

DRAFT

Transfer Degree Pathways for Baccalaureate Completion

Draft 3, January 2015

This plan is submitted to the MnSCU Board of Trustees in accordance with 2014 Session Laws H.F. 3172, Chapter 312, Sec. 12, and its mandate to the board to report on a plan to implement multi-campus articulation agreements that lead to baccalaureate degree completion. The plan was developed by the Academic Planning and Collaboration implementation team associated with the system's Charting the Future strategic planning efforts. The document discusses process, specific elements of the plan, and recommendations on how to make these transfer pathways a highly functional part of student success in Minnesota.

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Introduction and Charge

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) is a system of community and technical colleges and comprehensive universities deeply connected to their communities. They serve students, employers, and communities across Minnesota and beyond. The system came into being as a result of the 1991 Minnesota Legislature's decision to establish a new higher education board by 1995. The legislature regarded transfer as a core purpose of the newly merged postsecondary system. Transferability was one of the seven powers and responsibilities that the law gave the board, stating simply and directly:

The board shall place a high priority on ensuring the transferability of credit among the institutions it governs.

*- Minnesota Laws (1991) Chapter 356,
Article 9, Sect. 5, Subd. 6*

Even as the merger was being implemented, major initiatives were shaping the foundation of transfer today. In 1992, the four public higher education systems in Minnesota (the community colleges, technical colleges, the state universities and the University of Minnesota) published the result of their work over the prior two years to standardize procedures for transfer.

Participants in the Development of the Plan

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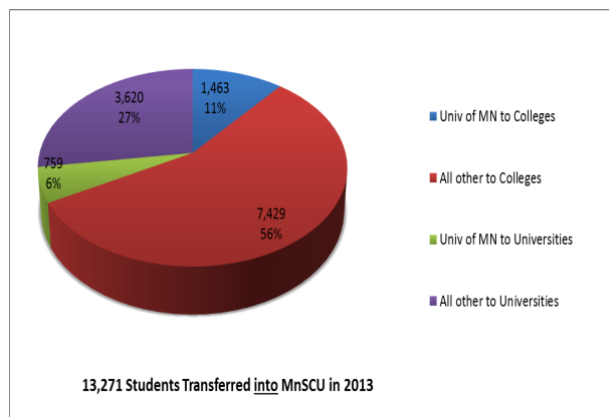
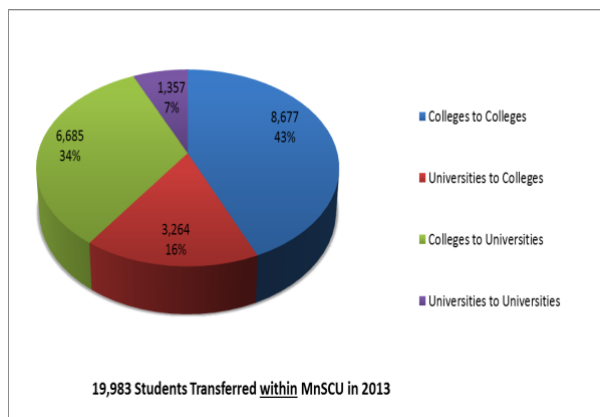
They also recommended the creation of a single Minnesota Transfer Curriculum, and in 1994 that curriculum agreement was finalized.

Those agreements and the creation of the MnSCU system twenty years ago put Minnesota at the forefront of the nation in defining a common, yet flexible, approach to the general education curriculum and providing smooth pathways for transfer. In 2007, the legislature and MnSCU took further steps to protect students’ resource investments by ensuring that students could complete associate and bachelor’s degrees within 60- and 120-credit limits. Then in 2010, the legislature approved MnSCU’s Smart Transfer Plan, standardizing transfer practices and systems and providing students with more information and resources for planning transfer.

