

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Academic Affairs

NO.: AAC 16-20, as
amended 01/19/16

COMMITTEE DATE: January 19, 2016

BOARD DATE: January 26, 2016

MASSTRANSFER PATHWAYS IMPLEMENTATION

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education is statutorily mandated 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 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 directs the Department to continue ongoing efforts to create a seamless system of transfer.

To that end, the Board hereby calls upon the Commissioner to (1) implement the MassTransfer Pathways initiative; and (2) report to the Board by Spring 2017 on progress towards implementation.

The Board thanks the Department and the Commonwealth’s institutions of public higher education for taking the initiative to develop a seamless system of transfer through a collaborative process.

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

Contact: Dr. Patricia A. Marshall, Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs
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” (Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 15A, Section 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 Board 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 Board in June 2008, which led to the implementation of the MassTransfer policy. MassTransfer replaced the Commonwealth Transfer Compact, Joint Admissions, and the Tuition Advantage Program 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 fronts. However, the drawback of the *MassTransfer* program is that it does not fully capture the transfer of foundational disciplinary courses for the major from two-year to four-year institutions¹. In effect, it only partially facilitates academic transfer pathways, as it does not guarantee that all credits completed under an associate’s program will necessarily count towards the major.

In recognition of the need to improve course-to-course transfer, a common course equivalency database was created to ease the process of transfer among Massachusetts public colleges and universities governed by the MassTransfer policy. It initially focused on equivalencies among the 15 community colleges. Shortly thereafter, the database was expanded to include equivalencies from the 15 community colleges to the seven comprehensive state universities. The University of Massachusetts began participating in the initiative later and as of January 2016, there are 9,000 courses in the database. Simultaneously, Department staff drafted a white paper, “Creating a Unified System of Transfer for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts” (Appendix A), that outlined the reasons to create academic transfer pathways and a proposed process, which was released in Spring 2014.

The MassTransfer Pathways initiative builds on the work of the common course equivalency project and MassTransfer Policy. The basic approach undertaken in creating MassTransfer Pathways among the public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth relies on three distinct components that build upon each other. These three steps, as defined in “Creating

¹ Goal Four from the Final Report from the Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group. Page 20. Retrieved from <http://www.mass.edu/bhe/lib/ctag/documents/CTAGReport.pdf>.

a Unified System of Transfer for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts” (Appendix A), consist of:

Step 1: Faculty from the community colleges, state university, and University of Massachusetts campuses identify the foundational courses for each discipline. Foundational courses are those offered among the community colleges, state university, and University of Massachusetts campuses that consist of the core coursework that is recommended for students to complete during their first two years of study in a given discipline. After the courses have been identified, faculty develop a list of essential core components that need to be covered in order for the course to be part of a statewide equivalency, therefore making them eligible for transfer across the Commonwealth amongst public higher education institutions.

Step 2: Transfer representatives and faculty work with DHE staff to build pathway maps that list the sequences of courses that make up the first 60 credits for native students including those courses in a particular major. These lists should include the foundational courses that arise from Step 1. Subsequently, the 60-credits are mapped back to the community colleges. The information gleaned from the first two steps of this process will allow DHE to construct a web-based portal for students to immediately track the academic pathways, by discipline, from the two-year to four-year institutions.

Step 3: The beginnings of a dialogue, within the discipline and across our public institutions, about the competencies and skills that students need as they progress through their first two years of study. This is clearly more long-term in nature but brings a depth and rigor to the discussions that go beyond the simple cataloguing of courses, creation of transfer pathways, and listing of credits.

In Fall 2014 Department staff began collaborating with the campuses in developing MassTransfer Pathways in six high-transfer disciplines: Biology, Chemistry, Economics, History, Political Science, and Psychology. In October 2014, faculty from across the state in these six disciplines met to identify foundational courses. In January 2015, Department staff presented before the Board of Higher Education and introduced the MassTransfer Pathways initiative. Staff shared with Board members the progress that had been made, as well as next steps.

Faculty then met again in Spring 2015 to determine course content (Steps 1 and 2). By agreeing on common course elements, statewide equivalencies were created for the foundational courses. Foundational courses for the six disciplines are listed below.

