

SCHEV Policy Paper

State Policy on College Transfer

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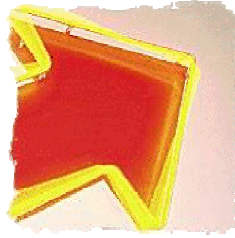


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Introduction to State Policy on College Transfer

Virginia's system of public colleges and universities has extended higher education throughout the Commonwealth from Eastern Shore to Big Stone Gap and from Fairfax to Southside. The system gives students ready access to college and enables them to choose from among many two- and four-year institutions. The Commonwealth has created a remarkable system intended to provide an educated, responsible citizenry and well-trained professionals. For Virginia to achieve these goals fully, especially in a time of financial stringency, the system must function as efficiently and effectively as possible. A report issued by the Institute for Higher Education illustrates the importance of strong transfer policy in the efficiency of higher education in the context of state government. The report, *State Policy and Community College-Baccalaureate Transfer*, links strong transfer policy with reducing state appropriations per degree. Moreover, the report notes that strong transfer policy reduces "achievement disparities that prevent low-income and minority students from obtaining the baccalaureate degree."

Some students begin college at a community college and subsequently transfer to a senior college or university to achieve their educational aspirations. These students must be assured of fair access to a four-year education and reasonable credit toward a bachelor's degree for their community college courses and program. Transfer should be easy and orderly. According to the Commission on the University of the 21st Century, "It should be made as easy as possible for graduates of community colleges to transfer to senior institutions and get full credit for the work they have done."

Transfer is also a matter of national interest. The American Council on Education has issued a major policy statement - *Setting the National Agenda: Academic Achievement and Transfer*. The ACE believes that qualified community-college students should be able to "transfer easily and routinely" to senior colleges and universities. "America's community colleges in particular embody our hopes for the future. For millions of students, they are the entry point to higher education and thus serve as the avenue to intellectual and economic growth. Entry to senior colleges or universities by community college students, i.e., transfer, is central to the realization of equal opportunity in education."

The State Policy on Transfer aims to enhance cooperation and consistency among institutions of higher education in Virginia with the intended goal of improving transfer for Virginia's students. This goal of smooth and orderly transfer has not been fully achieved, even though a number of community colleges and senior institutions have worked together diligently. Therefore, the State Policy on Transfer seeks to improve collaboration among Virginia's

institutions of higher education while promoting efficiency in the transfer process.

Ideally, students should be able to move through Virginia's public education system as if it were a continuum, rather than a system of distinct levels and separate stages.

The State Policy on Transfer has been guided by numerous assumptions:

- All capable students in the Commonwealth should have access to all levels of higher education.
- The institutional autonomy and diversity of Virginia colleges and universities are valuable and must be assured.
- Every senior institution should take significant responsibility for enrolling community college students.
- Effective transfer is a joint responsibility of community colleges and senior institutions.
- Transfer students and native students should be assured of equitable treatment by each senior college and university.
- Students should be encouraged to advance as far through the educational system as they are able.
- Students should not have to repeat coursework they have completed satisfactorily at a community college.
- The Commonwealth should have a coherent statewide policy on transfer that encourages continuing cooperation and can be sustained over time.

Admissions

1. Senior institutions have authority over admissions decisions to their institutions and to programs within their institutions. However, each senior institution should have a policy, approved by appropriate institutional parties and reviewed regularly, on admission of transfer students.
2. This policy should be based upon sound information about performance of transfer students at the institution and should be consistent from year to year. It should address matters such as the number of Virginia community-college transfer students who will be offered admission, whether students from the local area are given preference, and whether preference is given to students who have been awarded a transfer associate degree.
3. Each student who satisfactorily completes a transfer-degree program at a community college in Virginia should be assured the opportunity

- to transfer to a state-supported baccalaureate institution. It is the responsibility of all senior institutions to provide reasonable access to community-college graduates who meet the typical admissions criteria of a given institution. Student performance in a transfer-degree program is a strong indicator of success in senior institutions and, therefore, should count heavily in the evaluation of transfer applicants.
4. Transfer admissions priority should be given to students who have completed a transfer degree over those who have not.
 5. Admission to a given institution does not guarantee admission to particular degree-granting programs, majors, minors, or fields of concentration. Nevertheless, every baccalaureate degree program should provide reasonable avenues for admission of transfer students.
 6. Admission to specific programs, majors, minors, and fields of concentration may require, for example, a minimum grade point average and specific prerequisite courses. Such requirements should be applied equally to native and transfer students.

