Tackling Transfer

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The vast majority of students who enroll in a community college plan to one day earn a bachelor’s degree.
1.7 Million
new students enroll in a community college each year

80%
plan to get a bachelor’s degree or higher
We tracked **720,000** community college students who started in the fall of 2007 in pursuit of a college credential.

Only **100,000** earned a bachelor’s after 6 years.
Too few students manage to make the leap

Just 33% of students who started community college in fall of 2007 transferred to a four-year school.
Even when they transfer, we’re still failing them

Of the students who successfully transferred, only 42% went on to get a bachelor’s within 6 years of starting.
Outcomes aren’t great for anybody

44% of higher income students who transfer earn a bachelor’s degree within 6 years.

Just 36% of lower income students who transfer earn a bachelor’s degree within 6 years.
Even when students are able to transfer credits, those credits often don’t count toward their major.
Just **58%** of students can successfully transfer 90% of their credits.  

And **15%** can’t transfer any credits at all.
Students who can transfer 90% of their credits are 250% more likely to get their bachelor's degree, compared to those who transfer half or less.
Inadequate data on student transfer in postsecondary education

• Much of the research on transfer focuses on student-level experiences and less on institutional structures, policies, and partnerships which support transfer success

• Lack of widely available measures of institutional performance on transfer limits institutional ability to better serve transfers
Tracking Transfer: Five New Measures

1. Transfer-Out Rate
2. Transfer-with-Award Rate
3. Transfer-Out Bachelor’s Completion Rate
4. Transfer-In Bachelor’s Completion Rate
5. Community College Cohort Bachelor’s Completion Rate
3 Key Research Findings
These are the bachelor’s completion rates for transfer students, by individual community college.

There’s a lot of variation.
Average Transfer-Out Bachelor's Completion Rates by Institutional Characteristics

- U.S. community college average: 42%
- Urban: 40%
- Suburban/town: 43%
- Rural: 42%
- Upper income serving: 44%
- Middle income serving: 37%
- Lower income serving: 37%

Transfer-Out Bachelor’s Completion Rate
While outcomes at community colleges vary, what we might imagine would predict variation doesn’t.
On the other hand, the characteristics of 4-year schools matter when it comes to how many transfer students get a bachelor’s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Transfer-In Bachelor's Completion Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. four-year institution average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Private nonprofit</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selectivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very selective</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Suburban/town</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Student Socio-Economic Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Private nonprofit</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private for-profit</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very selective</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately selective</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonselective</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban/town</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper income</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle income</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower income</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Average Student Socio-Economic Status**

- **Upper income**: 43%
- **Middle income**: 35%
- **Lower income**: 28%
Transfer-Out Rates

Transfer-With-Award Rates

Transfer-Out Bachelor’s Completion Rates

U.S. average

33%

29%

42%
Transfer-In Bachelor's Completion Rates at Public Four-Year Institutions

- WA: 42%
- IA: 34%
- IL: 42%
- CA: 42%
- PA: 42%
- FL: 42%
- VA: 42%
- NJ: 42%
- NC: 42%
- SC: 42%
- TN: 42%
- NH: 42%
- AK: 42%

U.S. average: 42%

Transfer-In Bachelor's Completion Rates at Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions

- OR: 31%
- WA: 31%
- MT: 31%
- MS: 31%
- MN: 31%
- IA: 31%
- TX: 31%
- FL: 31%
- IL: 31%
- CA: 31%
- DE: 31%
- NE: 31%
- NY: 31%
- PA: 31%
- NH: 31%
- DC: 31%
- NJ: 31%

U.S. average: 31%
Transfer-In Bachelor's Completion Rates at Public Four-Year Institutions

U.S. average: 42%

Various states are shown with completion rates ranging from 0% to 100%. States include WA, IA, IL, CA, PA, FL, VA, NJ, NC, SC, TN, NH, AK, AL, TX, MN, NY, NE, MO, CT, MD, AZ, MA, OK, OR, KY, OH, HI, NV, ID, GA, VT, LA, WV, IN, CO, AR, ND, MT, ME, NM, SD, UT, AK, and others.

The chart indicates that some states have rates higher than the U.S. average, while others have lower rates. Notably, WA has a rate of 55%.

