



SACRAMENTO STATE
Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy

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Transfer Process is Too Complex and Confusing to Students *New study may offer clearer direction for community college students*

SACRAMENTO, CA – In line with a call for action by the Obama administration to increase the number of college graduates, Sacramento State's Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy (IHELP) released a new report offering one answer for states in these challenging times: make transfer policies more comprehensible for community college students.

With huge budget cuts and a looming shortage of college-educated workers, this is especially significant to California, where community colleges play a major role in producing baccalaureate degrees through the transfer process. The vast majority of California's college students begin their college careers in a community college, but sadly, the transfer process has proven to be complex and frustrating. The new study titled, "Crafting a Student-Centered Transfer Process in California: Lessons from Other States," points to the importance of statewide transfer policies and pathways as a remedy to a problem that has plagued states for decades.

"Improving the ease with which community college students transfer to universities has been a mounting national concern," said Nancy Shulock, executive director of IHELP. "States have struggled for years to simplify the transfer process for students and it is now more important than ever to get this figured out."

American higher education tends to be decentralized and autonomous, characteristics that can make the transfer process confusing for students. The process is extremely complex in California because of the segmented structure and sheer size of higher education. Community college students in California face different transfer requirements even within the same major within the same university system. With cash-strapped colleges unable to provide enough support services to help demystify the process, students often end up taking too many courses that don't count toward a degree and many don't make it through to transfer at all.

"We've designed a system that is much too hard for students to navigate – especially first-generation college students who we're working so hard to help in other ways," said Jolene Koester, president of California State University, Northridge. "It's time to come together around more student-centered transfer policies."

Recent reform efforts in California have seen little success and have arguably added more complexity to the transfer process. The new report maintains these efforts have mostly been

limited to the traditional paradigm of local agreements between individual colleges and universities and have not led to statewide, student-centered policies.

In the absence of state policy solutions, some educational leaders have taken appropriate steps at the local level. One such leader, Eloy Ortiz Oakley, superintendent-president of Long Beach City College, is especially committed to improving transfer success for his college's growing number of Latino and African-American students.

"IHELP's report has exposed some significant barriers that students face in transferring to a four-year college or university," said Oakley. "Swift action to improve statewide transfer policies along the lines suggested in the report is vital to the future success of California."

For this report, the researchers looked at the transfer policies of eight other progressive states in order to compare challenges and draw recommendations for a statewide transfer policy in California. The researchers considered specific criteria in formulating their recommendations, arguing that a desirable transfer policy should be:

- *effective* in creating pathways that lead to more community college students transferring to universities and earning bachelor's degrees
- *efficient* in minimizing the number of unnecessary credits students earn on the path to a degree
- *transparent* and easy to understand for students, families and counselors
- *robust* in accommodating the requirements of multiple major programs
- *strategic* in targeting majors that meet high-priority state needs
- *feasible* in balancing stakeholder desires for change with institutional interest in setting standards and requirements for transfer.

Drawing from the experiences of the eight states studied, the report identified three variations of statewide transfer policies and examined how well they met the above criteria when applied to the California context. The authors recommend new legislation that would simplify transfer for students by:

- developing standardized general education and major preparation requirements across all three public segments
- developing associate degrees for transfer, in different fields, that entitle students to admission to a public university and a guaranteed transfer of all degree credits
- structuring major preparation requirements across all segments to guarantee transfer of all such units into the major and to allow only minimal variations across institutions
- guaranteeing that students with an associate degree for transfer with major preparation are admitted as juniors, with allowance for the universities to require additional lower division major preparation courses, if necessary, *after* transfer.

With the addition of new associate degrees for transfer, community colleges should continue to offer non-transfer, terminal associate degrees or applied associate degrees.

"Transfer has been such a difficult issue for states because of the natural tension between students' interest in having consistent transfer requirements and institutional interests in specialized curricula," said Shulock. "But we've all heard stories of friends or relatives who have been enormously frustrated by the process. The time for change really does seem to be now."

To view the complete report, please visit IHELP's website at www.csus.edu/ihe.

About IHELP: The Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy (IHELP), located at California State University, Sacramento, seeks to enhance leadership and policy for higher education in California and the nation through producing research and services for policy makers, practitioners and educators. The Institute has an emphasis on community colleges in recognition of their importance to providing an educated and diverse citizenry and workforce.

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