In 2014, more than 35,000 students transferred within and into the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, and MnSCU’s carefully designed mechanisms for transfer are continually being updated to respond to the complex needs of students who often attend three or more institutions as they complete degrees. In reviewing those transfer mechanisms, the 2014 Legislature focused on the costs, in excess credits and time, whenever transfer is inefficient for students who transfer to the state universities. The legislature required that the system report in March 2015 on a plan to implement multi-campus articulation agreements that permit students who transfer with associate degrees to complete a bachelor’s degree with only 60 additional credits. This report describes the system’s plan to join several other states in creating guaranteed pathways for baccalaureate completion.

Limitations

The plan for these degree pathways, it should be noted, will serve one segment of MnSCU students who transfer: those who transfer with associate degrees and meet defined academic requirements. In 2013, students who transfer from the system’s two-year colleges to state universities represented about one-third, or 34%, of all within-MnSCU transfer. They made up only about 19% of all transfer students, because 40% of those who transfer into MnSCU institutions come from outside the system. MnSCU students who transfer from one of its two-year colleges to another make up about 43% of within-MnSCU transfer (26% of all transfer). The remaining 23% of within-MnSCU transfer is students transferring from state universities to state universities (7% of internal-to-MnSCU transfer; 4% of all transfer), and from state universities to two-year colleges (16% of within-MnSCU transfer; 10% of all transfer).



Nationally, higher education is facing serious challenges: funding shifts that threaten quality, access and affordability; increasing competition that affects enrollments; population shifts to the metropolitan areas; disruption of customized training and continuing education; and threats to higher education systems' authority to govern. As a system, MnSCU is facing the same challenges and yet remains committed to providing students an extraordinary education and the highest-value, most affordable options. Transferability of courses is a key element in that value proposition.

The Charting the Future Team Charge

The legislature's charge assigned the task of developing the multi-campus articulation implementation report to the appropriate Charting the Future (CTF) strategic planning team. Those teams came into being as a result of a planning effort launched in late 2012, when Chancellor Steven Rosenstone charged three workgroups: *Education of the Future*, *Workforce of the Future* and *System of the Future*, comprising 46 students, faculty, staff, presidents and trustees, to recommend ways for our colleges and universities to best contribute to Minnesota's prosperity in an ever-changing economic, technological, and demographic environment. In this context of opportunity, the three MnSCU work groups recommended the appointment of eight campus-led Charting the Future (CTF) implementation teams. These teams were designed to include students, faculty, and staff from across our colleges and universities.

- Four of the teams were launched in spring 2014: (1) Student Success, (2) Diversity, (3) Comprehensive Workplace Solutions and (4) System Incentives and Rewards.
- The other four teams launched in fall 2014: (5) Academic Planning and Collaboration, (6) Competency Certification and Credit for Prior Learning, (7) Education Technology, and (8) Information Technology Systems Design.

The charge to the Academic Planning and Collaboration implementation team is to recommend the strategies and initiatives that the system should implement to realize the Charting the Future recommendation to:

“Develop a collaborative and coordinated academic planning process that advances affordability, transferability and access to our programs and services across the state.”

Specifically, the Academic Planning and Collaboration implementation team is expected to:

1. Design and recommend a set of initiatives linked to each of its recommended strategies. The following initial list of strategies was developed by the original Charting the Future working group as a starting point, but teams are able to amend, add, and omit strategies as necessary.
 - a. Develop a comprehensive academic planning process that aligns our course and program offerings and support services to student demand as well as to regional and state workforce needs.

- b. Advance student success by expanding access to our academic programs and courses through flexible scheduling and course delivery models, as well as deeper collaboration among our colleges and universities.
 - c. Integrate and coordinate our facilities and technology planning to enhance students' educational experience.
 - d. Increase attention to professional development and engage our faculty in ongoing disciplinary and interdisciplinary collaborations to strengthen the transferability and quality of program offerings.
 - e. Accelerate development of partnerships with secondary schools to provide opportunities for college-ready students to take college-level courses tuition free while in high school, making higher education more affordable.
2. Provide leadership, coordination, and oversight of the implementation of these initiatives by colleges, universities and the system office.

