



# Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Improving Transfer to Increase Student Success 2014



## State Initiatives that Create Clear Pathways:

- Required by Texas Statute – It's the Law
  - Core Curriculum
  - Field of Study Curriculum
  - Associate of Arts in Teaching
  - Reverse Transfer
- Statewide Efforts – Encouraged Not Required
  - Voluntary Transfer Compacts
  - Career and Technical Education Programs of Study

## Core Curriculum

Texas public higher education institutions are **required by law** to adopt a core curriculum of 42 semester credit hours (SCH) that are consistent with the Texas Common Course Numbering System and with the rules issued by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The core curriculum promotes excellence in undergraduate education and facilitates the transfer of lower-division course credit among public colleges, universities, and health-related institutions throughout the state. One of the most important provisions of the core curriculum is that it allows students who successfully complete a 42-SCH core curriculum at one public institution to transfer the entire set of completed courses to another Texas public higher education institution without having to repeat any core courses. Students who transfer without completing the entire 42-SCH core curriculum also receive credit for each of the core courses they successfully complete. Although the courses included in the core curriculum may vary by institution, every Texas higher education institution's core curriculum must include the following foundational component areas and semester credit hours:

- Communications (6 SCH)
- Mathematics (3 SCH)
- Life and physical sciences (6 SCH)
- Language, philosophy, and culture (3 SCH)
- Creative arts (3 SCH)
- American history (6 SCH)
- Government/political science (6 SCH)
- Social and behavioral sciences (3 SCH)
- The component area option (6 SCH)

In fall 2012, 34 percent of all first-time transfer students from a public two-year college to a public university had completed the core curriculum (11,054 of 32,531 students).

## **Field of Study Curriculum**

In 1997, Texas passed legislation that requires the state's public universities to accept lower-division coursework for bachelor's degree programs in specific academic areas. The Field of Study Curricula (FOSC) were developed in collaboration with teaching faculty from colleges and universities and approved by the Coordinating Board. A Coordinating Board-approved FOSC allows a student to complete and transfer courses that satisfy lower-division requirements for a bachelor's degree in a specific academic area or field to Texas public higher education institutions.

After successfully completing one of these FOSC, a student transfers the block of courses to a public university, at which time the courses must be substituted for the institution's core requirements in a student's degree program or field of study, and the student receives full academic credit toward the degree program for the block of courses transferred. If a student transfers from one public institution of higher education to another without completing the FOSC of the sending institution, the student will receive academic credit from the receiving institution for each successfully completed course in the FOSC. However, the student may be required to complete additional courses to satisfy the core requirements in the degree program.

Several FOSC were developed and approved by the Coordinating Board in the early 2000s. FOSC are available for students pursuing degrees in the following fields:

- Business
- Communication
- Computer science
- Engineering
- Engineering technology
- Mexican-American studies
- Music
- Nursing

In fall 2012, 603 students who transferred to a university completed a FOSC and earned full credit (2% of all transfers).

## **Associate of Arts in Teaching**

The Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) degree is a Coordinating Board-approved collegiate degree program consisting of lower-division academic courses that transfer to baccalaureate programs leading to an initial Texas teacher certification. There are three AAT curricula and each include 60 SCH of coursework. The AAT curricula are designed to lead to teacher certification in three areas: 4-8, Early Childhood (EC)-12 Special Education; 8-12, Other EC-12 Other than Special Education; and EC-6.

The three AATs are fully transferable to any Texas public university offering baccalaureate degree programs that lead to an initial Texas teacher certification. Because the AAT fulfills the requirements of the Field of Study Curriculum statutes and Coordinating Board rules, all Texas public universities must accept the three AAT curricula if they offer the applicable baccalaureate degrees leading to an initial teacher certification.

## **Reverse Transfer**

The Reverse Transfer process was established by the Texas Legislature in 2011 to help students who transfer from a public community college to a public university receive an associate's degree as they successfully complete coursework. Texas public universities are required to identify, track, and follow up with each student who has (1) earned at least 30 SCH at a community college and (2) completed a total of 66 SCH. Once a student meets these requirements, the university – with the student's permission – sends the community college the student's course completion transcript. The community college reviews the transcript information and determines whether the student completed sufficient credits to qualify for an associate degree. Reverse transfer benefits students by allowing them to complete their associate degree if they transfer to a university prior to graduation from a community college.

## **Voluntary Transfer Compacts**

Voluntary transfer compacts are statewide articulation agreements that are entered into by signatory institutions of higher education in Texas. These transfer compacts streamline the transfer process for students pursuing bachelor's degrees in various disciplines and increase the number and preparedness of students matriculating from Texas public community colleges into bachelor's degree programs at Texas public universities. The transfer compacts provide students with guidance about the courses that offer the best pathways to bachelor's degrees in disciplines of interest. The transfer compacts eliminate the need for multiple one-to-one articulation agreements between community colleges and universities.

