaboration efforts included closer ties between CCR and other regional work, as well as supports for K-12 and post-secondary counselors and advisors to attend meetings and engage in professional development opportunities.

*Linn-Benton-Lincoln ESD* (serving more than 10,500 students across 12 school districts and three counties): Linn-Benton-Lincoln ESD focused on several critical components to help build a college and career ready student population, aiming to increase alignment, establish partnerships, and build and support training opportunities. In particular, the ESD sought to increase pathways, credit articulation between high schools and local community colleges, and dual-credit opportunities via enhanced partnerships between K-12 and post-secondary sectors, increased training, and expanded professional development for faculty, counselors, teachers, and staff. Increased training was considered a means to better leverage current resources and supports and expand the CCR conversation to encourage deeper partnerships and engagements in support of grade 11-14 successful transitions.

While funds from SB 418 were focused on coordinating current efforts, they also strengthened existing connections that we see are being sustained over time. In this way, RACs serve as a resource to expand and deepen collective impact in affecting student outcomes and successful grade 11-14 transitions now and in the future.

College and Career Readiness (CCR) Alliance Academy: The CCR Alliance Academy was launched at the end of January 2017 to provide professional development to school counselors, college advisors, and colleges of education across the state. The overall goal of the training was to increase CCR knowledge among current and future counselors, and to provide strategies, relevant practices, and opportunities for collaboration to promote results in success among students during key transition points between high school and college/career.

Ten total facilitators across the state were contracted to deliver and lead courses with undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education course credit provided by Portland State University (PSU). Initial courses focused on building a college-going culture; engaging students in college, career, and academic planning; assisting in financial aid and college applications; improving college and career counseling;

and, advising for student success across multiple grades and student groups. Future courses will continue to attend to ongoing or changing counselor, advisor, and educator needs in increasing CCR success among students during high school to college/career transitions.

Notable outcomes from the initial offering of CCR Alliance Academy courses included increased collaborations between K-12, and college counselors and advisors; development of teams coordinated and facilitated by RACs and/or ESDs; district to district partnerships; and, university-level counseling programs offering courses as part of their pre-service electives for the development of future school counselors.

### ***House Bill 2998 (2017) Oversight Group***

Finally, the work group organized pursuant to HB 2998 that was charged with recommending FC, has held discussions on several occasions regarding the need for ongoing engagement of community college and university faculty and personnel to attend to potential oversight and maintenance needs. The exact form of such group and how it would interact or overlap with JTAC is yet to be determined but it is anticipated that a forum will exist in the future for continued development of strategies and resources to ease student articulation within the post-secondary sector.

### **Focus on Courses or Majors with High Rates of Degree Incompletion**

Recent research has shown the importance of students completing “gatekeeper” courses within their first academic year. Gatekeeper courses are college level math and writing as well as major-specific courses such as anatomy and physiology or macroeconomics. Without adequate advising, students may avoid taking these critical courses and thus find themselves off-track in their major trajectory. Completion of these courses at the community college has been shown to be a predictor of successful transfer to a four-year institution with researchers stressing the need for “strong and consistent academic advising” so that students take the correct classes. (Hagedorn et al., 2008, p. 660). Working with an advisor on an education plan from the first term, students better understand when gateway courses need to be taken, why they are important, and even how to balance their course work so the challenging subjects are scheduled for the most appropriate terms. While education plans are not concrete or “written-in-stone,” they do offer students direction and help them stay on track in completing gateway courses. The development of a comprehensive, individual education plan that is both accurate and realistic for the student requires time for the advisor and the student to work together. Providing individual education plans to all students is a challenge for some advising programs due to the limited number of advisors with a finite amount of time for each student.

## **Next Steps Toward an Improved Transfer Process for Students**

As Oregon’s higher education institutions work to better support and prepare students to transfer between community colleges and universities in the state, it is ideal to keep in mind three essential practices identified by the *Transfer Playbook*: 1) make transfer student success a priority, 2) create clear programmatic pathways with aligned high-quality instruction, and 3) provide tailored transfer student advising (Wyner et al., 2016).