Biology

Biology I
Biology II
Chemistry I
Chemistry II
Pre-Calculus

Recommended Courses

Organic Chemistry I
Organic Chemistry II
Calculus I
Physics I
Physics II

Chemistry

Chemistry I
Chemistry II
Organic Chemistry I
Organic Chemistry II
Calculus I
Calculus II
Physics I
Physics II

Economics

Microeconomics
Macroeconomics

One of the Following:

Business Calculus
Statistics

History

US History I
US History II

One of the Two Sequences:

Western History Survey I
Western History Survey II
OR
World History Survey I
World History Survey II

Political ScienceThree of the Following:

American Government
Comparative Government
International Relations
State and Local Government

Psychology

General Psychology

One of the Following:

Research Methods
Statistics for Psychology

Four of the Following:

Abnormal Psychology
Adolescent Psychology
Child Psychology
Cognitive Psychology
Neuropsychology
Psychology of Personality

Social Psychology

After the creation of DHE statewide equivalencies and agreement on the foundational courses, DHE staff began developing the 60-credit maps that will be housed on a new MassTransfer Pathways website. A beta version of the website will be launched in early 2016 with the expectation that the full site will be launched in June 2016. The Spring semester will give campuses the opportunity to conduct comprehensive reviews of the site, check for accuracy, and provide feedback. In addition, Department staff began conversations around the development of shared learning outcomes (Step 3) in early Fall 2015.

In Fall 2015, the DHE began working on ten new disciplines: Business, Communication and Media Studies, Computer Science, Criminal Justice, Early Childhood Education, English, Liberal Arts, Mathematics, Sociology, and STEM Foundation (with an emphasis on the Natural and Physical Sciences). The 16 total disciplines will capture 70% of all transfer students, according to current data.

The DHE will implement the first set of six MassTransfer Pathways maps, in collaboration with the Community Colleges, State Universities, and the University of Massachusetts, by June 2016 and the second set of MassTransfer Pathways by June 2017.

The Commissioner will convene two advisory groups:

- The first group shall be MassTransfer Pathways discipline-specific faculty advisory committees that will review the foundational courses on an annual basis.
- The second group shall be an expanded MassTransfer Steering Committee that includes campus representatives that have been working on developing statewide transfer pathways, as well as building common course equivalencies. The Committee will continue to monitor national transfer trends, advise the Department on matters related to student transfer, and be charged with implementing the MassTransfer Pathways initiative.

The Department will also 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.

Department staff recognize that it is important to work with both faculty and transfer professionals in order to continue making progress on the development of MassTransfer Pathways, which promote college completion and support DHE efforts around the “Big Three” Completion Plan. The “Big Three” Completion Plan was developed by the DHE in recognition of the Massachusetts’ economy’s need for more college graduates. DHE has focused its efforts on three strategies that seek to increase the number of students graduating with degrees and certificates: Boost College Completion Rates, Close Achievement Gaps, Attract and Graduate More Students from Underserved Populations. The creation and implementation of MassTransfer Pathways will better prepare students who wish to transfer from two- to four-year institutions and increase alignment among the three segments of public higher education in Massachusetts.

Appendix A

Creating a Unified System of Transfer for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

The Impetus to Create a Unified System of Transfer

Massachusetts high school graduates are, by and large (two-thirds), enrolled in its public institutions of higher education. This represents a dramatic shift from thirty years ago when the majority of Massachusetts resident students were at private, independent colleges and universities. Moreover, over 50 percent of the total enrollment of students at Massachusetts public institutions of higher education is in our fifteen public community colleges. A good many of these community college students go on to transfer to a four-year institution. In fact, transfer students make up a large and growing fraction of new students enrolling in four-year public institutions. In 2013, transfer students made up 35.1% of the new student population at the UMass campuses and 34.8% at the State Universities. UMass Boston had more transfer students than native students (54.9%) and Worcester State University had 43% of its new student population enter as transfers. No doubt, facilitating transfer processes is important for both the sending and receiving institutions.

For many years, state legislatures, state higher education agencies, higher education institutions, students and parents have recognized the importance of student transfer from one institution to another. In 2012, the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) issued a report entitled *Transfer & Mobility: A National View of Pre-Degree Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions* (http://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/NSC_Signature_Report_2.pdf). Among other findings, the NSC study revealed that one third of all postsecondary students change their institutions at least once within five years before they earn their degrees.

While students transfer for a wide variety of reasons, the efficiency of our nation's transfer systems are important because they impact a number of crucial national priorities.