The Charge from the Minnesota Legislature

In addition to the original charge to the Academic Planning and Collaboration team, the legislative mandate is found in the text box indicating the work assigned by the 2014 legislature for one of the CTF implementation teams. Unique among the other implementation teams, Academic Planning and Collaboration was given this specific assignment in addition to its Charting the Future work.

[2014 Session Laws H.F. 3172, Chapter 312, Sec. 12](#)

The Board of Trustees of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities shall develop a plan to implement multi-campus articulation agreements that lead to baccalaureate degree completion upon earning the number of credits required for the degree minus 60 credits at a system university after transfer to the system university by a student with an associate in arts degree, associate of science degree, or an associate of fine arts (AFA) degree from a system college. The board shall assign the task of developing the plan to the appropriate committee formed under the board's "Charting the Future" initiative. The board shall report on this plan to the legislative committees with primary jurisdiction over higher education finance and policy by March 15, 2015.

The Schedule of the Team

Using the legislative charge as a base, the implementation team designed a schedule for the production of an updated plan for transfer. The schedule called for creating at least two preliminary drafts, followed by distribution for comment and feedback from all relevant constituent groups, offering a series of consultations, and presenting to the Charting the Future Steering Committee in the first week of February, 2015.

The Work of the Team

The work of the team on the legislative plan items began in the fall of 2014 and will continue through spring semester 2015. The majority of the team’s work was done face-to-face, but the option to connect to the group remotely was consistently provided. This model of meeting allowed for dynamic interpersonal discussion, while also creating opportunities for several out-of-state subject matter experts to provide direct feedback to the team. Additionally, the structure allowed for questions and deeper conversations regarding the potential pros, cons, benefits and challenges of implementation of a variety of different models.

The team started by compiling research and engaging in a literature review, then transitioned into examining multiple state systems with complex transfer systems. It was determined that the current legislation addresses a fraction of the total transfer picture. Quickly it became evident that there is great complexity and the variability in regards to how a student could potentially move between multiple institutions within the MnSCU system. While this report addresses the legislation and outlines a plan for transfer degree pathways for Baccalaureate completion, the APC Team anticipates there are more components that will necessitate further exploration and engagement as their work continues.

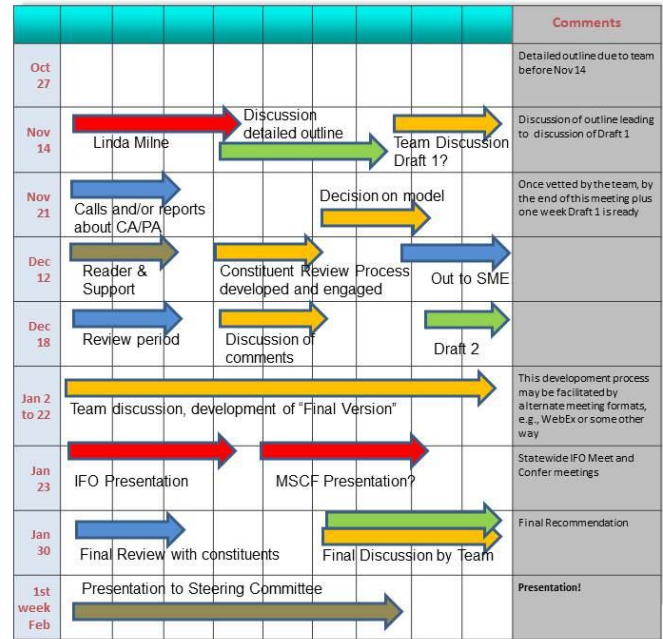
Common themes that were found in the team’s research on effective practices were the development of specific “transfer degrees”; clear and concise communication (websites, degree guides) so that students can understand how to plan for transfer; well-documented pathways through major programs to graduation; and strong advising as central to the success of the pathways. The team identified states that had appeared to have most effectively both designed and implemented complex transfer plans.

