

## **Transfer Education: A Bridge To The Future\***

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The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges is encouraged by the increasing interest of the Board of Governors, the California Postsecondary Education Commission and other segments of California's higher education in the reaffirmation of the transfer function of California community colleges. The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges has supported the preeminent position of this function throughout its history, as documented by the attached compendium of policies and positions on transfer education. It is important to note, as these resolutions attest, that the transfer function has received careful and constant attention by the faculty of California community colleges. Therefore, from our perspective, it would be more appropriate to approach the subject of transfer education in community colleges within a context of renewed commitment and revitalization of an important function, rather than to perceive it as a problem area that has suffered from neglect and is in need of reform. However, because of the complexity of the issues involved in the discussion of this subject, it would also be more appropriate to study it in a context of intersegmental responsibility, since the success of the transfer function of community colleges is dependent both upon the adequate preparation of high school graduates admitted to our institutions and the cooperation of four-year institutions in providing adequate transition to potential transfer students. It is a major concern of the Academic Senate that several issues of vital importance to a comprehensive discussion of the transfer function of community colleges be addressed from an intersegmental perspective:

- The need to determine the total number of potential transfer currently enrolled in California community colleges, and to establish the percentage of potential transfer students among the total student population.
- The need to understand demographic changes which are providing fewer high school graduates.

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- The need to address the problem of the high rate of high school dropouts and/or under preparation of high school graduates.
- The need to address the problem of growingly imbalanced curricular offerings at California community colleges to meet the needs of under prepared students at the expense of baccalaureate level classes.
- The need to expand the ability of four-year institutions to absorb community college transfers in impacted areas.
- The need to provide adequate funds in order to establish a comprehensive program of identification, assistance and eventual transfer of traditionally underrepresented students.
- The need to establish criteria for baccalaureate level courses among all segments of higher education.

- The need to establish a database on the performance of California community college transfers, on their persistence rate in relation to native students, and the need to share this information between community colleges and four—year institutions.
- The need to develop a unified program of high school recruitment of potential college students, emphasizing the viability of community colleges as transfer institutions.

In order to have a comprehensive discussion of the role of community colleges in facilitating flow of transfer students to four-year institutions, three areas of central importance must be considered: 1) improvement of intersegmental articulation, 2) coordination of academic support services, and 3) greater efforts to identify and meet the needs of minority students.

## **I. Intersegmental Articulation**

Although intersegmental articulation efforts in the establishment of agreements for course transferability and course credits have been successful in the past, the definition of articulation must be expanded to include the active involvement of faculty, counselors and administrators from all segments in determining academic rigor and expected competencies. It is not sufficient to ensure the acceptance of credits from one segment to another; it is also necessary to ascertain whether those credits carry with them the necessary acquired skills and academic competencies expected of transfer students. For this reason, it is imperative that faculties throughout the segments, with the encouragement and sponsorship of their administrations, establish an ongoing academic dialogue to determine the proper academic rigor and expected competencies of students completing courses within given disciplines. This academic interaction among faculties and counselors of all segments should be encouraged and supported on a regional basis by the administrations involved. For, the eventual transfer and successful completion of community college students in baccalaureate programs is not the sole responsibility of the community colleges, but a shared educational enterprise of all segments.

### **A. Articulation with Postsecondary Institutes**

The first step toward the achievement of successful articulation with postsecondary institutions is the recognition by all elements of postsecondary education that, although each fulfills a unique function under the Master Plan for Higher Education, they also share common educational activities, in particular, the instruction of introductory baccalaureate level courses. In order to facilitate student transfer, faculty in community colleges and four-year institutions should maintain a continuous dialogue to discuss comparability of commonly taught courses in content, prerequisites, academic rigor and expected competencies. Faculty in all elements of postsecondary education should cooperate to develop principles in general education and comparability of learning experiences (e.g., writing, library skills) to be acquired by all students planning to achieve a baccalaureate degree. Greater interaction and exchange among faculty at the postsecondary level would not only improve the articulation of course transferability and course comparability, it would also provide a much needed forum for faculties to share teaching technologies or methodologies and to keep abreast of the latest developments in their fields or disciplines. Furthermore, faculty interaction would also facilitate an open channel of communication for discussion of academic characteristics of successful transfer students, specific problems of those who are not, and identification and possible solution of problems faced by transfer students.