- *Cost of higher education:* Inefficient transfer systems contribute to the rising cost of higher education by requiring students to repeat courses for which they already have earned credit and to take more courses than are necessary for a degree. In 2013, the College Board reported that tuition and fees at public, two-year institutions rose an average of three percent a year over the past decade, while at public, four-year institutions the increase averaged four percent annually (<https://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/average-rates-growth-tuition-and-fees-over-time>). Current news reports abound with stories about the high and rising costs of a college education.
- *Rising student debt:* Associated with those rising costs of education is the rising debt of college students. In 2013 the Project on Student Debt, an initiative of The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS), reported that “Seven in 10 college seniors who graduated in 2012 had student loan debt, with an average of \$29,400 for those with loans. The national share of seniors graduating with loans rose in recent years, from 68 percent in 2008 to 71 percent in 2012, while their debt at graduation increased by an average of six percent per year (<http://projectonstudentdebt.org/files/pub/classof2012.pdf>).”
- *Time to graduation:* Requiring students to take more courses than they need not only adds to the cost of higher education and student debt, and also lengthens the time required for

students to complete their degrees. A 2012 report issued by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), entitled *Profile of 2007-08 First-Time Bachelor's Degree Recipients in 2009* (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013150.pdf>) revealed that while the median number of months for students to complete a bachelor's degree was 52, the average was 76 months, with 24 percent taking more than 72 months. For students, time beyond the traditional standard of 48 months means not only additional direct costs of tuition, fees and books, but increased expenses for room, board and transportation, as well as deferred opportunities for employment. For institutions, the additional time to degree completion means displacing new students when space and other resources limit enrollment.

- *Graduation rates:* While the federal government only began collecting college graduation rates in the mid-1990s, they have become a major issue of concern for many constituencies since then, especially among the nation's community colleges. According to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), and based on data from the NCES Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Graduation Rate Survey, the average six-year graduation rate of bachelor's degree students who began in 2003 was 55 percent, while the average three-year graduation rate of associate's degree students who began in 2006 was 29 percent (<http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/?level=nation&mode=graph&state=0&submeasure=2>). The graduation rate has become one measure of a college's success and a means of holding institutions accountable. Lengthening the time to degree completion reduces a college's graduation rate at the same time that raising the nation's graduation rates has become a national priority.

- *Workforce demands:* The knowledge-based economy requires a workforce with advanced training and schooling. A high school education is no longer sufficient if one wants to successfully compete for jobs that provide a rise in standards of living. At the same time, national trends point to a decline in the numbers of prospective traditional age college-going students over the next eight to ten years. Enrollment pressures are already building in the northeast. The competition for traditional age college-going students will only increase in the near term and enrollment driven institutions will be under significant pressure to maintain revenue and market share. Those institutions that are perceived as transfer student friendly will have a comparative advantage over others. The potential for a growing labor force skills gap is apparent in this environment and getting more students through the education pipeline prompts a greater degree of urgency.

All of these issues have led to a call to make the movement of students within and between public higher education sectors seamless. By developing academic transfer pathways which are clearly defined, it will increase credentialing that is necessary to meet the demands for a more highly educated citizenry and workforce.

Legislative Intent

The impetus to create a unified system of transfer has not always been fully embraced by campuses or systems of public institutions. After all, transfer articulation agreements reasonably fall within the area of curriculum and hence faculty and academic departments are fundamentally responsible for this element of the educational enterprise. Before an institution readily accepts academic course and credit from another institution, its faculty must have confidence that the content and pedagogy provide the student with a solid foundation to succeed in his/her studies. In the absence of direct faculty to faculty collaboration across academic institutions it is unreasonable to expect complete confidence that students are adequately trained at one institution in preparation for advanced work at another. It seems reasonable to expect, therefore, that conversations that promote alignment of the competencies gained in the first two years of study with more specialized courses in the major will serve as a solid basis for student success.

The slow pace of development of comprehensive systems of transfer across public institutions in many states has often prompted legislatures to mandate some or all components of a unified system of academic transfer. In Massachusetts there is considerable interest among legislators in creating such a unified system among our 28 undergraduate public institutions. This has resulted in a legislative mandate directing the Board of Higher Education 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 (Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9).” In addition, the FY13, FY 14, and FY15 budget included language supporting the current course equivalency initiative and states that the Commonwealth shall:

...support initiatives [that] promote the adoption of a standard core of course offering and numbering that are honored for common credit toward degrees and certificates across the commonwealth's community colleges, state universities and University of Massachusetts campuses...