Elements of the Implementation Plan

Under this plan the two-year and four-year institution faculty will come together to create the transfer degrees. By facilitating communication and collaboration among faculty at different institutions, the associate degree plans and the subsequent ability of those degrees to transfer and ultimately lead to university completion will be greatly enhanced. This implementation plan offers the opportunity to streamline degree transfer in order to increase the potential for it to be an optimally beneficial and minimally changeling experience for the student.

Academic Planning and Collaboration

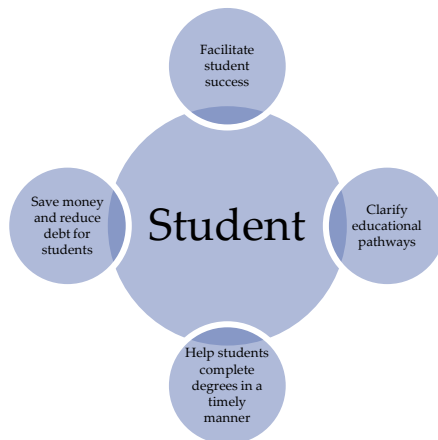
Goal: Recommendation of a plan for Associate to Baccalaureate



As stated, the intent of this plan is to launch new Transfer Degrees for Baccalaureate Completion that simplify the student transfer process between the Minnesota two-year institutions and the state universities. The initiative will generate savings on many levels, including but not limited to cost to the students, time to completion, and administrative overhead to maintain articulation agreements.

Elements:

1. Goals of the Transfer Degree to Baccalaureate Completion Plan
 - 1.1. Keep students and the primary and fundamental focus (see figure below)
 - 1.2. Facilitate student success
 - 1.3. Clarify educational pathways
 - 1.4. Help students complete degrees in a timely manner
 - 1.5. Save money and reduce debt for student
 - 1.6. ASSUMPTION: All students regardless of whether they are transfer students or direct entry will be treated the same and be given the same opportunities as long as all criteria are met.



2. Create Program Articulation Committees (PAC) by discipline composed of faculty of both college and university
 - 2.1 Faculty representatives from the colleges and universities – equal number from each
 - 2.2 Co-chaired by college and university faculty
 - 2.3 Advisors
 - 2.4 Students
 - 2.5 Representatives from participating institutions

The PACs will have full autonomy to consider full range of strategies/ideas to achieve the goals.

3. Transfer students in Minnesota’s community colleges may complete a “Transfer Degree Pathway for Baccalaureate Completion.”

3.1 There will be three new multi campus transfer pathways: The team is recommending the faculty create new transfer-assured pathways into parallel studies for the following three

degrees. AAS degrees are not eligible under this legislation. In addition, the faculty will need to consider how their current curriculum will fit into the new pathways.

- 3.1.1. AA (Associate of Arts – Discipline Name)
- 3.1.2. AS (Associate of Science – Discipline Name)
- 3.1.3. AFA (Associate of Fine Arts – Discipline Name)
- 3.1.4. Twenty-five to thirty transfer degrees will be available in the initial round.

3.2 From the team’s research a successful common structure for transfer degrees was identified to be: 60 credits distributed in the following pattern:

Type of courses	Number of credits
General Education Common Core across all disciplines	30
Broad Elective Courses	9-12
Discipline Specific Courses	9-12
Remaining Credits*	6-12
Total Credits	60

*The remaining 6-12 credits gives room for flexibility in course credits, or other campus requirements.

3.2.1. The PAC groups should consider this as the appropriate structure for the transfer degrees.

3.3 The PACs will determine what can be ensured for the students after the completion of the “Transfer Degree for Baccalaureate Completion” for the transfer of the full AA, AS, or AFA to the parallel baccalaureate degree. The PACs will create options for students to better plan and better prepare for transfer to the majors. The PACs will ensure accessibility to programs for all qualified students. Common threads from the other state system transfer degrees were the following. These should be strongly considered by the PAC groups. In addition, dual enrollment and strong 2+2 programs should be strongly considered for these degrees. As studies show, these assist students in planning to be prepared to enter the major more so than other degree paths.