### **B. Articulation with Secondary Institutions**

California community colleges, fulfill a unique function among post-secondary institutions in preparing under prepared or unaspiring high school students for college level work. They also provide ample opportunities for traditional students in occupational or liberal arts areas to complete their lower division coursework in preparation for transfer to four-year institutions. Because of the wide range in backgrounds of high school graduates entering our institutions, community colleges must strengthen their articulation activities with secondary institutions. Faculty, counselors and administrators must become actively involved in the recruitment of potential transfer students by presenting community colleges as an academically viable alternative for lower division course-work. Community college administrators must become aware of the potential high school student drain that could take place if community college staff do not become more aggressively involved in pointing out the unique advantages of attending community colleges for the purpose of eventual transfer. High school parents and high school students should be made aware of the academic strengths of community colleges, emphasizing the excellence and commitment of their instructional staff. Community college administrators should initiate, encourage and support organized efforts to convey these messages to the community through both written and oral communication. Community college administrators should also encourage and facilitate the Interaction and exchange of community college and high school faculties. Furthermore, community college faculty should maintain academic and professional ties with their colleagues in secondary institutions to discuss student expectations in college level courses and to establish follow-up mechanisms whereby feeder high schools are kept informed of the performance and persistence rate of their graduates. Community college faculty should also demonstrate initiative and creativity in designing programs for faculty in secondary institutions to assist them in updating their professional skills, particularly in fields of rapidly growing technological advancement. All these efforts should be coordinated not only for the identification of traditional potential transfer students, but also for the identification and assistance of underrepresented groups in postsecondary education. For community colleges are unique in their ability to provide an opportunity for under-prepared or unaspiring students to acquire college level skills and competencies for transfer to four-year institutions.

## **II. Academic Support Services**

One of the great strengths of California community colleges in the assessment, identification and guidance of students with transfer potential is their effective network of academic support services. Even though greatly under funded, community colleges have developed complex programs of orientation, counseling, and tutorial and referral services. The development of these support services has been limited by dwindling fiscal resources throughout the State. However, with the recent (1983) mandate of AB 851, which calls for the Board of Governors of California Community Colleges to conduct a study of student matriculation, the importance of a system of academic support services has received much needed attention. According to the proposed recommendation, California community colleges should begin implementation of various components of student matriculation, admission, assessment, orientation, placement, counseling/advising and follow-up on student progress. Although many of these services are already being offered by many colleges, the proposal for student matriculation calls for a coordination of all these activities to ensure the proper assessment of student's academic skills, the appropriate placement of that student in courses where she/he has a greater chance for success and the removal of identified academic deficiencies. Furthermore, a system of student

matriculation also allows for the early identification of students with transfer potential. This early identification can take place through assessment mechanisms, through student declaration of educational intent or through individual faculty identification, based on class performance. It becomes obvious then that admissions and records, counselors and faculty need to coordinate their activities for an efficient identification of potential transfer students and for the subsequent provision of counseling/advising to inform students of the academic requirements to complete their educational plan or to acquaint them with the different educational alternatives available to them. Additionally, faculty will be instrumental in advising students interested in a specific major, in making them aware of the expected competencies of that major and in encouraging and preparing them to succeed at four-year institutions.

Once faculty in the community colleges become actively involved in academic advisement and create an inevitably increased interaction with counselors, it will be possible for both to work together to identify talented students to consider the transfer option and to encourage students who did not originally identify themselves as candidates for transfer.

Faculty should also assume the responsibility of creating a college environment that parallels the experience more closely associated with four-year institutions. Not only should faculty teaching baccalaureate level classes maintain comparable academic rigor and standards in their courses, they should also explore the possibility of developing honors programs, special seminars, guests lecturer series or student and faculty exchange with four-year institutions. Administrators could contribute to this college environment by providing and supporting part-time, on—campus employment for transfer students to encourage them to be on campus for longer periods of time and, therefore, more likely to be available to participate in campus activities. These jobs could help to make campus life more central to the daily existence of the transfer student and to reduce the compartmentalization of their educational experience to only the hours spent in the classroom. Counselors could provide additional assistance by contacting community college graduates who have successfully transferred to four-year institutions and by asking them to serve as models or mentors for currently enrolled transfer students. These students would not only serve as examples of those who have succeeded via the transfer process, but they could also provide current information about the problems and prospects for students who are planning to transfer in the near future.