In addition, Senate Bill 579 (currently under discussion), *An Act relative to student records coordination across public higher education institutions*, affirms the need to build and maintain a:

“...computer-based transfer and degree auditing system providing individual students with clear and consistent information on the student's progress toward fulfilling degree requirements in any undergraduate program at any public institution of higher education; provided that the system shall include course-to-course equivalencies across institutions enabling students access to information necessary for understanding how credits will transfer to another public institution of higher education; provided further, that the council shall coordinate the implementation of the system and shall ensure all public higher education institutions utilize the system for all undergraduate programs and course offerings...

The legislature has quite clearly stated its intent to promote a unified system of transfer and has called upon public higher education to move this initiative forward. There is an opportunity now to meet the legislative intent of creating a unified system of transfer built upon a foundation that allows collegial discussions across the various public higher education sectors in Massachusetts.

In anticipation of these concerns surrounding transfer, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE), with funding provided by the Massachusetts legislature, initiated in 2012 the Massachusetts Articulated System of Transfer (MAST). Initially the MAST project included the development of (1) a system-wide database using a common course numbering system which maps identified course and elective equivalencies among the public higher education institutions of the Commonwealth and (2) a common transfer policy for the community colleges of the state. In 2014, MAST has now embarked on a third component: assisting in the development of academic program pathways from Community Colleges to State Universities and the University of Massachusetts campuses.

Planning for the Creation of a Unified System of Academic Transfer

Vision Project data suggest that transfer students have higher graduation rates than native students on both the state university and UMass campuses. Nonetheless, community college students take longer to graduate than similar students who begin their academic careers at four-year institutions. These results mirror national trends and research suggests that this disparity is *not* due to differences in academic performance among these students.² Other explanations that have *not* been found to measurably result in these differences, despite the fact that they are sometimes cited as obstacles for community college students, include: the focus on vocational training at community colleges or declining levels of student aid over time. The one factor that overwhelmingly reduces the likelihood that a community college transfer student graduates at the same rate as a student that begins in a four-year institution is the loss of credits as a student transitions from a two to four-year institution. **In sum, the inability to transfer credits across two to four-year sectors is the primary impediment to the timely graduation of community college transfer students.** The more credits a student loses in this process, the less likely they are to graduate with a bachelor's degree.

Given the significant growth of community college enrollments over the last few years and the increased need for baccalaureate-educated citizenry in the knowledge-based economy, it is likely that the fraction of potential transfer students will grow. At the same time, it is apparent that the accumulation of credits at the two-year college level, without commensurate acceptance on the part of four-year institutions, is a detriment to college completion and success.

Massachusetts has made some progress in developing a unified system of academic transfer. The New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) compared Massachusetts with surrounding states as the chart below illustrates:³

² David B. Monaghan and Paul Attewell, (2014) "The Community College Route to the Bachelor's Degree," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. 20, 1-22.

³ Laura Hannenmann and Matthew Hazenbush, *Students On the Move: Supporting Student Transfer*. (Boston: New England Board of Higher Education), March 2014.

Course Credit Policies							
State	Transferable General Education Core	Transfer Pathways	Reverse Transfer	Common Course Numbering	System-wide Common Transfer Policy	System-wide Transcript	Inter-Institutional Student Exchange Policy
CT	X	X ²		X	X		
ME	X ²	X ²	X ²		X		
MA	X		X ¹	X ²	X ²		
NH		X ¹	X ^{1,2}				
RI		X	X ²				X
VT		X ¹				X	

Notes: 1 Resources and policies are administered at an institutional level.
2 Resources or policies currently in development.

The most significant development of transfer policies in the Commonwealth has been the creation of the *MassTransfer* program in 2009. In general, this program allows students at community colleges to transfer a total of 60 credits to a four-year public institution if they have received an Associate's Degree. Likewise, if a student completes the *MassTransfer* Block they will have satisfied the general education requirements at any public 4-year institution.⁴

