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A REPORT FROM THE COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS

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Washington Public Baccalaureate Summary: REVERSE TRANSFER



WASHINGTON STATE
Council of
Presidents

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The Council of Presidents (COP) is an association of Washington’s six public baccalaureate degree granting college and universities. Located in Olympia, Washington, COP strives to be a common voice for the public baccalaureate sector and the most respected and trusted resource for decision makers on issues affecting public higher education. COP serves as the coordinating role for a number of initiatives and activities common to the public baccalaureate institutions, fostering coordination and collaboration among the public baccalaureates as well as with other educational partners, both in Washington and nationally.

This report is also available online at councilofpresidents.org.

Introduction

Demand for workers with postsecondary credentials is higher than it has ever been. An analysis by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce found that nationally, 55% of jobs that offer a salary of at least \$35,000 are filled by workers with a bachelor's or advanced degree.¹

The increasing call for workers with postsecondary credentials is even more pronounced in Washington. According to analysis² of job opportunities and related skills requirements completed by the Washington Roundtable, it is projected there will be 740,000 job openings in Washington by 2021. Sixty-three percent of career job openings will be filled by workers with bachelor's degrees or higher. This is perhaps even more critical as the impacts of COVID-19 are realized and the demonstrated correlations between education attainment and job security are underscored.

There are many ways to earn a bachelor's degree. Some students choose to enroll at one institution and stay there until they earn their bachelor's degree. Others start their journey at a community or technical college (CTC) before transferring to a four-year college or university that awards a bachelor's degree. In Washington, the goal is for both paths to equally lead to student success.

Washington has a strong transfer foundation upon which to build. Overall, Washington's public four-year college and universities are strongly committed to degree completion. Nationally, the sector ranks 5th in the nation for the best four-year graduation rates and 2nd in the nation for the proportion of community and technical college students who finish bachelor's degrees after transferring to a four-year college or university.³

More than 80% of Washington community and technical college transfer students attend a Washington public four-year institution. Nearly 40% of the graduates of the Class of 2016 from Washington's public four-year institutions began their education at a community or technical college.⁴ In 2018-19, 37% of students enrolled at a Washington community or technical college intended to transfer to a baccalaureate institution.⁵

Washington's success is grounded in a long history of effective collaboration. The [Joint Transfer Council](#) (JTC) and the [Intercollege Relations Commission](#) (ICRC) work closely with the Council of Presidents (COP), Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), and Independent Colleges of Washington (ICW) to identify and respond to emerging issues, as well as to find opportunities to reduce barriers for all transfer students.

Washington's transfer partners work together to create and maintain policies that support seamless credit transfer between Washington's colleges and universities. These policies are a critical part in meeting the state's [postsecondary educational attainment goals](#). Effective transfer policy helps community and technical college students access affordable, high-quality bachelor's degrees, while providing opportunities to earn valuable credentials along the way.

In recent years, Washington's public four-year college and universities - in partnership with the state's community and technical colleges - collaborated to develop reverse transfer policies and processes to provide another opportunity for timely degree completion.

1. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. [Good Jobs that Pay without a BA: A State-by-State Analysis](#).

2. Washington Roundtable. [Career Profiles](#).

3. National Student Clearinghouse. [Tracking Transfer: Measures of Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students to Complete Bachelor's Degrees. 2017](#)

4. Council of Presidents. [Washington's Public Four-year College and Universities: National Leaders in Transfer](#).

5. SBCTC Enrollment Data [Dashboard](#)

Reverse Transfer in Washington

Reverse transfer is a process for awarding associate degrees to students who transferred to an institution to complete a bachelor's degree before completing requirements for an associate degree at a community or technical college.⁶

The 2016 Legislature passed [Senate Bill 6354](#) which required each public baccalaureate institution to work with the SBCTC to develop plans for facilitating the reverse transfer of academic credits by December 31, 2017.

