

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities – Office of Internal Auditing

Summary of Student Credit Transfer Testing

May 2010

Background:

On February 10, 2010, the Audit Committee met with Legislative Auditor Jim Nobles and his staff to review and discuss their program evaluation report, *MnSCU System Office*. Based on that discussion, the Audit Committee Chair made several recommendations to the Board Chair on how to address the report findings. In his February 17, 2010 letter, Chair Olson assigned the responsibility for studying student credit transfer to the audit committee.

The Office of Internal Auditing tested fiscal year 2009 student records to identify the extent that credits may not have transferred between MnSCU colleges and universities and the reasons for any unsuccessful credit transfers. Part of the testing focused on a stratified random sample of approximately 16,000 students that enrolled in a MnSCU college or university in 2009 that transferred previously earned credits from another MnSCU college or university. An additional test analyzed the transfer experience of students who earned a baccalaureate degree in either Psychology or Accounting in 2009.

Quantitative Results:

Reasons Credits Not Accepted in Transfer

Reason Credits Not Accepted in Transfer	2009 Enrolling Students	2009 Accounting Graduates	2009 Psychology Graduates
Minnesota Transfer Curriculum courses or goal areas not shown as completed at receiving institution	10	4	1
Similar courses not given equivalencies	8	19	0
D grades not accepted	3	6	12
PSEO courses not recognized or accepted	0	0	4
Old credits	1	10	0
Data entry error or unknown	6	0	0
Total Number of Students with Incidents	28	39	17
Population	16,309	211	258
Sample Size	281	109	102
Estimated Incident Rate	9.4%¹	26.5%	6.6%

¹ Based on the statistical sampling methodology, we are 95 percent confident that the incident rate would be between 5.9% and 12.9%.

In addition to projecting the incident rates, we estimated the magnitude of credit loss for the 2009 graduates. For the 56 student graduates who experienced a transfer problem, the median number of credits lost was six. Ten of the accounting graduates, however, lost more than 30 credits, pushing the mean number of lost credits for the accounting graduates to 16. The mean credit loss for psychology graduates remained the same as the median, at six credits

From the statistical sample, we also estimated that 20.7 percent² of students experienced some type of process problem when transferring credits. These problems did not always result in students losing transfer credits, but included issues such as:

- Transcripts included errors on transfer credits or it was not evident how the number of transferred credits was calculated.
- Developmental credits were included in the number of credits transferred on the transcript, and overstated the number of credits eligible for degree completion.
- Inconsistent methods were used to convert quarter credits to semester credits.
- Transcripts did not conform to the System requirements for flagging developmental or repeated courses.

Policy Considerations:

- Work to align two and four year programs to reduce the loss of credits. The 2+2 program in Accounting offered in partnership between Rochester Community & Technical College and Winona State University is an example of a successful alignment.
- Consider whether a System-wide policy is needed to establish consistent treatment of D grades for transfer eligibility.
- Consider whether a System-wide policy is needed on the age at which coursework loses its eligibility for transfer.
- Consider creating the role of “Credit Transfer Ombudsman” to provide students with an independent channel for advice on how to resolve credit transfer problems.
- Consider a policy on creating more uniformity on recording transfer credits on MnSCU transcripts. Practices varied widely among MnSCU colleges and universities and make it difficult for students to understand whether their prior coursework counts toward their intended degree.

² Based on the statistical sampling methodology, we are 95 percent confident that the incident rate would be between 16.2% and 25.2%.

Management Recommendations:

- **Minnesota Transfer Curriculum:**
 - Colleges and universities need to ensure that staff understand the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum requirements.
 - Colleges and universities should advise students on the importance of completing courses and goal areas within the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.
 - The Office of the Chancellor Academic and Student Affairs and Public Affairs divisions should work with colleges and universities to communicate the value of completing the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum courses and goal areas to students.
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should develop a common way for students to assess their progress toward completing the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.

- **DARS**
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should develop a standardized degree audit template for colleges and universities to use for degree requirements.
 - Colleges and universities should list in-progress courses on degree audits.
 - Colleges and universities need to ensure that they are using DARS degree audits for verifying that program requirements have been met for graduation.