The drawback of the *MassTransfer* program is that it does not fully capture the transfer of foundational disciplinary courses for the major from two-year to four-year institutions. In effect, it does not facilitate academic transfer pathways (as noted in the table above) and hence does not guarantee that all credits completed under an Associate's program will necessarily count towards a bachelor's degree in a specific field. There are also anecdotal stories about students taking the wrong course at a two-year campus for their major at a four-year campus, thinking that it will count towards the degree. It is also possible that a program of study at one state university will have different requirements than the same program at another state university. This makes it difficult for community college students to navigate our public higher education system, costing them more time and money as they accumulate excess numbers of credits. The current system of creating articulation agreements (of which we have over 2,500 different articulation agreements among our public institutions in Massachusetts) is inconsistent and confusing across the community colleges, state universities, and UMass campuses. Moreover, research has shown that "articulation policies do not appear to enhance bachelor's degree attainment in the public sector."⁵ **Fundamentally, this is a college completion issue and the MassTransfer program does not address the issue of transferring credits within a degree program from a system-wide perspective.**

Given the acceptance of current policies with respect to credit transfer for general education, it is time to focus on majors and programs. The goal of the Department of Higher Education is to facilitate this discussion in close collaboration with the campuses, as has been done in other states that have developed system-wide transfer programs. The essential mechanism for carrying out this work will be system-wide disciplinary groups, containing one representative of a discipline from each undergraduate public campus, who can work with colleagues from across the system to identify the courses and the content that should constitute essential lower-division

⁴ Students can also gain automatic admission and tuition waivers depending on their academic performance. Other specific provisions apply, see <http://www.mass.edu/masstransfer/Students/CompleteAssociate.asp> for more details.

⁵ Josipa Rothka and Bruce Keith, "Credits, Time, and Attainment: Articulation Policies and Success After Transfer," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, September 2008; vol. 30, 3; pp. 247.

work for purposes of preparation for transfer to a four-year institution within that discipline. Each of these disciplinary groups will be led by individuals with a background in that field.

For the first year the intent is to focus on six 'high transfer' disciplines: biology, chemistry, economics, history, political science, and psychology. The goal will be to establish baccalaureate degree requirements for the identified majors that will be linked to specific courses at each of the 15 community colleges. This will allow community college students to know what courses they need to take in order to successfully transfer 60 credits towards their degree at a four-year institution. The work will continue in additional fields in subsequent years until we have applied the new policy to as many majors and programs as is feasible.⁶ Our focus over the next several weeks will be on organizing disciplinary groups in the six key fields mentioned earlier so that we can convene these groups and begin the actual work in Fall 2014.

The basic approach undertaken here in creating academic transfer pathways among the public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth relies on three distinct components that build upon each other. These three components consist of:

- (1) After an initial meeting, a registry completed by each 4-year campus (state universities and UMass campuses) that lists the sequence of courses that make up the first 60 credits for native students including those courses in a particular major. The initial majors include biology, chemistry, economics, history, political science, and psychology.
- (2) A mapping of the courses that arise from component (1) to course equivalencies at the community college level. This will allow for a full discussion of the foundational courses in the disciplines that are offered amongst the three different sectors. At this point, it will become quite apparent where the gaps and inconsistencies in course equivalencies exist between our two- and four-year campuses. The information gleaned from the first two components of this exercise will allow DHE to construct a web-based portal for students to immediately track the academic pathways, by discipline, from the two-year to four-year institutions. Attached to the end of this document is a template for an inventory of first and second year courses to be completed by campuses as well as a degree program inventory.
- (3) The beginnings of a dialogue, within the discipline and across our public institutions, about the competencies and skills that students need as they progress through their first two years of study. This is clearly more long-term in nature but brings a depth and rigor to the discussions that go beyond the simple cataloguing of courses, creation of transfer pathways, and listing of credits.

A timeline for these three components of the construction of a unified system of transfer appears below:

⁶The overall effort will be staffed and coordinated by the Department of Higher Education and led by Senior Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs Carlos Santiago with the assistance of Dr. Paul Raverta, former President of Berkshire Community College, and Ms. Elena Quiroz, Academic Policy and Project Coordinator. Dr. Santiago and Dr. Raverta also plan to involve a transfer specialist from each campus to assure expert guidance for our efforts. The Massachusetts Articulated System of Transfer (MAST) will provide a foundation for this process.