Students who successfully complete any or all of the courses in a voluntary transfer compact with a grade of "C" or better are able to receive credit in their selected major for those courses when they transfer to a signatory university, provided the degree program the student has been admitted to include the completed courses. In turn, participating institutions apply these courses to satisfy program requirements, up to the number of SCH for a specific course in the degree program at the university. The compacts are beneficial because they ensure courses transfer and apply toward earning a bachelor's degree in a major course of study. (Note: Although successfully completed courses from the *Lower-Division Academic Course Guide Manual* (see page five) are required to transfer by law, universities are not required to apply the transferred courses to major requirements for a bachelor's degree. Voluntary transfer compacts ensure that universities provide this benefit to students.)

Eighteen public Texas universities and 64 Texas public community colleges, districts and technical colleges currently participate in one or more of the following compacts: engineering (biomedical, chemical, civil, electrical, industrial, and mechanical); biology; chemistry; mathematics; business; management information systems; and computer information systems and sciences. Information about voluntary transfer compacts and the participating institutions are available at <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/tuningtexas>.

## **Career and Technical Education Programs of Study**

Perkins Leadership Grants fund the development and ongoing improvement of model Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs of Study with input from secondary and postsecondary academic and CTE faculty. The CTE Programs of Study help students, parents, and counselors with college and career planning by providing students enrolled in high school or college with information about clear and efficient pathways to obtain an associate degree. Currently, there are more than 120 state-recognized CTE Programs of Study aligned with the 16 federally designated career clusters. At least one CTE Program of Study has been developed for each of the career cluster pathways.

The Texas Education Agency requires secondary school districts to offer a minimum of one coherent sequence of CTE courses from at least three different clusters. Each state-recognized CTE Program of Study includes rigorous secondary academic courses, provides opportunities for students to complete industry-recognized CTE courses, and provides a pathway for students to progress through a postsecondary education program leading to an associate degree.



## State Initiatives that Align Curricula:

- Texas Common Course Numbering System
- *Lower-Division Academic Course Guide Manual (ACGM)* and Learning Outcomes Project
- Texas Tuning Project

### **Texas Common Course Numbering System**

The Texas Common Course Numbering System (TCCNS) provides Texas higher education institutions with a uniform course taxonomy designed to enhance course transfer. The TCCNS consists of a four-character alphabetic prefix that designates the academic discipline and a four-digit course number that designates the level, credit value, and sequence of courses. Currently, all Texas public community and technical colleges and universities participate, as well as some nonprofit, independent institutions of higher education. The TCCNS allows students to access information about course equivalencies, as determined by participating institutions.

The Texas Common Course Numbering System developed as a grass-roots, cooperative, and voluntary effort among public community colleges and universities. The Coordinating Board has provided ongoing support for the TCCNS since the initiative began in the 1970s.

### ***Lower-Division Academic Course Guide Manual (ACGM)* and ACGM Learning Outcomes Projects**

The *Lower-Division Academic Course Guide Manual (ACGM)* is the official list of courses approved for general academic course transfer that may be offered for state funding by public community and technical colleges in Texas. The ACGM provides course descriptions and learning outcomes, which are regularly reviewed and updated.

To improve academic transfer, Coordinating Board staff initiated the ACGM Learning Outcomes Projects for faculty across the state to develop student learning outcomes for frequently taught ACGM courses. Learning outcomes help ensure consistency in course content and student learning so that students are equally prepared for upper-division coursework, no matter where they take their lower-division academic courses.

## **Texas Tuning Project**

Tuning is a collaborative faculty-led process designed to define what students should know, understand, and be able to demonstrate after completing a degree program in a specific field. Tuning focuses on the knowledge, skills, and abilities students need to achieve at different levels along the educational pipeline prior to graduation.

To “tune” a discipline, faculty use their knowledge and expertise; academic and professional documents; and input from students, recent graduates, and employers to establish criteria-referenced learning outcomes and competencies by degree level and subject area. This convergence of resources provides students with clear expectations and allows students to efficiently plan their educational experiences to achieve those expectations. The tuning process is designed to make higher education outcomes more transparent to all stakeholders, including students, employers, and parents.

“Fine-tuning” is also a faculty-led process designed to identify – on the basis of the agreed-upon program-level learning outcomes – a set of common lower-division courses that will provide the necessary academic background for a discipline. Faculty work together to align course learning outcomes across institutions and sectors, which provides a basis for voluntary transfer and articulation agreements among institutions. Twelve disciplines have been tuned and fine-tuned in Texas:

- Engineering (six disciplines)
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Mathematics
- Business
- Management information systems
- Computer information systems and sciences

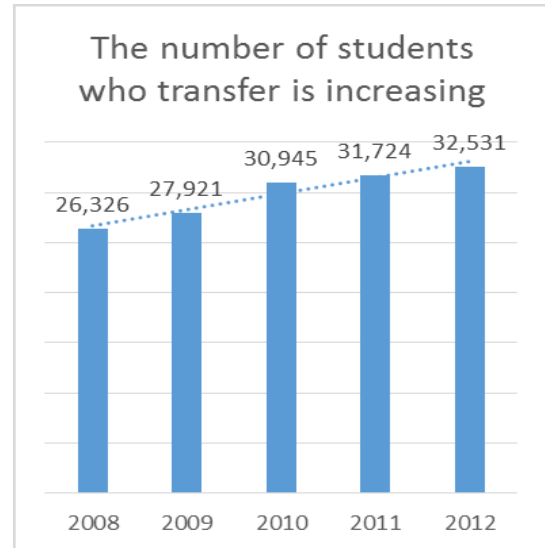
Tuning documents and additional information about the Texas Tuning Project are available at <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/tuningtexas>.

