

CWID DATA NOTE

Why Don't Potentially Eligible Reverse Transfer Students Receive the Degree? Exploring the Outcomes of Reverse Transfer Degree Audits

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DATE NOTE NO. 6

MARCH 2016

Introduction

As our previous research has shown (Taylor et al., 2013), a significant portion of transfer students do not earn an associate's degree prior to transfer and stop-out of 4-year institutions before earning a bachelor's degree. Many of these students have a substantial number of college credits, yet no credential to recognize their postsecondary progress. Reverse transfer programs are designed to provide associate's degrees to transfer students once they complete the required courses at the 4-year institution, thereby reducing the number of students with "some college, no degree."

Unfortunately, only a sizeable proportion of transfer students potentially eligible for reverse transfer actually receive the degree. Figure 1 provides an example of this phenomenon using data from the first year of CWID in Michigan. Nearly 14,000 transfer students in the sample were potentially eligible for reverse transfer, but only 607 received the degree. One important factor contributing to this issue is the difficulty in obtaining consent from students, and we have previously written about ways to maximize student consent (Taylor & Bragg, 2015). However, equally important is the fact that only 42% of students who received a degree audit also received an associate's degree through reverse transfer. If students met the 2-year residency requirement, earned enough cumulative college credits, and consented to participate in reverse transfer, what is preventing them from receiving the degree? The purpose of this Data Note is to explore the reasons why potentially eligible reverse transfer students do not receive the associate's degree.

Method

This brief addresses the following research question:

Why don't potentially eligible reverse transfer students receive the associate's degree?

The data used for this analysis comes from Minnesota, which collected particularly detailed data on why students did or did not meet degree requirements. The sample includes students who transferred from a CWID-participating 2-year institution to a CWID-participating 4-year institution between 2008 and 2012, met the residency requirement for CWID eligibility, and transferred without an associate's degree ($n = 8,076$).

Minnesota's reverse transfer process was somewhat unique for two reasons. First, both 2-year and 4-year institutions in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system, which implemented CWID in Minnesota, are authorized to award associate's degrees. Second, Minnesota used a two-stage degree audit process. Student transcripts were first audited centrally by officials at the MnSCU system. If the MnSCU audit determined that students were eligible or potentially eligible for an associate's degree, MnSCU officials sent the student's transcript to the institution (either 2-year or 4-year) where the student was most likely to meet the requirements of an associate's degree.

For both stages in the degree audit process, detailed data was collected on why students did or did not receive the associate's degree. This Data Note focuses on that data.

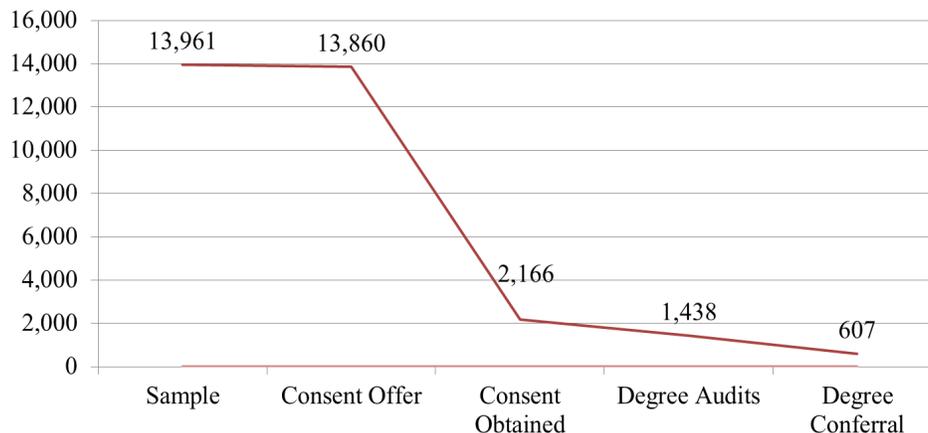


Figure 1. This figure used data from Michigan to show the number of students associated with different phases of the reverse transfer process.

Results

As shown in Figure 2, more than two-thirds (5,577) of the 8,076 transfer students in the cohort were not eligible for reverse transfer after the MnSCU audit. Interestingly, whereas only 11% of students

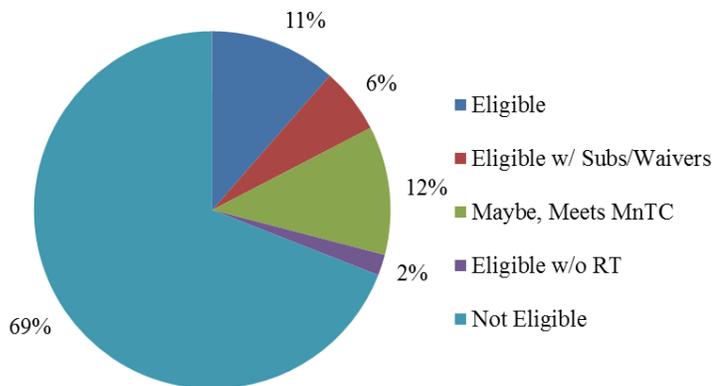


Figure 2. This figure shows the results of the MnSCU audit to determine reverse transfer eligibility ($n = 8,076$).

were determined by MnSCU to be potentially eligible based on associate's degree requirements, an additional 6% were potentially eligible with course substitutions or waivers, and another 12% were eligible for the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC), a fully transferrable common core of lower division courses. Another 2% of students were eligible for an associate's degree at the institution they were then attending, without the need for reverse transfer.

