Progress Report of the Credit Transfer Project Steering Committee

Today more than ever, publically funded institutions of higher education find themselves in forefront of addressing the challenges of college affordability, access, and completion. This Credit Transfer Project is aimed at improving the college credit transfer process to make it easier for students to move among Maine’s public universities and to transfer from the Maine Community College System to the University of Maine System and vice versa. Led by a Credit Transfer Steering Committee it will direct outcomes leading to the implementation of these programs for academic year 2013-14 or as directed by the Board of Trustees.

This report to the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees provides a synopsis of the steering committee’s work to date pertaining to transfer practices in Maine’s public universities. A subsequent report will be dedicated to our collaborative efforts with the Maine Community College System.

Current Status of Credit Transfer in the University of Maine System

Examples of good practices are found at every one of Maine’s public universities. Some individual campuses are well advanced in selected best practices. However, most of our efforts operate in isolation and they have not been implemented “to scale.” Most importantly, our approach to credit transfer is not embedded within a policy structure suited for statewide implementation. Our review of the current status of system-wide credit transfer practices affirms that the awarding of transfer credits in Maine has grown antiquated in the face of the changing nature of public higher education (technology, adult learners, K-16, etc.) which has outstripped the comparative effectiveness of our present practices.

Best practice solutions exist which can be implemented to create a comparative advantage for Maine’s public universities, though they may require radical changes in our understanding of how transfer students are treated. In a recent study the Education Commission of the States concluded that states can improve transfer rates by creating state-wide and system-wide policies. State-wide transfer programs, whether codified in legislation or negotiated through cooperative agreements among higher education systems, offer a model pathway toward bachelor’s degree completion.1

One fundamental finding from the steering committee’s review is that Maine needs a reliable, robust college transfer system for students navigating through the baccalaureate offerings of the public university system.

Best Practices

After reviewing two dozen best practices from the national literature, the steering committee’s change analysis review selected four (4) best transfer practices for Maine’s public universities. These best practices form a basis for the forthcoming policy recommendations and implementation plans that will be submitted to the Board for consideration at future meetings.

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**TABLE 1**

*System-wide Best Practices* to improve the college credit transfer process and to make it easier for students to move among Maine’s public universities

- Electronic communication tools
- Block Transfer /General Education Common Core
- Major (program-to-program) Articulation
- Adult & Transfer degree completion - including Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

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**Implementation**

During July and August the steering committee conducted consultations with national best practice experts on implementation details. Herewith is the steering committee’s initial outline for implementing national best transfer practices for Maine’s public universities.

**Electronic communication tools**

1. Fully implement the Degree Audit system
2. Develop a Comprehensive Electronic Inventory
3. Develop a statewide transfer portal

**Block transfer**

1. Develop a System-wide pathway for the block transfer of general education requirements.
   - General Education Outcomes -- a broad-based assemblage of faculty from every campus in the system will be convened to develop shared general education outcomes using a common model such as the Lumina Foundation’s Degree Qualifications Profile. This process would not supersede general education requirements developed by the individual campuses in concert with their respective missions, but would provide a common framework to facilitate block transfer of credit from one campus to another to fulfill general education requirements.
   - Engage campuses across System in a facilitated design process to develop linkages with the block transfer framework, beginning with an academic summit in Winter/Spring 2013.

**Major-to-Major Program Articulation**

1. Develop a structural alignment for common majors using the Electronic Inventory, Priority Programs & Majors (PPM) will be selected to align with System workforce development priorities (examples: STEM or Nursing & Allied Health) first.
Adult & Transfer Degree Completion

1. Transfer Assessment Process – conduct a facilitated, comprehensive transfer assessment on each campus.

2. Create an Adult Learner Initiative
   • conduct an Adult Learner Focused Institution (ALFI) assessment on each campus.
   • Implement Reverse Transfer on AA/AS degree granting campuses.
   • Create Transfer Concierge Services (TCS) on each campus.
   • Implement Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) System-wide.

The steering committee has developed a communications plan to inform campus stakeholders and others about the transfer credit project, its origins, goals, and processes. The Credit Transfer Project Steering Committee is coordinating communications with the Performance-based Funding Steering Committee.

The steering committee intends to present policy recommendations to the Academic Affairs Committee for consideration at the November, 2012 Board of Trustees meeting. The full plan based upon those policies will be presented at the January 2013 Board meeting.

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