- 3.3.1. Ensures that a student has fully met all the lower division general education requirements at a MnSCU university,
- 3.3.2. Ensures that a student has full junior status
- 3.3.3. Ensures student degree completion at the end of four years if the student follows protocols as created by disciplinary faculty
- 3.3.4. Provides the opportunity for 2 year college students to apply to programs at the same point in their academic progress as direct entry students (pre-requisites have been completed). Students and advisors should note the difference between open and restrictive programs.
- 3.3.5 Guarantees, where capacity permits, that students who meet or exceed specific program requirements will be admitted to that program.
- 3.3.6. Operational and procedural pieces need to be identified to ensure that the receiving universities have the knowledge the student is transferring under these pathways.
- 3.3.7. Assessment tools for the pathways to be reviewed regularly to maintain or enhance quality and student success outcomes.

4. Phase 1 will begin with four distinct major types: a major that reflects sequential (pre-requisite) courses; a major that has program-specific accreditation requirements; a major that is in the performing arts; and each degree type is represented AA, AS, AFA.

4.1 The team suggests the degrees in the grid below be looked at first for feasibility of testing the processes.

Degree	Discipline	Type
AA	Psychology	Popular Major for both direct entry and transfer students
AS	Biology	Sequential Courses/Pre-requisites
AS	Business	Program accreditation requirements
AFA	Theatre	Performing art and has the complete MnTC

4.2 Project Launch Meetings

- 4.2.1. Invite Academic Officers, Deans from phase 1 disciplines, and faculty representatives from each phase 1 discipline.
- 4.2.2. Become familiar with transfer degree goals
- 4.2.3. Determine common principles/protocols for transfer degrees
- 4.2.4. Choose representatives to serve on program articulation committees

5. The charge to each PAC will be to create a consultation and communication plan for the transfer degree pathways.

6. The expectation is that all MnSCU universities and eligible colleges (those who offer the AA, AS, and AFA degrees) will participate. Viewing the viability of transfer in any direction, not just the traditional two-year to four-year institution path will provide a richness and flexibility not usually seen.

6.1. Every College will identify associate programs that would align with the bachelor’s completion degrees created or drafted by PAC

6.2. Two and four year faculty has equal voices

6.3. Beyond the original 4 majors, identified majors that were the

- 6.3.1. Most popular program of studies CC
- 6.3.2. Most popular 4 year programs
- 6.3.3. Most popular Transfer programs
- 6.3.4. Identified content and competencies to transfer to the junior level

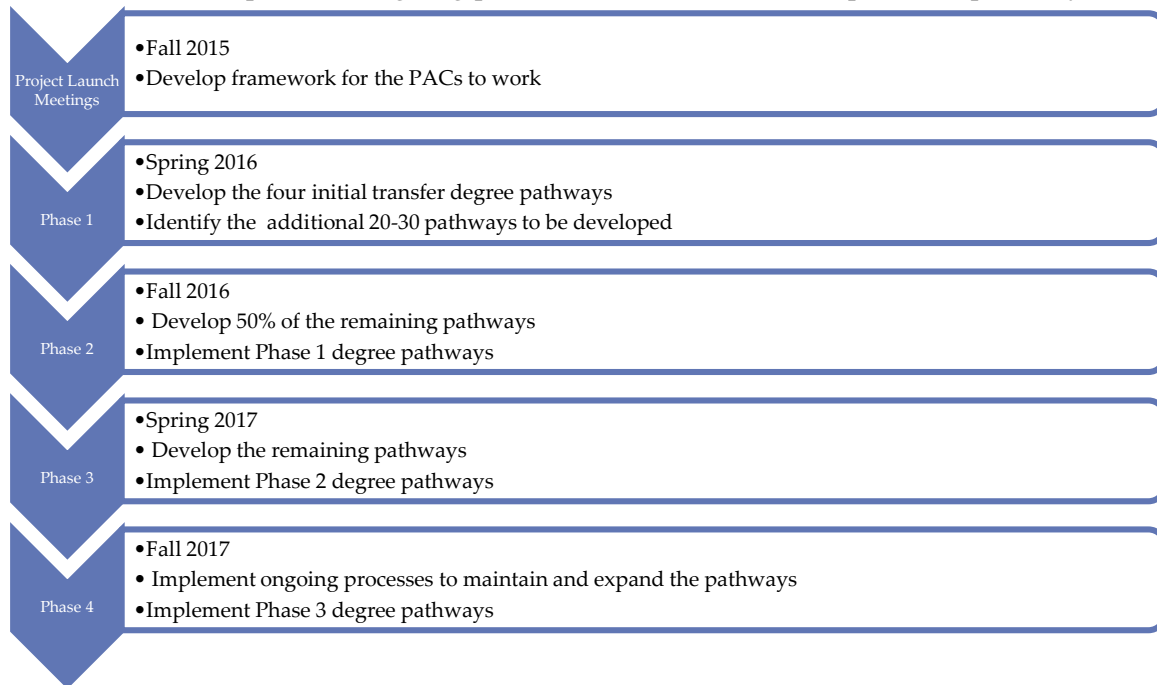
6.4 Operational and Procedural Questions