Finally, there is an urgent need for community colleges to develop a uniform information system that will not only help store and analyze enrollment patterns in our institutions, but will also record individual student declaration of educational intent, persistence rate and success or failure to accomplish educational goals. Community colleges need the establishment of such mechanisms to assist in the assessment and placement of students in appropriate college level course but also to provide a system of early warning and follow—up of student progress. Such information can be used not only to develop longitudinal studies of retention! attrition patterns, but also to develop a database of the transfer, persistence and completion rate of community college students in four-year Institutions. The development of this information will also allow community colleges to determine the percentage of their potential transfer pool within the total student population, and their success rate in transferring this percentage to four-year institutions.

### **III. Meeting The Needs Of Minorities**

Every concerted effort must be made to ensure that the establishment of assessment, placement and follow—up mechanisms work to the benefit of minority students or underrepresented groups. California community colleges enroll a much higher percentage of minority students in their institutions than any other segment of postsecondary education; however, they transfer a much smaller proportion of minority students than other students. California community colleges are traditionally, pedagogically and ideologically committed to the principle of providing an opportunity for postsecondary education to all students, in particular students for whom their educational, ethnic or socio—economic background have limited those opportunities.

Additionally, community colleges have become aware of demographic projections, which suggest that Hispanic minorities will provide the largest group of potential college students in the next thirty years. Not only should community colleges reinforce their recruitment activities of minority students and strengthen their articulation efforts with secondary institutions to ensure that these students are properly prepared for college level work, they should also coordinate all staff activities to ensure that the enhancement of the transfer program in community colleges does not become a tracking mechanism that effectively prevents minority students from participating in the benefits of the program.

It is possible that a reinvigorated transfer program could be intimidating to some students; this could be a special problem among minority students who do not perceive of themselves as candidates for eventual transfer. Individuals from families without a history of college attendance, or individuals with a greater number of academic deficiencies to surmount, might be less likely to aspire to be integrated into the transfer program. This potential problem would have to be recognized. from the outset, and a special effort would have to be established in order to identify and assist such students upon admission to the college.

The initial assessment process would not only have to be evaluated to ensure its sensitivity to cultural differences, but also the counseling and advising sessions would have to establish an adequate program to help overcome any identified academic deficiencies, and to secure a sufficient array of support services to create a learning situation that would maximize the opportunities for success. These measures could be coordinated with the established programs of EOP&S to monitor and enhance student achievement.

The counseling program would also need to provide information about the sources and means of financial aid, and to project a system of financial aid that could be coordinated with a transfer program.

It is also important that all students, but especially minority students, have available role models, both among faculty and student mentors, who can provide social support for the legitimacy of the transfer function. It is essential that students realize that others from similar cultural and socio-economic background have been able to succeed via the transfer function of the community colleges. The availability of the appropriate role models will also encourage students to involve themselves in the range of student activities that are available to them.

**Conclusion:**

The faculty and the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges remain committed to the importance of the transfer function in the mission of the community colleges and are willing to participate in the current discussions of this issue with the anticipation that they will lead to an opportunity to review and revitalize this essential function of our institutions. We also remain committed to the open access policy of community colleges and to the provision of a second opportunity for less traditional students. Our commitment to this position is not antithetical to the maintenance of academic standards or academic rigor; however, it necessitates the careful planning and coordination of all support systems in our colleges to ensure the maximum benefit for the maximum number of students. At the same time, the Academic Senate would like to make some recommendations which would respond to some of the concerns expressed in this paper. The Academic Senate believes that in order for California community colleges to strengthen their transfer function, the State Legislature must provide:

- Sufficient funding for the establishment of an information system to facilitate the matriculation process and to provide a data base to study the performance and persistence rate of community college transfer students.
- Sufficient funding for the implementation of a matriculation process at all community colleges.
- Sufficient funding for an increased provision of remedial education for students with assessed educational deficiencies.
- Sufficient funding for adequate compensation of faculty involved in academic advising.
- Sufficient funding for the increased recruitment of minority students to community colleges.
- Sufficient funding for adequate staffing of academic support service areas, comparable to funding for these services at the other segments of postsecondary education.