Description	Date
Campus Disciplinary Experts and Transfer Specialists Identified	Summer 2014
Discipline Leaders (one per sector) Identified	Mid-September 2014
Meeting with Discipline Leaders	Week of September 29 th
Academic Transfer Pathways Fall Convening	October 17, 2014
Templates Completed by Four-Year Institutions	December 19, 2014
Analysis of Common Foundational Courses Completed by DHE Staff by:	January 23, 2015
MAST Group Maps to Two-Year Institutions Completed by:	March 2, 2015
Academic Transfer Pathways Spring Convening	Spring 2015
MAST Group Maps Vetted by Four-Year Institutions Completed by:	April 6, 2015
MAST Common Course Equivalencies Website Launched	June 2015
Finalize Foundational Courses by Discipline	Fall 2015
Prototype Web-Based Transfer System Launched	Late Fall 2015
Academic Transfer Pathways Fall Convening Initiate Shared Learning Outcomes Conversation	Spring 2016

MAST staff have been identifying equivalencies within general education (MassTransfer Block) courses among the 15 community colleges. Once identified by MAST staff and confirmed by campus representatives, the equivalencies are entered into a database designed by a DHE staff member. As this equivalency work is progressing, state universities and the University of Massachusetts campuses are identifying equivalent courses between the community colleges and these institutions.

Among the state universities, MAST staff began by identifying equivalents of courses transferred from the community colleges. Subsequently, they included equivalents of common introductory general education courses transferred among the universities and to the community colleges typically taken within the first two years of a baccalaureate program. The campuses of the University of Massachusetts focused initially on equivalents of all psychology and political science courses transferred from the community colleges and in alignment with this initiative, will now identify equivalencies for biology, chemistry, economics, and history courses. By the beginning of August 2014, nearly 6,000 courses in 36 different academic disciplines had been entered into the system.

For the 2014-2015 academic year, MAST staff plan to complete the identification of equivalent general education (MassTransfer Block) courses among the community colleges, continue the identification of equivalent first- and second-year courses among the state universities and the University of Massachusetts expand the identification of equivalent courses to the natural and physical sciences within the University of Massachusetts. Perhaps most significantly, MAST hopes to introduce the course equivalency database to the public in summer 2015.

When opened to the public, the system will enable students, faculty, advisors, and others to determine how courses transfer from one institution to another among all three segments of public higher education in Massachusetts and to search for equivalent courses across the state.

The system will provide a transparent, systematic and readily-accessible means to determine the transferability statewide of general education (MassTransfer Block) and other commonly transferred courses.

A process will also be developed for annually updating the database in order to maintain its accuracy—an activity planned for the 2014-15 academic year. While the development of the system and the initial entry of course equivalents have occupied MAST staff thus far, the system's value in the future depends on the currency of the data it contains. MAST staff will establish a process that allows campuses to submit updated course data to DHE with as little burden on campus staff as possible. Statewide compliance with the update process will be crucial to the system's continued accuracy and usefulness.

During the 2013-2014 academic year, community college representatives, with the assistance of MAST staff, drafted a Common Transfer policy that received the endorsement of the community colleges' chief academic officers (copy appears at the end of the document). Following that endorsement, the campuses began their own internal approval processes for the new policy. By the end of Summer 2014, eight campuses had approved the new policy, and the remaining seven campuses plan to approve the policy in the Fall. MAST staff will follow up with those remaining campuses during the 2014 Fall term.

While the Common Transfer Policy allows some flexibility for campuses in several areas, work on the Common Policy has generated discussion among the colleges that seems to be leading toward the adoption of more uniformity in these areas, as institutions learn more about the policies and practices of other institutions around the state. These results underscore the value of initiating statewide conversations on similar issues in the future.

Concluding Remarks

DHE's MAST project has achieved some progress in creating a systematic and student-centered transfer process among the Massachusetts public institutions of higher education, yet much work remains to create a system that best meets the needs of all constituencies. Two good examples of the type of work we are proposing can be found at TnTransferPathway.org for the University of Tennessee System and SUNY.edu for the State University of New York System.

The establishment of a system-wide transfer program is much needed in Massachusetts. Other state systems, including CUNY and Maryland, have moved far beyond bilateral agreements to create system-wide programs of course equivalences that assure the transfer of credits from any community college to any four-year institution in a wide array of majors and programs, with information about these policies readily available to students in on-line format. This is the kind of system that the legislature has asked us to develop and so many people are working hard to implement.

And, most important of all, there is ample evidence that the complexity of transferring within our public system is one of the barriers to achieving the higher rates of student success and college completion that is a shared goal for all parts of public higher education and a centerpiece of the Vision Project. It is time to take this work to the next level. The 2014-2015 academic year will see a continuation and expansion of the progress already attained, which will contribute to reducing costs, lowering debt, shortening the completion time and improving the graduation rates of students throughout the Commonwealth.