Transfer-In Bachelor's Completion Rates at Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions

U.S. average: 31%

Similar to the public institutions chart, various states are shown with completion rates ranging from 0% to 100%. States include OR, WA, MT, MS, MN, IA, TX, FL, IL, CA, DE, NE, NY, PA, NH, NJ, DC, NJ, NH, PA, NY, NE, DE, CA, IL, FL, TX, IA, MN, MS, MT, WA, OR, and others.

The chart indicates that some states have rates higher than the U.S. average, while others have lower rates. Notably, OR has a rate of 46%.
Community College Cohort Bachelor's Completion Rates by State

U.S. average: 14%
Community College Cohort Bachelor's Completion Rates by State

- WY
- MT
- MD
- IL
- OK
- NJ
- FL
- KS
- IA
- TN
- TX
- MS
- VA
- NY
- CA
- PA
- AL
- WA
- MI
- NE
- ND
- MO
- MN
- OR
- NH
- MA
- ID
- AZ
- CT
- CO
- NV
- SC
- HI
- NC
- LA
- OH
- GA
- KY
- WI
- AR
- NM
- ME
- WV
- SD

U.S. average: 14%

State with the highest completion rate: U.S. average
State with the lowest completion rate: SD

Completion rates range from 0% to 100%.
Community College Cohort Bachelor's Completion Rates by State

- **Transfer-Out Rates**: U.S. average 33%
- **Transfer-With-Award Rates**: U.S. average 29%
- **Transfer-Out Bachelor's Completion Rates**: U.S. average 42%

States with high completion rates include WA, VA, and WV. States with lower rates include SD, NV, and TX. Washington, The Evergreen State, is highlighted with a completion rate of 49%.
Community College Cohort Bachelor's Completion Rates by State

- WY: 17%
- MT: 17%
- MD: 14%
- IL: 14%
- OK: 17%
- NJ: 13%
- FL: 17%
- KS: 17%
- IA: 17%
- TN: 17%
- TX: 17%
- MS: 17%
- VA: 17%
- NY: 17%
- CA: 17%
- U.S. average: 14%
- PA: 17%
- AL: 17%
- WA: 17%
- MI: 13%
- NE: 13%
- ND: 13%
- MO: 13%
- MN: 13%
- OR: 13%
- NH: 13%
- MA: 13%
- ID: 13%
- AZ: 13%
- CT: 13%
- CO: 13%
- NV: 13%
- SC: 13%
- HI: 13%
- NC: 13%
- LA: 13%
- OH: 13%
- GA: 13%
- KY: 13%
- WI: 13%
- AR: 13%
- NM: 13%
- ME: 13%
- WV: 13%
- SD: 13%
Community College Cohort Bachelor's Completion Rates, by Student Income

- Lower income students
- Higher income students

11 pt. Gap
Figure 1. Variation among Ohio Community Colleges on Transfer Measures (n=22)

- Transfer-Out Rates
- Transfer with Award Rates
- Transfer-Out Bachelor’s Completion Rates

Figure 2. Variation among Ohio Four-year Institutions on Transfer Measure

- Transfer-In Bachelor’s Completion Rates
  N= 14 Public 4-yr Institutions, N= 52 Private nonprofit 4-yr Institutions
Transfer-In Bachelor's Completion Rates by Number of Transfer Enrollments

- Public
- Private nonprofit
- Private for-profit

Number of Transfer Enrollments

Transfer-In Bachelor's Completion Rate
Our conclusion: Transfer outcomes depend on what community colleges and 4-year colleges do to teach and support their students.
Barriers to Transfer Success

1) Lack of early momentum
2) Transfer paths unclear
3) Students make progress, don’t transfer
4) Credit loss
5) Post-transfer “academic shock”
Transfer Success Barriers:

1. Lack of Early Momentum
VA Fall 2004 Matched 2- and 4-Year FTIC Students
Average Credit Load by Term

Average Credit Load

Term
1st year 2nd year 3rd year 4th year 5th year 6th year 7th year 8th year

Source: Xu, Jaggars, & Fletcher, 2016.
VA Fall 2004 Matched 2- and 4-Year FTIC Students
Cumulative Credits Earned by Term

Source: Xu, Jaggars, & Fletcher, 2016.
Transfer Success Barriers:

2. Transfer Paths Unclear
National Fall 2007 Degree-Seeking CC Entrants who Transferred within Six Years
N = 230K Transfer Students

- 69% transfer within 3 years
- 43% transfer within 2 years
- 18% transfer within 1 year