By December 2017, all Washington public four-year college and universities developed and implemented plans for reverse transfer with Washington community and technical colleges. Each plan⁷ includes a policy allowing eligible students the opportunity to transfer credits back to a community or technical college to use towards completion of a two-year academic transfer degree and procedures for notifying eligible students of their eligibility for participation in the reverse transfer program.

Eligible students are defined as all transfer students who enroll as degree-seeking students at a four-year institution of higher education before attaining an associate degree, but after completing 60 quarter credits or more of transferable coursework at a Washington community or technical college.

Washington's public baccalaureate institutions initiate the process by notifying current students that they are eligible for a reverse transfer/articulation degree. Students must then contact the community or technical college they most recently attended or the college where they earned the most credits. Students then request their transcripts from their current university to be sent to the identified community or technical college. The community or technical college then confirms the student earned an associate degree and sends a transcript to the current university with associate degree awarded.

Washington's Public Four-Year College and Universities Reverse Transfer Policies

In Washington, reverse transfer is guided by the following principles:

- ◆ Encourage transfer students to complete an associate degree prior to transferring to a Washington public four-year college or university.
- ◆ Promote the idea that advising eligible students in the reverse transfer process is a shared responsibility among students and Washington's public four-year institutions and community and technical colleges.
- ◆ Recognize there are benefits to students and institutions if students who transfer to a four-year public institution without an associate degree can use appropriate four-year institution courses to complete the requirements for an associate degree and are awarded the associate degree by a Washington community or technical college.
- ◆ Acknowledge that reverse transfer policies and processes should be as simple and transparent as possible and consistent with limitations on resources (e.g., staff, technology, etc.).
- ◆ Some students will choose not to participate. The choice to participate must be made by each eligible student.

6. Education Commission of the States. *Reverse Transfer: The path less traveled*. May 2015

7. *Reverse Transfer Plans*

Below is a summary of institutional reverse transfer policies for each of COP's six member institutions.⁸

Central Washington University

Washington community and technical college students who transfer to Central Washington University (CWU) without an associate degree may be eligible to participate in the University's *Reverse Transfer Agreement* to earn an associate degree from a Washington community or technical college.

Under the University's *Reverse Transfer Agreement* eligible students are students from a Washington state community or technical college who:

- ◆ Enroll as degree-seeking students at CWU prior to attaining an associate degree; and
- ◆ Prior to enrolling at the University completed a minimum of 60 quarter credits or more of transferable coursework including 30 or more credits completed at one or more Washington public community or technical college.

The University Registrar identifies all eligible students after the end of the first quarter they are enrolled at the University. Each student is electronically notified of their eligibility to participate in reverse transfer. The notifications include details regarding the process for reverse transfer and community and technical college phone and email information.

The University works with eligible students to inform students of the process to request an official CWU transcript to be sent to the community college that is identified to award the associate degree. Students who earn a Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA) Associate degree from a Washington community or technical college after enrolling at CWU is required to submit an official transcript documenting the awarding of the DTA to the Office of Admissions to receive the benefits of completion of the University's Common Requirements (UCORE) (e.g., general education requirements).

The community or technical college is responsible for working with the students once the student has initiated the process to evaluate coursework and determine how the University's courses, discipline areas and credits will apply towards completion of the associate degree. The community or technical college determines if an associate degree is awarded or not.

Eastern Washington University

Washington community and technical college students who transferred to Eastern Washington University (EWU) without an associate degree may be eligible to participate in reverse transfer to earn an associate degree from a Washington community or technical college.

Eligible students are students from a Washington state community or technical college who:

- ◆ Enroll as degree-seeking students at EWU prior to attaining an associate degree; and
- ◆ Prior to enrolling at the University completed a minimum of 60 quarter credits or more of transferable coursework including 30 or more credits completed at one or more Washington public community or technical college.

8. Where available the number of students who inquired about or completed the reverse transfer policy is included.

When an eligible student applies to the University the students is informed about reverse transfer. The University also communicates reverse transfer through the University Catalog and through advising with students. If an eligible student indicates their willingness to participate the student must complete a consent form which specifies what records may be disclosed for what purposes and to whom to be eligible for reverse transfer.