## Other Transfer Information: Texas Data on Transfer Students and Swirling Transfer Students

### Texas Data on Transfer Students

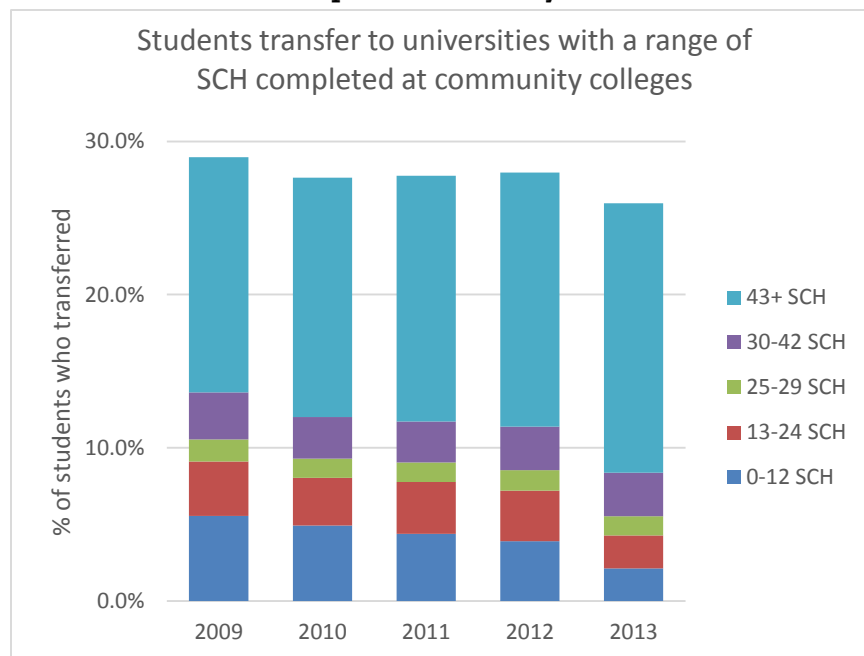
The number of students who enroll in a public community, state, or technical college after high school and then transfer to a university increases every year. In fall 2012, more than 32,000 public community and technical college students made the transition to a Texas public university.

The Coordinating Board’s institutional data show that most students who graduate with a bachelor’s degree from a public institution of higher education in Texas completed semester credit hours at a community or technical college, some through dual credit opportunities in high school, some through summer enrollment or co-enrollment, and some as traditional transfer students (see “Swirling Transfer Students”).



In 2013, more than 75 percent of public university graduates had completed credit hours at a Texas public community college, with almost 40 percent completing 30 SCH or more. These data reflect a range of student enrollment patterns, including traditional transfer pathways, dual credit participation prior to university enrollment, online and summer course enrollment, co-enrollment at a college and university, and more (see “Swirling Transfer Students”).

Almost 60 percent of students who enroll in a Texas public community college after high school and transfer to a public university in Texas do so with 43 or more SCH completed at the community college.



Based on recent cohort data, approximately one in four students who enter a community college transfer to a public university or health-related institution within six years. Students in academic programs are approximately twice as likely to transfer to a university as technical students.

## Swirling Transfer Students

The term “swirling” describes an increasingly common practice among college students – enrolling and taking courses at many institutions of higher education. Swirling students move among higher education institutions, completing courses along the way, without following a traditional educational pathway. Student swirling patterns include moving from a community college to another community college, from a community college to a university, from a university to a community college, and so on. Swirling allows students greater flexibility (e.g., taking courses at convenient locations or times); however, students can easily rack up additional costs and potentially increased student loan debt because of poor course selection.

An analysis of 2013 Texas baccalaureate graduates tracked back six years showed that only 22 percent of graduates attended a single institution. For graduates who attended more than one institution, most attended one community college (51%) and one university. An additional 2 percent attended two universities, and 25 percent attended three or more institutions. This pattern has remained fairly constant for the last decade.

Co-enrollment, another type of swirling, is when a student is enrolled at two or more institutions during the same semester. This pattern is uncommon compared to enrollment at different institutions during different semesters. In Fiscal Year 2013, between 2 and 3 percent of all students co-enrolled in a given semester, with fall co-enrollment rates around 2 percent and spring and summer rates closer to 3 percent. Specifically, statewide co-enrollment numbers were as follows: fall 2012, 1.9 percent; spring 2013, 2.6 percent; first summer session 2013, 2.9 percent; and second summer session 2013, 0.3 percent.

Higher education institutions face challenges related to student swirling, especially in the area of data reporting. For example, if a student’s overall academic progress is not reported accurately by an institution, that institution may not receive credit for a graduate, which may affect the institution’s funding and graduation rates.

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## Improving Transfer Increases Student Success and Reduces Costs for Students and the State