- 6.4.1. Who updates the course system?
- 6.4.2. How do you minimize burden?
- 6.4.3. Requires that people trust each other

- 6.4.4. Dispute resolution process/Appeal process for students
- 6.4.5. Helps to have mandate but we are a state with shared governance which takes a lot of time
- 6.4.6. Need for funding sources outside of regular budgets

7. Implementation Schedule

- 7.1. Project Launch Meetings prior to beginning Phase 1 – fall 2015
- 7.2. Phase 1 will begin in spring of 2016 with 4 selected majors
- 7.3. Phase 2 50% of remaining top enrollment majors in year 2 fall 2016
- 7.4. Phase 3 The remaining top enrollment majors in year 3
- 7.5. Phase 4 Implement ongoing processes to maintain and expand the pathways.



There are many questions to be answered. A few of them follow.

- a. What about the infrastructure to support the Pathways Long Term Minnesota Transfer and Articulation Center? How can Transferology/MnTransfer be adapted to meet the ongoing and emerging needs?
- b. How do the coordination committees fit into current structures? Do they need to be changed?
- c. Include and expand on current services, meaning a comprehensive understanding of what is already in use – standing committees, technology, etc.
- d. There needs to be in place mechanisms of review and assessment.
- e. There need to be appeal processes for students, colleges and universities. IT systems working with campuses to streamline the transfer process
- f. We need to thoroughly understand budget ramifications to sustainability

Summary

In addition to cost factors and excessive student loans, the effectiveness of the transfer path from community colleges to four-year baccalaureate-granting universities is particularly critical to improving college completion rates and raising the proportion of residents who earn baccalaureate degrees. It is the view of this implementation team that initiatives to improve baccalaureate completion should incorporate policies and practices that explicitly address transfer. Even the most

thoughtful and well-intentioned policies will be very limited in their effectiveness if they fail to address this critical issue that reflects the real life circumstances and constraints confronting students seeking, often struggling, to earn bachelor's degrees.

Finally, it is worth noting that the absence of a standardized credit transfer mechanism (national standards to benchmark against) has once again caught the eye of politicians. Like other states, the Minnesota legislature produced a bill that aims to ease college credit mobility for students by asking colleges and universities to: establish transfer of credit policies; make those policies available to the public; and to abide by their own individual policies. While that singular motivation is enough to stir action, the desire to improve student success is brought into the foreground; where it should be.

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities are essential to Minnesota's economic success and social fabric and have been since the Minnesota Legislature authorized Winona Normal School (now Winona State University) in 1858. We fulfill our promise to Minnesota by being places of hope and opportunity where all Minnesotans can create better futures for themselves, their families and their communities. We believe every Minnesotan – regardless of age, economic status, cultural background, disability, immigrant status, or place of residence – deserves the opportunity for an excellent education. It is our collective commitment to this promise that makes us who we are. It is what binds our colleges and universities together and makes us different from other higher education providers.