The Office of Records and Registration identifies all eligible students once each term. The list of eligible students who may qualify for reverse transfer is based on a cohort code. The University uploads the list of identified eligible students to the National Student Clearinghouse.

Washington community and technical colleges then may download the data. The community or technical college is responsible for working with the students once the student has initiated the process to confirm how the University courses, discipline areas and credits will apply towards completion of the associate degree.

The Evergreen State College

Washington community and technical college students who transferred to The Evergreen State College (Evergreen) without an associate degree may be eligible to participate in reverse transfer to earn an associate degree from a Washington community or technical college.

Eligible students are students from a Washington state community or technical college who:

- ◆ Enroll as degree-seeking students at Evergreen prior to attaining an associate degree; and
- ◆ Prior to enrolling at the College completed a minimum of 60 quarter credits or more of transferable coursework including 30 or more credits completed at one or more Washington public community or technical college.

The College identifies all eligible students after the end of the first quarter they are enrolled at the College. Each student is electronically notified of their eligibility to participate in reverse transfer. The notifications include details regarding the process for reverse transfer and community and technical college phone and email information. The College works with eligible students to inform students of the process to request an official transcript from Evergreen be sent to the community college that is identified to award the associate degree.

The SBCTC is the first point of contact for students interested in pursuing reverse transfer, and is responsible for identifying the appropriate community college and contact. In addition, the community or technical college is responsible for working with the students once the student has initiated the process to evaluate coursework and determine how the College's curriculum, discipline areas and credits will apply towards completion of the associate degree. The community or technical college determines if an associate degree is awarded or not.

Transfer students who are or have earned a professional technical associate degree from a Washington community or technical college may pursue The Evergreen's [Upside-Down Transfer Option](#). Transfer students must complete all eligibility requirements, including the completion of a technical associate degree, prior to the first date of enrollment at the College. Students participating reverse transfer to complete a professional technical associate degree are not eligible to participate in, or receive the benefits of, the Upside-Down Transfer Option.

University of Washington

Washington community and technical college students who transfer to the University of Washington (UW) without an associate degree may be eligible to participate in reverse transfer to earn an associate degree from a Washington community or technical college.

Eligible students are students from a Washington state community or technical college who:

- ◆ Enroll as degree-seeking students at the UW prior to attaining an associate degree,
- ◆ Prior to enrolling at the University completed a minimum of 60 quarter credits or more of transferable coursework from a Washington community or technical college,
- ◆ Completed a minimum of 30 or more at the University and
- ◆ Did not enter the University as first year “freshmen” (after high school graduation) with college credit earned at a Washington community or technical college prior to high school graduation.

The University identifies all eligible students after the end of each quarter they are enrolled at the University. Each student is notified of their eligibility to participate in reverse transfer. The University works with eligible students regarding the process to request a complimentary official transcript from the UW to be sent to their former Washington community or technical college.

The community or technical college is responsible for working with the students once the student has initiated the process to evaluate coursework and determine how the University’s courses, discipline areas and credits will apply towards completion of the associate degree. The community or technical college determines if an associate degree is awarded or not.

Washington State University

Washington community and technical college students who transferred to Washington State University (WSU) without an associate degree may be eligible to participate in reverse transfer to earn an associate degree from a Washington community or technical college.

Eligible students are students from a Washington state community or technical college who:

- ◆ Enroll as degree-seeking students at WSU prior to attaining an associate degree; and
- ◆ Prior to enrolling at the University completed a minimum of 20 semester (30 quarter) credits or more of transferable coursework from a single Washington community or technical college including 30 or more credits completed at a Washington public community or technical college.

The University identifies all eligible students after the end of the first semester they are enrolled at the University. Eligible students are identified through the myWSU student information system with an indicator/notification. The notification is also accessible to University advisors and reinforces University messaging to eligible regarding reverse transfer and the availability of assistance for students.

If an eligible student indicates their willingness to participate the student must complete a FERPA consent form to allow the University to send the student’s transcript data through the National Student Clearinghouse.

