

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Academic Affairs

NO.: AAC 17-30

COMMITTEE DATE: June 13, 2017

BOARD DATE: June 20, 2017

MASSTRANSFER POLICY AMENDMENT

MOVED: In June 2008, the Board accepted the Final Report of the Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group (CTAG) and adopted the MassTransfer Policy. In furtherance of the CTAG recommendations, the Board directed the Department to continue ongoing efforts to create a seamless system of transfer.

To that end, in Spring 2017 the Commissioner convened the “Exploring STEM Foundations for Transfer Students Committee” (the Committee), a group of campus stakeholders charged with exploring and making recommendations to address the unique challenges faced by STEM students seeking to transfer from a community college to a state university or a University of Massachusetts campus. As outlined in the attached background document, the Committee has completed its work and is recommending amendments to the MassTransfer Policy to improve its effectiveness.

The Board thanks the Committee for its work and, consistent with the Committee’s recommendations, hereby amends the MassTransfer Policy, as follows:

1. The number of General Education (Gen Ed) Foundation courses will be reduced from 34 credits to 28 credits for students in A2B STEM pathways.
2. The reduction will take place in two categories: behavioral and social sciences and humanities and fine arts. Community college students enrolled in A2B STEM pathways will be required to complete at least six credits in each of these categories.
3. The receiving institutions can require up to an additional four courses in order to satisfy their general education requirements.

The Board directs the Commissioner to work with the campuses to implement these policy amendments by the Fall of 2018, to continue ongoing efforts to create a seamless system of transfer, and to periodically report back to the BHE on the Department’s progress in this regard.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, §§ 6 and 9(v)

Contact: Allison Little, Executive Director of STEM

Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Chief of Staff and Director of Academic Policy and Student Success

BACKGROUND

The Board of Higher Education (BHE) has the statutory authority to “develop and implement a transfer compact for the purpose of facilitating and fostering the transfer of students without the loss of academic credit or standing from one public institution to another.” M.G.L. c. 15A, §9(v). In April 2007, the BHE created the Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group (CTAG) to develop a comprehensive understanding of transfer-related issues and to make recommendations to the BHE on steps that can be implemented to improve the transfer process in Massachusetts and make it as seamless as possible.

CTAG presented its final report to the BHE in June 2008, which led to the implementation of the MassTransfer policy. MassTransfer replaced the Commonwealth Transfer Compact, Joint Admissions, and the Tuition Advantage programs with a single transfer policy. The MassTransfer Tuition Waiver was developed to complement the policy and provides students who complete an associate’s degree in a linked program with a cumulative 3.0 GPA a tuition discount once they transfer to a public four-year institution. The CTAG final report included four goals:

- Goal 1: Implement the MassTransfer policy effective Academic Year 2009–10.
- Goal 2: Provide easy access to clear, accurate, and cohesive transfer information.
- Goal 3: Ensure sustained effectiveness and accountability of transfer policies and practices.
- Goal 4: Expand alignment of statewide program-to-program and course-to-course transfer.

CTAG included recommendations on how to achieve these goals and progress has been made on all four. One of the major elements of the MassTransfer policy is the 34-credit Gen Ed Foundation, formerly known as the MassTransfer Block. The Gen Ed Foundation enables any student in the Massachusetts public higher education system to complete a portable transfer block that satisfies general education/distribution/core requirements across all institutions. However, in the process of developing the A2B Mapped Pathways, DHE staff and campus stakeholders realized that the Gen Ed Foundation was not serving STEM students as well as hoped. Community college students in STEM pathways were completing more of their courses in general education than within their major and this created a series of challenges when they transferred to four-year institutions.

In Spring 2017, Commissioner Carlos E. Santiago convened the Exploring STEM Foundations for Transfer Students Committee (the Committee), comprised of campus stakeholders charged with exploring and building an alternative to the Gen Ed Foundation for STEM students.

Committee Representation

The Committee was comprised of chief academic officers, deans of STEM, deans of humanities or liberal arts and transfer professionals from both community colleges and baccalaureate institutions. The Committee was staffed by Allison Little, Executive Director of STEM, and Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Chief of Staff and Director of Academic Policy and Student Success. The committee met three times during the Spring 2017 semester.

Process

The first meeting focused on setting goals and establishing the context for the work. The initial discussion concentrated on reducing the Gen Ed Foundation by two courses, one in the behavioral and social sciences category and one in the humanities and fine arts category.

Following the first meeting, DHE staff developed a survey to gain broad feedback from campuses represented on the committee about the proposed revisions. Committee members were asked to connect with others at their colleges or universities before completing the survey to ensure that a diverse group of stakeholders were engaged and providing input. The survey consisted of three primary questions: (a) Should the number of Gen Ed Foundation credits be reduced? (b) Should the number of Gen Ed Foundation credits be reduced for STEM students or all students? (c) What is the potential impact of these revisions?

