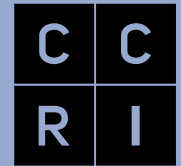


TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS SERIES

Introduction to the High-Performing Transfer Partnerships Study



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DATA NOTE 1 | JANUARY 2018

This document is the first in a new series of Data Notes that share research results from our High-Performing Transfer Partnerships ([HPTP](#)) study. Our inquiry process relies on a mixed-methods research design that includes student-level data from 15 states affiliated with the national initiative on reverse credit transfer called Credit When It's Due (CWID). Our HPTP study involves analyzing the CWID dataset to identify pairs of high-performing transfer partnerships, defined as two- and four-year institutional pairs that outperform others in their state at transferring, retaining and graduating students, based on aggregate and disaggregated data. This Data Note explains the rationale for our overall HPTP research, and provides a brief overview of the existing literature on transfer partnerships.

HIGH-PERFORMING TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS STUDY

Why should we study high-performing transfer partnerships?

It is vital to understand what facilitates transfer between two- and four-year colleges and baccalaureate-degree completion, as these processes are pivotal to the collegiate experience of many if not most college students, and particularly historically underserved populations, including low-income, minoritized, first-generation, and older students. Studies of transfer policies and practices have historically looked at what “sending” community colleges do to promote vertical transfer, and sometimes (although far less often) what “receiving” four-year institutions do to facilitate transfer and support transfer students. However, there is very little research on the nature of partnerships between sending and receiving institutions, including whether colleges and universities represent their work on transfer as a partnership at all.

Of the research that is available on transfer partnerships, the vast majority of studies focus on one half of the partnership (i.e., either two- or four-year institutions), or speak to what each institution can do separately to improve transfer and completion outcomes (Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Handel, 2011; Miller, 2013; Wilson & Lowry, 2016; Wyner, Deane, Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Although these studies help us to understand the unique ways that institutions within a pair can promote student transfer and graduation, there is less information about the specific strategies that institutions can utilize to collaboratively achieve their shared goals through a formal partnership. This research aims to fill that gap.

What do we hope to learn from this study?

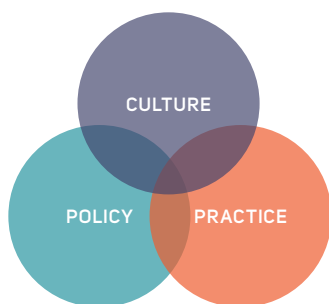
- What is the difference between a pair of institutions that simply send and receive students between each other, and a pair of institutions that intentionally partner to facilitate student transfer and baccalaureate completion for these students?
- What do high-performing partnerships look like, and how do they vary between institutions with differing characteristics?
- What are the catalysts and barriers for sending and receiving institutions to form such partnerships?
- What characteristics of these partnerships facilitate or hinder equitable outcomes for students?
- What are lessons about implementation and outcomes that can be shared with other institutions?

CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH-PERFORMING TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS

What does the literature say about high-performing transfer partnerships?

Much of the currently available research on transfer partnerships focuses on major- or department-specific programs that only serve a small proportion of transfer students at a given institution. Kisker (2007) offers one of the few definitions of a transfer partnership that refers to the improvement of transfer structures, policies, and practices within and across entire institutions, describing it as a “collaboration between one or more community colleges and a bachelor degree-granting institution for the purpose of increasing transfer and baccalaureate attainment for all or for a particular subset of students” (p. 284). Our research aims to build upon this conceptualization and specifically examine institutional partnerships that promote more equitable transfer outcomes for underserved student populations, by drawing upon the literature on transfer receptive cultures (Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solorzano, 2011).

To begin, we examined existing studies on collaborations between sending and receiving institutions, to develop a clearer sense of the characteristics of effective partnerships. The limited literature offers a few initial suggestions for promoting transfer and supporting transfer students, which we categorized into three broad areas: culture, policy, and practice. With the goal of focusing on effective partnerships, the following list omits characteristics or services that reside in one institution (e.g., advising), and only includes strategies and practices that involve two or more partners.



CULTURE

- Presidential/leadership support for partnership practices
- Transfer-affirming messaging at both partner institutions
- Trust built between institutional partners
- Presence on partner institution campus
- Strong, non-hierarchical, collaborative relationships between faculty & staff at partner institutions
- Shared responsibility & accountability between partner institutions for student success
- Shared commitment to continually assess and adapt to student needs

POLICY

- Policies to ensure curricular rigor & alignment between institutions
- Budgetary support for transfer practices
- Formalized credit arrangements (program maps/articulation agreements)
- Shared policies to help students navigate financial aid processes across both institutions
- Transparent transfer credit policies
- Transfer targets and admissions preferences

PRACTICE

- Regular one-on-one meetings between senior leaders at partner institutions
- Regular conversations between senior academic and student services administrators at partner institutions
- Frequent collaboration between faculty, advising staff, & financial aid counselors at partner institutions
- Collaborative cross-campus recruitment and programming
- Faculty involvement in admission process, articulation, and design and implementation of partnership practices
- Data sharing about transfer outcomes for assessment, planning, and improvement

NEXT STEPS

Preliminary findings from our HPTP study have uncovered some additional elements of successful partnerships that have not been highlighted in previous research. These include dual admissions agreements, co-located degree programs, staff positions that focus on establishing and managing partnerships, shared advising practices, university center models, and informal institutional relationships that can either help or hinder transfer processes. The next steps of our HPTP study focus on learning more about how these types of strategies are utilized by partnering institutions to facilitate transfer, with particular attention to equitable outcomes.

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