Washington community and technical colleges then may download the data. The community or technical college is responsible for working with the students once the student has initiated the process to confirm how the University courses and discipline areas and credits will apply towards completion of the associate degree. The University provides eligible students with SBCTC reverse transfer contact information to inform students how to follow up on any next steps to earn an associate degree.

Students who earn a Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA) Associate degree from a Washington community or technical college after enrolling at WSU can send the official community or technical college transcript to the University for potential UCORE fulfillment (e.g. – general education requirements).

Western Washington University

Washington community and technical college students who transfer to Western Washington University (WWU) without an associate degree may be eligible to participate in reverse transfer to earn an associate degree from a Washington community or technical college.

Eligible students are students from a Washington state community or technical college who:

- ◆ Enroll as degree-seeking students at WWU prior to attaining an associate degree,
- ◆ Prior to enrolling at the University completed a minimum of 60 quarter credits or more of transferable coursework including a minimum of 20 or more quarter credits completed at a single Washington public community or technical college.

The University's Academic Advising Center conducts quarterly outreach to incoming eligible students. Each term following peak enrollment, the Academic Advising Center emails eligible students a letter informing them of their option to complete WWU's General University Requirements (GURs) (i.e., general education requirements) or to complete their DTA associate degree through the reverse transfer option. Students are encouraged to connect with advising to discuss which option better aligns with their academic interests, remaining GURs, and progress towards their transfer degree.

An approved associate degree is generally earned prior to initial enrollment at WWU as a student transferring in with credit. If any student wishes to complete such a degree to have it satisfy the University's GUR while enrolled at WWU, the degree must be earned by the time the student 1) has completed 45 credits at WWU, or 2) one calendar year has passed from initial enrollment, whichever comes later. A student seeking an exception to the 45-credit limit or one calendar year timeline must petition the Registrar's Office for approval.

The community or technical college is responsible for working with the students once the student has initiated the process to evaluate coursework and determine how the University's courses, discipline areas and credits will apply towards completion of the associate degree. The community or technical college determines if an associate degree is awarded or not.

Washington's Public Four-Year College and Universities Reverse Transfer Participation

[Senate Bill 6354](#) required each public baccalaureate institution to work with the SBCTC to develop plans for facilitating the reverse transfer of academic credits by December 31, 2017. The plans to facilitate reverse transfer of academic credits were finalized and effective January 1, 2018.

In the 2018-19 academic year, across the sector on average institutions identified 900 or fewer students per institution with over 60 transferable credits and without an associate degree. In general, across the sector this represented approximately 25% of the total students with transfer credit at each institution.

Institution	Eligible Students	Percentage of Transfer Students, Fall 2018
CWU	720	26%
EWU	540	82%
Evergreen	See Note ⁹	See Note ⁹
UW	874	25%
WSU	See Note ¹⁰	See Note ¹⁰
WWU	617	23%

Current data is limited regarding the number of eligible students who completed the reverse transfer process. The data to date shows students in the low single digits.

Reverse Transfer: Benefits, Challenges and Recommendations

In recent years, Washington’s public four-year college and universities, in partnership with the state’s community and technical colleges engaged to develop reverse transfer policies and processes. The intent was and is to provide another opportunity for degree completion by further building on Washington’s strong transfer foundation.

Even though a student is now seeking a bachelor’s degree, there are several advantages to the student who applies for the associate degree through reverse transfer. The associate degree is a marketable credential in the workplace, giving students who possess the associate degree an edge when applying for employment. Earning the associate degree shows prospective employers a certain level of responsibility, focus, and persistence which is required to attain the degree and is valuable in the workplace environment. The associate degree is also often a positive incentive aiding the student in completing the work required to attain a bachelor’s degree and leads to higher persistence and graduation rates in the four-year sector. Finally, the opportunity to reach out to students who may benefit from reverse transfer provides the ability for other critical advising conversations with students including major and minor declarations and course planning.