At the second meeting, the committee analyzed the survey results. The majority of respondents agreed with the initial recommendation to reduce the number of general education courses for STEM students. The responses were mixed as far as to whom the alternative Gen Ed Foundation should apply, but the general sense was that the change should first apply to students in STEM A2B Pathways. As far as potential impact, the survey responses showed that the process for implementing an alternative Gen Ed Foundation for students would take at least a year and would require professional development for faculty and advisors.

After the second meeting, DHE staff surveyed chief academic officers, registrars, and other campus stakeholders. The results of this survey highlighted the importance of acknowledging that this change would only affect students in STEM A2B Pathways, whether they were A2B Mapped, A2B Linked, or A2B Other, as defined below.

- A2B Mapped: These pathways provide students with a “map” of courses to take at a community college. They guarantee that general education requirements and major foundational requirements will transfer and a minimum of 60 credits will apply to the baccalaureate program.
- A2B Linked: These pathways guarantee that a student’s general education requirements will transfer and ensure that a minimum of 60 credits will apply to the baccalaureate program. These were formerly known as MassTransfer Articulation Agreements.
- A2B Linked Other: These pathways guarantee students that a minimum of 60 credits will apply to the baccalaureate program. These were formerly known as Additional Transfer Agreements.

At the third meeting, the Committee came to consensus on three major recommendations, which are described below. The Committee recognized that the changes would have several benefits to students and institutions. Community college students will be able to take more courses within their majors and avoid being out of sequence with their courses when they transfer. Therefore, after transfer they will not be so heavily loaded with major course requirements, be more likely to complete their degrees within 60 credits and more likely to graduate.

Recommendations

The Exploring STEM Foundations for Transfer Students Committee recommends amending the MassTransfer Policy as follows:

1. The number of Gen Ed Foundation courses will be reduced from 34 credits to 28 credits for students in A2B STEM pathways.

2. The reduction will take place in two categories: behavioral and social sciences and humanities and fine arts. Community college students enrolled in A2B STEM pathways will be required to complete at least six credits in each of these categories.
3. The receiving institutions can require up to an additional four courses in order to satisfy their general education requirements.

The table below shows the effects of these changes on the Gen Ed Foundation.

General Education Foundation		
<i>Subject Areas</i>	<i>Current</i>	<i>STEM</i>
English composition/writing	6	6
Behavioral and social sciences	9	6
Humanities and fine arts	9	6
Natural or physical sciences	7	7
Mathematics/quantitative reasoning	3	3
Total	34	28

Next Steps

DHE staff will update and revise the MassTransfer policy guidelines in order to include information that is related to more recent achievements in creating a seamless system of transfer, including the development of the STEM Gen Ed Foundation. Simultaneously, campuses will work to implement this policy amendment by Fall 2018. DHE staff will reconvene STEM faculty who have developed A2B Mapped Pathways in order to revise the 60-credit maps to reflect the new STEM Gen Ed Foundation and allow community college students to take more courses within their majors.

Committee Members

Janice Barney, Mount Wachusett Community College
Mark Broadbent, Holyoke Community College
Alberto Cardelle, Fitchburg State University
Margaret Carroll, Framingham State University
Sandy Christoun, Bridgewater State University
Robert Cody, Cape Cod Community College
Nancy Cohen, University of Massachusetts President's Office
Christopher Cratsley, Fitchburg State University
Daniel de la Torre, Quinsigamond Community College
Elizabeth Dumont, University of Massachusetts Amherst
Felecia Edwards, University of Massachusetts Boston
Michelle Elia, Bloomer Bunker Hill Community College
Meledath Govindan, Fitchburg State University
Felicia Griffin-Fennell, Springfield Technical Community College
Andrew Grosovsky, University of Massachusetts Boston
William Heineman, Northern Essex Community College
Avril Hevey-Doucette, Salem State University
Margaret Hoey, Fitchburg State University
Lynn Hunter, Massachusetts Bay Community College
Leo Hwang, Greenfield Community College
Oliver Ibe, University of Massachusetts Lowell
Monica Joslin, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
Charlie Kaminski, Berkshire Community College
Steve King, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
Elizabeth Kinsman, Massachusetts Bay Community College
Raynold Lewis, Worcester State University
Patricia Marshall, Department of Higher Education
John McCarthy, University of Massachusetts Amherst
Susan Miller, Cape Cod Community College
Laura Rubin, North Shore Community College
Marietta Schwartz, University of Massachusetts Boston
Eileen Shea, Bristol Community College
Christina Swaidan, Westfield State University
Kathleen Sweeney, Middlesex Community College
Tracy Wallace, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
Deanna Yameen, Massasoit Community College