Common Transfer Policy Massachusetts Articulated System of Transfer

I. Preamble

The community colleges of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in order to ease and clarify the process of transferring earned credit from one college to another, whether among themselves or from other public or private institutions; to provide standards for the evaluation of alternative sources of credit; to reduce the time and cost of completing a college education; and to increase the opportunities for graduation of their students, establish this common transfer policy. This policy respects the academic standards, quality and integrity of each of the Massachusetts community colleges.

II. Introduction

In accepting undergraduate transfer credit from other institutions, the Massachusetts community colleges apply this policy to ensure that credit accepted reflects appropriate levels of academic quality and is applicable to students' programs. Each community college makes this policy publicly available to students and prospective students on their websites and other communications. This policy reduces unnecessary barriers to protect the colleges' academic quality and integrity.

This policy addresses issues of academic credit earned through coursework completed at one institution and transferred to another. It also addresses the related issue of credit earned through alternative sources of credit, such as examinations, professional courses, military training and other prior learning experiences.

III. General Conditions

- A. For credit to transfer, the courses must have been taken at an institution accredited by one of the six regional accreditation agencies in the United States or, when allowed by college practice, by a national accreditation agency recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). Consult your college about any special requirements for online courses.
- B. Credit earned at international institutions not accredited by one of the six regional United States accreditation agencies may transfer.
- C. Colleges require official transcripts from the institutions where credit was earned for credit to transfer.
- D. Students must be accepted by the institution and have declared their major programs of study for credit to be transferred.
- E. At minimum credit will be granted for courses that apply to students' current programs of study.
- F. Once credit is transferred it becomes part of students' permanent records.
- G. Only credit for college-level coursework will transfer.
- H. Credit for pre-college-level or developmental coursework does not transfer.
- I. Colleges may choose to use developmental coursework for student placement purposes.
- J. Grades do not transfer; only credit transfers. Therefore, transfer credit grades are not used in calculating grade or quality point averages. Consult your college for any exceptions.
- K. Transfer credit is designated on transcripts with an appropriate letter or symbol in the grade field.
- L. Credit will transfer as (1) the course equivalent at the receiving institution, if it exists, or (2) as an elective equivalent within a comparable department, if it exists. Some

colleges transfer credit with an appropriate transfer code and number, when neither the course equivalent, nor a comparable department, exists.

- M. Credits earned in a quarter-hour system will be converted to semester-hour equivalents.
- N. Audited coursework does not transfer.
- O. Credit will not be granted for duplicate coursework or for two courses that cover the same or similar content.

IV. Minimum Grades

- A. Most colleges require a minimum grade of C (2.00 on a 4.00 scale) or higher for courses and credits to transfer. Some colleges will accept grades of C- or higher for transfer.
- B. Grades of D, D+, C- and CD (1.00 to 1.99 on a 4.00 scale) may transfer if they are for courses that are part of the 34-credit MassTransfer Block and students have completed the Block with a cumulative grade or quality point average of 2.00 or higher.
- C. Grades higher than C (2.00) may be required for admission to certain programs, for use as pre-requisite courses and for application of credit to certain program requirements. The colleges will publish the higher standards and the programs to which these higher standards apply.
- D. Grades of Pass (P), Satisfactory (S) or similar grades will transfer only when official transcripts indicate that such grades are equivalent to a grade of C or higher.

V. Residency Requirement/Maximum Transfer Credit Allowed

Institutions require students to complete at least one quarter (25%) of the credits of the first associate degree at that institution in order to graduate (referred to as the residency requirement). Transfer of up to the remaining three-quarters of the credits will depend upon the associate degree program's requirements and elective options. Requirements for a second and subsequent degree vary depending on institutions' practices. The number of credits transferable toward a certificate program varies by college and certificate.

VI. Alternative Sources of Credit

- A. Credit will be granted for satisfactory scores on Advanced Placement (AP) examinations based on institutions' policies.
- B. Credit will be granted for satisfactory scores on College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) examinations based on institutions' policies.
- C. Official score reports from the College Board are required in order to receive credit for AP and CLEP.
- D. Credit will be granted for satisfactory scores on challenge or credit examinations based on institutions' policies.
- E. Credit may be granted for formal courses or examinations offered by various organizations, including businesses, unions, government and military based on the recommendations of the American Council on Education (ACE) as found in its *National Guide to College Credit for Workforce Training*, a resource of its College Credit Recommendation Service (CREDIT).
- F. Credit also may be granted for learning from experience at work, volunteering in the community, military service, job training, independent reading, open source courseware study, and hobbies based on the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) standards of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).
- G. Members of the Service members Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Consortium adhere to the Consortium's Academic Residency Requirements for service members at their institutions.

