

TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS SERIES

High-Performing Transfer Partnerships and Promising Practices



Lia Wetzstein

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Our High-Performing Transfer Partnerships (HPTP) study uses quantitative data to find institutional pairs of community colleges and baccalaureate-granting institutions (BGI) within states that have better than average results on bachelor's completion and/or retention for all students and students of color. Once these pairs are identified, our research team visits the community colleges and baccalaureate-granting institutions to gather qualitative data to identify practices that may contribute to these positive student outcomes. Our analysis is continuing and already we are learning that pairs of institutions are shifting from seeing themselves as operating singularly and separately, in the ways they enroll and serve students, to seeing themselves as "sister" institutions that work toward a common goal of supporting their shared students to attain a baccalaureate degree. This brief summarizes promising practices that our data show support and maintain partnerships that have positive outcomes for students, including underserved student populations. (For more explanation of the High-Performing Transfer Partnership (HPTP) study, [Yeh, 2018, Data Note 1](#)).

INTRODUCTION

This data note focuses on the following research question: What are the promising practices of partnerships that may contribute to transfer student outcomes? Our results come from interviews of 88 faculty, staff, and students in one state, with six different higher education institutions (four community colleges and two bachelor's granting institutions), participating in the study.

CREATING PARTNERSHIP POSITIONS

Higher education institutions that send and receive students often create articulation agreements to provide transfer routes from one institution to and through another. Three pairs of institutions in our study created positions to facilitate transfer partnerships with each other and other institutions in the state.

As many people interviewed noted, the creation of an institutional partnership requires relationship building and maintenance over time, along with creating an infrastructure to determine how to share resources, communicate information, and coordinate innumerable details around student support. Several community colleges and baccalaureate-granting institutions were creating director-level positions to help facilitate partnerships, with many of these positions being new or only a few years old. Two of the four community colleges that we studied employed a

person who focused full- or part-time on university partnerships. One of the two universities that we studied had two partnership positions; one position focused on the academic affairs side and a newer partnership position focused on student services. These positions appear to enable some of the other promising practices described below.

SHARING RESOURCES

Resources are often limited for all institutions involved in transfer, prompting different ways to share resources that also serve students' transfer needs. This includes hiring staff that work for and are paid by both institutions involved in a transfer partnership, and also by offering co-located baccalaureate degree programs on community college campuses.

Joint Staffing Appointments

Two institutions involved in a single transfer partnership in our study employed a joint transfer advisor. Those interviewed described the advantages of joint transfer advisors, which include having someone who knows the policies and practices of both institutions, helps transfer students navigate their path through the community college and all the way to the baccalaureate, and represents the interests of both institutions. Several staff and faculty employed by this institutional pair observed that their joint transfer advisor is pivotal to improving students' experiences. One interviewee used the term "seamless" to describe the transfer process supported by their joint transfer advisor.

A majority of the students we interviewed attending the above institutional pair pointed to the joint transfer advisor as instrumental to facilitating their smooth transition from the community college to the baccalaureate-granting institution. This advisor's knowledge of course work, faculty and staff, deadlines, paperwork, and processes at both institutions helped make the path to a baccalaureate degree more transparent and, according to some students, transfer "easy". One transfer student said about the joint transfer advisor that, "...she was able to get access about the information for both campus[es], and she was able to compare and contrast between the classes and...what we need. So yeah, transition[al] was very less stressful."

The joint transfer advisor noted that her position was created to help community college students transfer to their university partner. When asked about whether both institutions shared responsibility for student transfer and completion, the joint advisor felt the creation of this position showed equal effort from the institutions to improve the transfer experience of students.

Transfers weren't coming through as seamlessly as they should, that there were hiccups. Their willingness to sit at the table together and create my [position] description....That was a strong demonstration of paying attention to what they needed to do, to make this better.

An administrator from another baccalaureate-granting institution that invested in joint staffing felt that joint appointments are key to partnership success and show a commitment to the partnership.

I would say [joint staffing is] absolutely pivotal for the success of the [partnership]....Every single conversation we go into, I pretty much ask about, "How do we have joint staff? How can we make that alignment?" Because you need to have an investment, someone that is 100% invested in that success of the partnership. There's no other real great way to do it, other than to put a person there.