Acceptance and Application of Credits

1. It is the intention of the State Policy on Transfer that students who begin their work toward the baccalaureate degree by enrolling in transfer programs in community colleges will have this work recognized as legitimate and equivalent to that offered at senior institutions.
2. Articulation between community colleges and senior institutions is a reciprocal process. Community colleges have the responsibility of ensuring that their programs and courses are equivalent to those offered at senior institutions, and senior institutions have an obligation to recognize such work as equivalent, once the two parties have determined equivalency.
3. Students who have earned an associate degree based upon a baccalaureate-oriented sequence of courses should be considered to have met lower-division general-education requirements of senior institutions. These students will be considered to have attained junior standing (typically defined by credits completed at the senior institution). It may, however, take transfer students longer than two years to complete the baccalaureate because of prerequisites in the major or other requirements or circumstances.
4. Where students must satisfy additional general-education requirements -- credits in upper-division general education or foreign languages required of native students, for example -- senior institutions should specify and publish such requirements.
5. Some occupational-technical programs (the Associate of Applied Science and the Associate of Applied Arts) have counterparts in senior

- institutions (e.g., nursing, engineering technology, hotel and restaurant management). Senior institutions and community colleges should look for ways to facilitate student transfer into these programs. Transfer from occupational-technical programs will continue to be worked out through articulation agreements or on a case-by-case basis.
6. Community colleges should counsel carefully those occupational-technical students who express an interest in transfer in their choice of appropriate courses. And senior institutions should be well informed about community-college curricula so that students do not need to retake courses that essentially repeat courses from the community-college program.

Communication and Information

1. Community colleges and senior institutions — and state agencies as well — share an obligation to facilitate transfer. Good communication is the single most important factor in successful student transfer and articulation. Therefore, all parties should ensure effective communication with one another. Such communication needs to take place statewide as well as on a local or regional basis.
 - Faculty in the same disciplines in community colleges and senior institutions should meet periodically to discuss common issues.
 - Community colleges should create opportunities for students who have transferred from their college to meet with current students who are considering transferring.
 - Senior institutions should provide periodic advising sessions to potential transfer students prior to the time they transfer.
 - Community-college counselors should meet at least once a year with key transfer decision-makers from senior institutions to discuss program changes. (For example, the associate dean of the business school who handles all transfer students would discuss changes, if any, in program requirements needed to transfer to the business school of that institution.)
 - Counselors and faculty at community colleges who advise students on transfer should meet periodically to discuss issues such as program changes.
 - Transfer decision-makers at senior colleges and universities should meet periodically with the faculty in their institutions who advise students on transfer to update them on possible changes.
 - As soon as possible senior colleges and universities should provide students who transfer with a formal evaluation of their transfer credits prior to their initial registration.

2. Articulation agreements between community colleges and senior institutions and their individual programs are beneficial to student transfer and should be encouraged. Articulation agreements work only if
 - They are developed and maintained mutually between representatives from community colleges and senior institutions,
 - They are widely disseminated and clearly stated,
 - They spell out clearly what, if anything, is guaranteed to students,
 - Both parties abide by them, and
 - Community colleges and senior institutions inform one another promptly whenever they change program or degree requirements. Institutions should abide by their original agreements long enough for transfer students to adjust to the changes.
3. Consistent with current practice, all senior institutions should provide transfer information in a convenient manner (website or published document). Detailed transfer information is the most important method by which baccalaureate-bound students can plan an appropriate program of study at a community college. Transfer websites or documents work best if:
 - The information on transferability of credit is current,
 - The information and format are consistent among senior institutions,
 - They are easily available to students, faculty, and counselors, and
 - Program-specific requirements are readily available

Administrative Responsibility for Transfer

1. One person should be designated as chief transfer officer at each institution or campus.
2. Each senior institution should establish a central source of information on transfer. This clearinghouse function should be housed in the admissions office and be served by a central database that can be accessed widely on campus.
3. In addition, a person at each school or college at the senior institution, preferably someone within each dean's office, should be designated as the person with final authority on transferability of courses in the major. A process for students to appeal decisions about transfer of credits should be established and well publicized.

Services for Transfer Students

Transfer students to senior institutions should have, to the extent possible, the same opportunities as native students of comparable standing in such areas as course selection, registration, access to campus housing, and financial aid.

Transfer Student Responsibilities

Students intending to transfer are responsible for planning their course of study to meet the requirements of the institution(s) to which they desire to transfer. This student is responsible for seeking out the information and advice that is necessary to develop such a plan. Students are encouraged to identify as early as possible the senior institution and program into which they would like to transfer. Delays in developing and following an appropriate plan or changes in plan (e.g. changes in major) may reduce the applicability of transfer credit to the degree program a student ultimately selects.

Minority Students and Transfer

In order to ensure that minority students are being encouraged to pursue the bachelor's degree, community colleges should determine whether minority students are being counseled into or otherwise enrolled disproportionately in programs that are not designed to transfer.

Tracking Transfer Students

1. Upon request, senior institutions should be able to report community-college transfer-student progress to the community colleges in a consistent, identifiable form. This information should track students for at least three years or until the student graduates or withdraws from the senior institution, whichever comes first.
2. Community colleges should be able to demonstrate how these data are used to improve upon or confirm the success of their transfer programs. In analyzing the data, community colleges

- should pay particular attention to the performance, retention, and graduation rates of students by race.
3. Likewise, senior institutions should track the subsequent progress to the baccalaureate of transfer students by race.

Footnotes

1. All references to community colleges also apply to Richard Bland College and its students.
2. Transfer degrees are the Associate of Arts (A.A.), the Associate of Science (A.S.), and the Associate of Arts and Sciences (A.A.&S.), (under specific articulation agreements, some institutions are accepting the Associate of Applied Arts (A.A.A.), and the Associate of Applied Sciences (A.A.S) for identified degree programs).



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