- The Academic and Student Affairs division should develop a standard conversion for quarter hour credit conversion.

- The Office of the Chancellor Public Affairs and Academic and Student Affairs divisions should work with colleges and universities to develop a uniform template for accessing transfer information on Web sites and to the extent possible create consistent content for informing students about transfer.

Summary of Student Credit Transfer Findings and Integration of Recommendations

Minnesota State College Student Association (MSCSA)
Minnesota State University Student Association (MSUSA)
Minnesota State Colleges and Universities – Office of Internal Auditing

May 19, 2010

The Minnesota State College Student Association (MSCSA) began to hear pronounced student concerns on transfer beginning around 2006. In 2007 MSCSA identified transfer as one of its top issues and continued to work with students to identify specific concerns. Staff within the Office of the Chancellor began to work with the student associations to improve communication on transfer. In the spring of 2009, MSCSA students led a “transfer hotline” campaign across the system’s two-year college campuses to identify student transfer problems. In the fall of 2009, the leadership of the Minnesota State University Student Association (MSUSA) voted to prioritize credit transfer as an issue to address and conducted roundtable discussions with their students. MSCSA and MSUSA also joined together to research student transfer concerns, probing the issues identified through the transfer hotline. MSCSA and MSUSA asked Chancellor McCormick for assistance to conduct a survey of students about their experience with transferring credits. The survey was administered in January through March, 2010.

In a February 17, 2010 letter to trustees, Board Chair Olson assigned the responsibility for studying student credit transfer to the audit committee to address findings identified in the Office of the Legislative Auditor’s program evaluation report, *MnSCU System Office*. The Office of Internal Auditing conducted a quantitative analysis of fiscal year 2009 student records to identify the extent that credits may not have transferred between MnSCU colleges and universities and the reasons for any unsuccessful credit transfers.

A summary of the findings and an integration of recommendations from the two research efforts are presented below:

Finding 1 – Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC)

Student Survey: MnTC credits were the most common type respondents reported transferring, but 29% of them did not know whether they had completed a MnTC goal area or course. Respondents who completed the MnTC were more likely to be satisfied with their transfer experience than respondents who did not complete the MnTC.

Quantitative Analysis: Nine percent¹ of 2009 students experienced some credit loss when transferring credits. MnTC courses or goal areas not recorded as completed at receiving institutions was one of the most significant reasons for credit loss.

- **Suggested Action:** Refer to Academic and Student Affairs Committee
- **Policy Considerations:**
 - 3.29 College and University Transcripts - Consider revising policy to create more uniformity on recording transfer credits on MnSCU transcripts.
 - 3.37 Minnesota Transfer Curriculum

¹ Based on a statistical sampling methodology, with 95 percent confidence, the overall incident rate for student credit loss would be between 5.9 percent and 12.9 percent.

- **Management Recommendations:**
 - Colleges and universities need to ensure that staff members understand the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum requirements.
 - Colleges and universities should advise students on the advantages of completing courses and goal areas within the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.
 - The Public Affairs and Academic and Student Affairs divisions should work with colleges and universities to communicate the advantages of completing the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum courses and goal areas to students.
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should develop uniform required training for staff and faculty who advise potential transfer students.
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should develop a common way for students to assess their progress toward completing the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.

- **Success Criteria:** A subsequent survey will find that substantially more students know about the MnTC and whether they have completed it. A subsequent quantitative analysis will not find instances of credit loss due to unrecorded MnTC goal or course completion.

Finding 2 – Course Equivalencies and Acceptance of Credit

Student Survey: Respondents who reported that their credits did not transfer as expected, cited several reasons including: the courses not equivalent, the courses transferred as electives instead of major requirements, the student had insufficient information to determine equivalency, and the courses were taken too long ago.