Co-located Degrees

We found community colleges and baccalaureate-granting institutions partnering to offer bachelor's completion options on community college campuses. For the community colleges, a co-located bachelor's degree program provides opportunities for community college students who want to complete a baccalaureate degree to do so on the

same campus where they have already engaged in collegiate studies. Many of the staff and faculty interviewed felt the co-located degree programs provide place-bound students greater access to a baccalaureate degree. Despite these positive claims, we found little research on the impact of co-located degree programs and believe that this is an area that deserves disciplined study.

These community colleges provide access to a baccalaureate degree in a familiar place to their students while the partnering baccalaureate-granting institutions are able to enroll more students without needing to invest in infrastructure on their campuses. A university administrator described this type of partnership as both a “growth strategy” for the university, as well as a way for each institution to invest in the partnership. This administrator also said, “Our number one strategy for growth is partnerships...and mutual investment comes with that.”

Dual-Admission

One example of a co-located degree program focuses on increasing the number of Bachelor’s of Science in Nursing (BSN) degrees in the state. Seven community colleges with RN programs are partnering with a university to provide the final two years of the BSN degree option. These programs offer a dual-enrollment model such that once students are accepted to the 2-year RN (i.e., Associate Degree in Nursing or ADN) they are also automatically admitted to the BSN that is offered by the university on the 2-year campus. The university partner hires credentialed community college faculty as community faculty to provide the final two years of course work at the various community colleges, which are geographically spread throughout the state. One administrator offered some details on how the partnership was strengthened by hiring local faculty, saying,

Normally their faculty are credentialed and we hire them as community faculty for us. We do that for many of the partnerships actually, ‘cause then again, that creates that investment...it’s mutually beneficial, too, ‘cause then that particular faculty is invested in seeing the partnership grow. They’ll probably talk about it in their community college courses, to their students, and then obviously teach them at the [Baccalaureate] level as well.

Several students indicated that having the co-located BSN degree option increased the likelihood that they would complete their bachelor’s degree, with one saying that dual-enrollment also helped make the degree seem achievable. The student said, “I think this actually makes it feel more attainable, just knowing that they have the automatic entrance.”

University Space on Community College Campuses

Three community colleges invested in buildings and space specifically for universities to offer advising as well as bachelor’s level coursework on their campuses so that baccalaureate degrees can be completed there. These centers create a space where community college students can attain a baccalaureate degree on a campus with which they are already familiar, and provide work and meeting space for faculty and advisors from partnering baccalaureate-granting institutions. A community college administrator described why one center was created:

It was the lack of universities in our area. That was really it. We wanted to just meet the student where they’re at, and by talking to so many students on our campus, a lot of people take the bus. A lot of people take public transportation. A lot of people have their families here. They work here. They don’t want to leave our area.

Many students that were interviewed appreciated the convenience of having these university spaces on their community college campus as they did not want to learn a new institutional system to finish their baccalaureate degree. And for many, they have ties to the area that made a local baccalaureate option important. One student explained, “[I] don’t want to relocate because of family...my family, my work and everything involved.”

CONCLUSION

One administrator interviewed for our study described the difference between institutions that exchange students and those engaged in partnerships supporting transfer as follows: “Working together - it’s not just one person’s responsibility, or one institution’s responsibility to do X, Y, and Z, and this other institution to do A, B, and C. It’s working together to get common goals created.”

This statement shows an institutional level of commitment toward transfer and student baccalaureate completion at both institutions. Moving beyond shared articulation agreements to focus on shared goals and resources has led to new and creative ways of supporting students and improving the transfer process. Continued collection and analysis of data in other state contexts may lead to new understandings of innovative practices and will be shared in CCRI’s future data notes. Our subsequent work will also discuss barriers and incentives to these types of partnerships.

TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS DATA NOTES

Yeh, T. L. (2018, January). Introduction to the high-performing transfer partnerships study (Transfer Partnerships Series, [Data Note 1](#)). Seattle, WA: Community College Research Initiatives, University of Washington.

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About the author: [Lia Wetzstein](#) is a Research Scientist at CCRI whose wide-ranging research interests revolve around education equity.

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