- H. Academic credits earned through the evaluation of military occupation, training, experience and coursework are transferable within the Massachusetts public higher education system in accordance with the Mass Transfer agreement.
- I. Credit granted by one institution from alternative sources other than that included by item H above may not transfer to another institution.

VII. Time Limits

- A. Credit will be transferred without time limits, unless otherwise specified in college catalogs for specific courses or programs.
- B. Certain programs, courses or admission standards may require courses to be taken within a specified time period based on institutions' policies. The colleges will publish the programs, courses or admission standards with specified time limits.

VIII. Student Appeals

- A. Institutions maintain and publish a process for students to appeal decisions made about transfer credit.
- B. Institutions designate and publish the contact information of an ombudsperson who ensures institutional compliance with transfer policies and procedures.

IX. Review and Amendment

- A. The community colleges will periodically review this policy and propose amendments with the guidance of the Department of Higher Education.
- B. This policy may be amended with the unanimous consent of the community colleges.

X. Contact

Interested parties with comments or questions may contact _____ of the Department of Higher Education at (617) ____-____ or _____@bhe.mass.edu.

XI. Adoption

This policy was adopted by unanimous consent of the Massachusetts community colleges on _____.

Endorsed by the Chief Academic Officers of the Massachusetts Community Colleges.

Massachusetts Public Higher Education Baccalaureate Degree Program Inventory

Project Goal:

1. Document up-to-date, first and second year level baccalaureate degree requirements for specified academic disciplines and report them in a comparable format across all University of Massachusetts campuses and State Universities. The inventory will be used to further the work of faculty and transfer counselors engaged in a system-wide analysis of program level-student learning outcomes and the curricular alignment of major (foundational) courses.
2. Maximize the number and percentage of Massachusetts Community College credits earned that apply to specified Massachusetts public baccalaureate degree programs.

Inventory Process

The documentation of University of Massachusetts/State University baccalaureate degree program requirements for the selected majors will be accomplished through a two stage process. The first stage will focus on major (foundational) degree requirements, and all additional institutional degree requirements will be documented in stage two.

Stage 1: Document Major (Foundational) Requirements by October 3, 2014.

Step 1: Meet with MAST project staff to discuss the project, your majors, degree requirements and MassTransfer as it is applied at your institution for community college students who have graduated before transfer and those who transfer prior to graduation.

Step 2: Document fall 2014 biology, chemistry, economics, history, political science, and psychology baccalaureate degree major (foundational) requirements that can be fulfilled with first and second year level courses being sure to include all of the requested information.

- Whenever a specific course is required, document the course number, title and credits.
- If students may choose one of a small group of courses to fulfill a requirement, document the specific course options. Please be sure to provide their course numbers, titles and credits.

Data may be submitted electronically in PDF, Word, Excel or text formats, in print, or by providing links to online resources. You may choose to fulfill this request by reviewing, and updating as necessary, the draft list of your major (foundational) requirements compiled by MAST staff or by providing existing print documents or links to online resources that contain all of the necessary information. Materials may be submitted by email to praverta@bhe.mass.edu or by mail to:

Dr. Paul Raverta
Department of Higher Education
Room 1401
One Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108

Stage 2: Document all additional institutional first and second year course baccalaureate degree requirements by the end of the fall semester. Note any course(s) required, or recommended, by the specified major to fulfill a specific distribution requirement and be sure to include the number of credits required. Please also provide information about how to access a list of courses that satisfy each institutional distribution requirement

- If a requirement is fulfilled by a Mass Transfer Block course; document the related MassTransfer subject area using the following codes:

A = English Composition/Writing

B = Behavioral or Social Sciences

C = Humanities and Fine Arts

D = Mathematics/Quantitative Reasoning

E = Natural or Physical Science

DHE or MAST Project staff will translate the degree requirements that are provided into a consistent format that will map the individual inventories from the University of Massachusetts/State University baccalaureate program to equivalent courses at each of the 15 community colleges. This will support the student learning outcome and enhance curricular alignment work of faculty and staff from across Massachusetts Public Higher Education. Each institution will have an opportunity to review their requirements as translated for accuracy.