There are also challenges with reverse transfer. Students lack awareness of reverse transfer and the benefits associated with this process. Access to resources to advise and support students before and during the eligibility process for reverse transfer and connecting to the appropriate individuals at an institution and clear communications about processes remain a challenge. Finally, student data collection throughout the reverse transfer process is complex.

Washington’s public four-year college and universities believe many of the identified challenges may be addressed through improved processes and communications at the institutional and sector levels. This work should be institutionally led and recognize the diverse missions and policies of Washington’s public baccalaureate and community and technical colleges.

9. Evergreen transfers credit from Washington community and technical colleges as a block of credits rather than by individual course. This challenges the College to ensure reverse transfer credits are accurately transcribed and not duplicative credits. The College is engaged in developing and implementing data collection policies to inform future practices

10. Data for WSU was not available at the time of this summary.

Improved, Student-Centered Communications

Student awareness of reverse transfer and benefits remains an ongoing challenge. Both Washington's public baccalaureate and community and technical colleges should continue to engage and improve current marketing and communications, including through the exploration of joint marketing and advertising efforts.

Communications should be student-centered with clear and concise language and include a range of modalities (e.g., texts, emails, letters, videos, etc.). Terminology should be consistent and shared across institutions and sectors to convey definitions and intentions more easily to students. An equity lens should also be utilized to ensure that historically underrepresented students are made aware of this process. Contact information at both the baccalaureate and community and technical colleges should be provided and regularly updated for reverse transfer.

Advising

Institutional resources at the baccalaureate and community and technical colleges for advising and other critical support services before and during the eligibility process for reverse transfer remains a challenge. Advising is critical to address how students learn about reverse transfer prior to transferring to a four-year college or university and are prepared to register for first quarter coursework.

As the first point of contact with transfer students, it is critical that institutions discuss reverse transfer with students. What are the benefits, what is the process, how do they align courses needed to complete an associate degree and how may courses count towards both an associate degree and the bachelor's degree and align with a student's intended major. Finally, students must understand through the advising process that they can pursue their bachelor's degree and earn an associate degree through reverse transfer at the same time.

Streamline Process for Reverse Transfer

The process to complete reverse transfer requires several steps. To earn a reverse transfer/articulation degree, Washington's public baccalaureate institutions notify current students that they are eligible for a reverse transfer/articulation degree. Students must then contact the community or technical college they most recently attended or the college where they earned the most credits. Students then request their transcripts from their current university to be sent to the identified community or technical college. The community or technical college then confirms the student earned an associate degree and sends a transcript to the current university with the associate degree awarded.

Key to successful reverse transfer is the recognition that the awarding of an associate degree is the responsibility of the community and technical college. A community or technical college must review the baccalaureate institution's official transcript and determine whether students are eligible for their associate degrees. How this process can be automated within existing data collection and student systems should be explored. Recognizing the complexity of navigating transcripts between a baccalaureate institution and a community and technical college and how and who to reconnect at a community or technical college may be viewed as barriers by eligible students. Washington's community and technical colleges and public baccalaureate institutions should collaborate to review the current process and identify potential ways to make it easier for students to navigate.

Improve Reverse Transfer Data Collection

At this time, data is limited regarding the impact of reverse transfer in Washington. The multiple step process to successfully complete reverse transfer requires engagement and communication across multiple institutions and policies. Some institutions are engaged with the National Student Clearinghouse to improve data collection while other institutions are implementing data collection practices at the institutional level.

Recognizing the importance of understanding student engagement in reverse transfer and the complexity of the reverse transfer process, Washington's community and technical colleges and public baccalaureate institutions should collaborate to identify how to improve data collection.

Conclusion

The benefits of reverse transfer are critical to increase the degree completion rates in Washington and the number of workers with the necessary postsecondary credentials to fill career job openings now and in the future. The opportunity to continue this work in partnership is a continual focus for the Council of Presidents along with our member institutions. We believe continuing to collaborate and partner across institutions and sectors will allow Washington to address current challenges and increase reverse transfer statewide.