Quantitative Analysis: The most significant reason students lost credits in transfer was that similar courses did not have a course equivalency, this was more prevalent for accounting graduates. In addition, there were inconsistencies among institutions regarding acceptance of courses with a D grade. There also were inconsistencies among institutions in the acceptance of credits deemed to be too old. Finally, in a few instances, credits for PSEO courses were not being recognized or accepted.

- **Suggested Action:** Refer to Academic and Student Affairs Committee

- **Policy Considerations:**
 - 3.5 Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO)
 - 3.21 Undergraduate Course Credit Transfer
 - Work to align two and four year programs to reduce the loss of credits.
 - Consider whether a System-wide policy is needed to establish consistent treatment of D grades for transfer eligibility.
 - Consider whether a System-wide policy is needed on the age at which coursework loses its eligibility for transfer.
 - 3.22 Course Syllabi
 - Clarify the use of syllabi, course outlines, or other equivalency documents.

- **Management Recommendations:**
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should ensure that course equivalency information is accurate, available and complied with at colleges and universities
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should develop a standardized degree audit template for colleges and universities to use for degree requirements.

- **Success Criteria:** Need to be defined

Finding 3 – Transfer Information and Resources

Student Survey: Two-thirds of survey respondents whose credits did not transfer as expected were not aware of the appeals process, but 89 percent of those who did appeal had some or all of their credits accepted. Forty percent of respondents reported that they did not seek advice from college or university staff regarding transfer and 41 percent did not start planning for transfer until their last semester before transferring or later. Respondents reported that institutional websites were their primary online resource for information about transfer. Six percent of respondents reported that they had used the uSelect (Course Applicability System) tool during the transfer process. Finally, among respondents who submitted written complaints, the most frequent topic was problems with transfer advising and information.

Comment: Although a high number of credits are accepted in transfer, there may be a disconnect between the way credits sometimes transfer and the way students expect them to transfer. Additionally, transfer problems brought to the attention of the system are often anecdotal or involve individual students whose educational records cannot be disclosed to third parties. These limitations hinder the ability to determine whether complaints about the transfer process are valid and need corrective action.

- **Suggested Action:** Refer to Academic and Student Affairs and Advancement Committees.
- **Policy Considerations:**
 - Consider creating the role of “Credit Transfer Ombudsman” to provide students with an independent channel for advice on how to resolve credit transfer problems.
- **Management Recommendations:**
 - The Public Affairs and Academic and Student Affairs divisions should work with colleges and universities to:
 - Develop uniform standards for displaying transfer information on Web sites and to the extent possible create consistent content for informing students about transfer.
 - Advise students on the appeals process.
 - Improve communication to better manage student expectations about the transfer process, transfer tools, sources of transfer information and the value of early planning for transfer.
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should monitor appeals and their results to help identify transfer issues.
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should consider adding staff to meet the significant work involved with accomplishing continuous improvement in student credit transfer.
- **Success Criteria:** Need to be defined

Finding 4 – Transfer Tools and Data Entry

Quantitative Analysis: The use of eTranscript and Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS) are important tools for college and university staff in supporting transfer. Two percent of 2009 students may have lost some transfer credits due to data entry errors.

- **Suggested Action:** Refer action to management and monitor progress

- **Management Recommendations:**
 - The Academic and Student Affairs should:
 - Ensure that colleges and universities have implemented eTranscript.
 - Ensure that colleges and universities list in-progress courses on DARS degree audits.
 - Communicate the system standard for conversion of quarter credit hours to semester credit hours and verify that colleges and universities are using standard.
 - Colleges and universities need to ensure that they are using DARS degree audits for verifying that program requirements have been met for graduation.

- **Success Criteria:** Need to be defined

Finding 5 – Accountability

Comment: The Board of Trustees has had limited discussion related to student credit transfer since 2004. In addition, the accountability framework does not contain a measure related to student credit transfer.

- **Suggested Action:** Refer to Academic and Student Affairs Committee

- **Policy Considerations:**
 - Implement systematic monitoring of transfer with periodic reporting.
 - Add a transfer measure to the accountability framework.
 - Engage the board in a study session to review other states' transfer models, successes and challenges.

- **Success Criteria:** Need to be defined