Two of the most widely embraced advising best practices in Oregon are the use of full-time, professional academic advisors and the assignment of students to an advisor within their area of study. It is difficult for advisors to be experts on all programs offered at their institutions as well as on the articulation of credits to other Oregon schools. Additionally, institutions often do not have resources to employ the requisite number of professional advisors. To fill the advising gap, it is often necessary for faculty to act as advisors for students who have declared majors in their own department. While faculty mentoring and discipline-specific career advice can positively impact student's success, there can be challenges as well. Professional advising staff focus on advising, student development and retention as their primary roles while faculty are content area experts and may not know all of the nuances of advising such as resources on campus, articulation agreements with universities, and other aspects that help student retention and persistence. In addition, faculty may not receive additional training to insure they are adequately equipped to deliver the holistic advising students need.

Decreasing the student to advisor ratio would facilitate better opportunities for advisors to interact with students. Thus allowing advisors to provide one-on-one, in-person advising, with a developmental and individualized approach (Robbins, 2013). A recent survey of Oregon community college student services administrators indicated that the range of student to advisor ratios at the colleges ranges from a low of 150:1 to a high of 700:1. Those numbers are simply untenable for holistic, developmental advising. As Winston stated, "with such workloads, developmental advising is impossible, no matter what the philosophy or skills of the advisors" (p. 113). Increased interactions between students and their advisors, an intentional focus on student success, and on-going support if a student struggles, should assist students in navigating the transfer process smoothly. The transfer process can be viewed in two phases: the actual process of transferring and selecting courses at the sending institution and applying those credits to the receiving institution; and the adjustment to the new institution once the student has transferred (Townsend, 2008). Providing a specific transfer advisor within academic advising offices to assist prospective transfer students, and support newly matriculated students, should translate into a more seamless and successful transfer experience.

Finally, making investments in technology, both at the institution-level and at the state-level as discussed above, can help ensure that students are receiving accurate, timely information to help make informed decisions, such as where to transfer based on credits being accepted, and meet all deadlines and obligations.

## Conclusion

It is clear that consistent, high-quality academic advising is a critical factor in student transfer. We know what works for students: access to advisors who have the information and tools that they need to help students identify their own path to success. In order for students to have this access, though, the advisor to student ratio must be manageable and utilize full-time academic advisors with the training and background to connect with the whole student in a diverse student population.

The key challenge that inhibits community colleges and universities from fully implementing an intentional, developmental advising model is lack of resources. In this instance, "resources" may mean people (e.g., advisors), technology (e.g., a student facing, statewide web portal) or logistics (e.g., time).

Deploying resources such as those utilized by the exemplar ASAP program at CUNY, requires sustained funding from the state to truly create a framework that helps students transfer seamlessly.

While many colleges have implemented promising practices, including technology, to help address academic advising obstacles, more needs to be done and there is no substitute for one-on-one advising for successful transfer. "Developmental counseling or advising is concerned not only with a specific personal or vocational decision but also with facilitating the student's rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavior awareness, and problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluation skills" (Burton et al., 1998).

We know that successful advising means much more than scheduling the correct classes. Developmental and proactive advising requires professionals who are familiar with student development, career exploration and confirmation, interpersonal communication, and stress and time management. Incorporating more professional advisors with these skills and providing them with regular professional development opportunities to stay current in academic programs, resources and policies, is a critical component of supporting and increasing student success and student transfer across the state and a necessary resources that needs attention.

Resources and alternative advising methods, including technology and self-advising, may be implemented in ways that improve advising efficiency while enabling advisors to work more closely with the students who most need it. Investing judiciously and strategically in technology-based advising tools could support self-advising for routine needs, which would allow advisors to spend more time on in-depth advising. Providing a tool or portal that all students can access and utilize to clearly understand how credits can transfer to schools in the state would start a much needed transparent communication process. Such a tool would help students explore and understand more of their academic options and benefit those who self-advise or choose to never see an academic advisor. Additionally, it has the potential to make each advising appointment richer and more productive as the student is likely to come in with prepared questions and topics to discuss with their advisor, rather than just scheduling questions, thereby allowing the meeting to focus on the holistic and developmental aspects of advising. Lastly, this type of tool would be highly valuable for academic advisors, providing them with quick access to transfer and articulation information for all of Oregon's public universities and community colleges.

Creating and maintaining an articulation portal or tool such as this will take extensive time and organization. It would require a state-wide commitment of both financial resources and manpower. However, the potential widespread benefit to Oregon students and the lasting success of the FC and USTAs makes the investment worth considering.

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