MnSCU collected additional data on why students did not meet the MnSCU audit for the 69% of students from the previous analysis. As shown in Figure 3, over one quarter of students had already completed their bachelor's degree, 6% had some type of suspension,

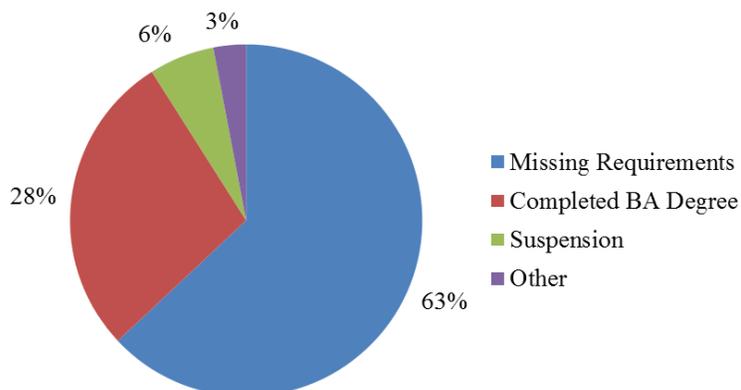


Figure 3. This figure shows the reasons why students did not meet the initial MnSCU audit. The sample includes $n = 5,529$ students from the previous analysis who did not meet the MnSCU audit requirements ($n = 48$ students had missing data). "Other" includes students deemed ineligible due to a financial hold, low GPA, or an unspecified reason.

References

- Taylor, J. L., & Bragg, D. D. (2015, January). *Optimizing reverse transfer policies and processes: Lessons from twelve CWID states*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Taylor, J. L., Bishop, C., Makela, J. P., Bragg, D. D., & Ruud, C. M. (2013). *Credit When It's Due: Results from the baseline study*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The author gratefully acknowledge Debra Bragg and Jason Taylor for their insights and feedback on an earlier draft of this publication, Cari Bishop and Jason Taylor for their assistance in creating the datasets which were utilized in this research, and researchers at the MnSCU system who collaborated to provide data for the CWID grant. This publication was prepared pursuant to a contract awarded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in October 2012 to OCCRL, College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Preliminary research associated with this project was funded by Lumina Foundation in July-September 2012.

Suggested Citation

- Giani, M.S. (2016). *CWID DATA NOTE: Why don't potentially eligible reverse transfer students receive the degree? Exploring the outcomes of reverse transfer degree audits*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

and a handful of students were not eligible due to financial holds, low GPA, or other reasons. However, the majority of students (63%) that did not pass the MnSCU audit were missing some type of degree requirements.

As mentioned previously, if students met the requirements of the initial MnSCU audit, their transcripts were shared with the 2-year or 4-year institution that MnSCU determined would be most likely to be able to award the student an associate's degree. That institution then conducted a secondary degree audit to determine if the student met the requirements of an associate's degree offered by that institution. Out of the 2,498 students that were potentially eligible based on the MnSCU audit, 1,422 students (57%) met the requirements of a degree during the institutional audit whereas 1,076 students (43%) did not. Similar to the previous analyses, Figure 4 displays the reasons why students did not meet the institutional audit. Once again, the primary reason was that students were missing degree requirements.

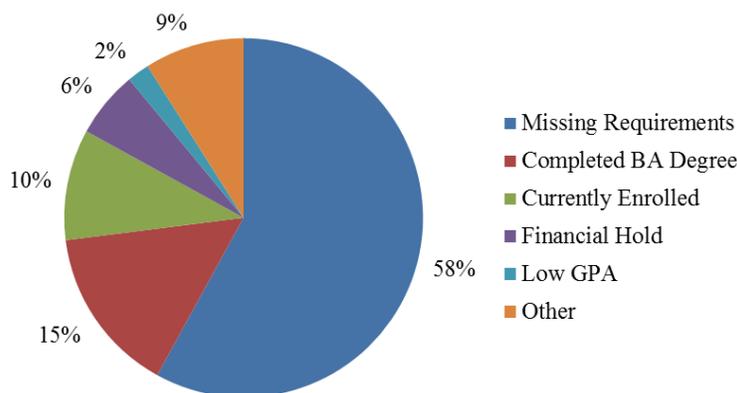


Figure 4. This figure shows the reasons why students did not pass the secondary institutional audit. The sample includes $n = 1,076$ students who passed the initial MnSCU audit but did not pass the institutional audit.

What this Means

Although community colleges have ample experience receiving 4-year transcripts, applying upper-division coursework to the requirements of an associate's degree is often a novel process. As shown in Minnesota, many students potentially eligible for reverse transfer were missing degree requirements. One promising practice in this regard is the utilization and expansion of course substitutions and waivers, as over one third of the students that met the initial MnSCU audit required substitutions and/or waivers. We believe this practice can help institutions implementing reverse transfer maximize student eligibility while maintaining the integrity of the associate's degrees awarded through reverse transfer. Similarly, this research provides valuable data on why so many students do not receive degrees, and additional data should be collected on the types of courses and requirements that students are missing to improve articulation and transfer where possible.