Without a Pre-Transfer Award
With a Pre-Transfer Award

Transfer Arrival at Four-year Colleges: Earliest Transfer Term
Unique Enrollment Sequences among ~100K Bachelor’s Degree Completers from the Fall 2007 CC Cohort

General Patterns, Based on Highest College Attended Each Year

Patterns with Enrollment Breaks, 19.9%

- 2 + 3, 17.7%
- 3 + 3, 13.6%
- 2 + 4, 10.9%
- 1 + 3, 3.7%
- 1 + 4, 8.0%
- 4 + 2, 3.5%
- 1 + 5, 4.9%
- 3 + 1, 0.2%
- 2 + 1, 0.2%
- 5 + 1, 0.1%
- 1 + 1, 0.1%
- 4 + 1, 0.2%
- 1 + 2, 0.7%
- 3 + 2, 8.1%

*Enrollment Breaks defined as at least one year with no college enrollment in both fall and spring terms
Transfer Success Barriers:

3. Students Make Progress, Don’t Transfer
VA Fall Starting 2004 CC Cohort, Bachelor’s Degree Seekers
Rate of Transfer to Four-year Colleges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College-level credits earned from CCs</th>
<th>&lt; 20</th>
<th>20-39</th>
<th>40-59</th>
<th>≥ 60</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All two-year entrants</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate earners</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Xu, Jaggars, & Fletcher, 2016, Table 9.
Transfer Success Barriers:

4. Credit Loss
## Credits and Time to Degree

**VA Fall 2004 FTIC Cohort, BA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Matched Samples</th>
<th>2-Year Entrants</th>
<th>4-Year Entrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of credits (any type)</strong></td>
<td>136</td>
<td>126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of college-level credits</strong></td>
<td>133</td>
<td>125</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Semesters</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Xu, Jaggars, & Fletcher, 2016, Table 10.*
Transfer Success Barriers:

5. Post-transfer “Academic Shock”
Term-by-Term Fluctuations in GPA Among Transfers and Matched Native Students

Transfer student community college GPAs pre-transfer much higher than matched sample of 4-Year Entrants.

"Transfer Shock" initial drop in GPA; still higher than matched sample of 4-Year Entrants.

Transfer Student GPA consistently higher than matched sample of 4-Year Entrants.

Source: Xu, Jaggars, & Fletcher, 2016, Figure 4.
How Can Community College and Four-Year Partners Achieve Strong Transfer Outcomes?
The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges

✓ STRATEGY 1: Prioritize Transfer

✓ STRATEGY 2: Create Clear Programmatic Pathways with Aligned High-Quality Instruction

✓ STRATEGY 3: Provide Tailored Transfer Student Advising
STRATEGY 1: Prioritize Transfer

- Communicate transfer as a key component of the institution’s mission
- Share data to increase understanding of the need to improve transfer student outcomes – and the benefits of doing so
- Dedicate significant resources to support transfer students

“EVERYONE ASKS, 'WHERE ARE YOU GOING NEXT?'”

— STUDENT AT HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
STRATEGY 2: Create Clear Programmatic Pathways with Aligned High-Quality Instruction

- Work collaboratively with colleagues from partner institutions to create major-specific program maps
- Provide rigorous instruction and other high-quality academic experiences to prepare students for four-year programs
- Establish regular, reliable processes for updating and improving program maps
- Design unconventional pathways, as necessary
Courses that lead to technical or industry certifications

Career Pathways showing potential majors and median earnings

Specific pathway information on program options and career outlook

Educational progression depending on goals

Course sequences for programs with flexibility for FT and PT attendance

Courses that lead to technical or industry certifications
STRATEGY 3: Provide Tailored Transfer Student Advising

For a complete list of questions, see page 34 of The Transfer Playbook.
STRATEGY 3: Provide Tailored Transfer Student Advising

- Clearly articulate students’ transfer options and help them determine, as early as possible, their field of interest, major, and preferred transfer destination.

- Continuously monitor student progress, provide frequent feedback and intervene quickly when students are off-track.

- Help students access the financial resources necessary to achieve their goals.
STRATEGY 3: Provide Tailored Transfer Student Advising

- Commit dedicated personnel, structures, and resources for transfer students
- Assign advisors and clearly communicate essential information to prospective transfer students
- Strongly encourage transfer students to choose a major prior to transfer
- Replicate elements of the first-year experience for transfer students
- Exercise fairness in financial aid allocation

— CURRENT COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENT
For more information

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http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu

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We’re also on Facebook and Twitter.

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