

Strengthening the Transfer Pathway From Community to Four-Year Private Colleges

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What is the Edvance Foundation, and why has it published this report?**

The Edvance Foundation is a nonprofit organization **dedicated to advancing American higher education** through the development of bold, sustainable solutions that address the most pressing challenges facing students and institutions of higher education in the 21st century.

- **What research was done for this report?**

The Edvance Foundation partnered with Human Capital Research Corporation to conduct a **nationwide survey of transfer practices at private four-year institutions**. The foundation also conducted a **listening tour** across 18 states, meeting with college and university presidents and practitioners to better understand the obstacles that prevent community college students from transferring successfully. All of this research built on work by the **Jack Kent Cooke Foundation and its Community College Transfer Initiative**. This initiative funded eight highly selective colleges and universities to help high-achieving, low-to moderate-income community college students transfer to, and succeed at, four-year institutions.

- **Why is it important to focus on the community college transfer process?**

Community colleges have a fundamental

mission of providing practical career training for some students and providing opportunities for greater educational achievement at four-year institutions for others. With 13 million students – 44% of all U.S. undergraduates – attending these low-cost institutions, **community colleges play a critical role in advancing the educations and careers** of our nation's future workforce.

However, community colleges are struggling. Just 20% of first-time, full-time community college students seeking an associate degree earn one within three years. Only 35% complete their degree within five years. Eighty percent of community college students begin their studies with plans to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree. But just 25% transfer within five years, and only 17% complete a bachelor's degree within six years of transferring. **If we don't address this problem, an entire generation of students will fail to meet their educational potential**, which will have an enormous negative impact on the knowledge capital and competitiveness of the United States.

- **Why should four-year institutions put extra effort into supporting community college students amid so many other problems in higher education?**

Many colleges and universities have made it a priority to increase the diversity of their student bodies in terms of race,

socioeconomic class, and thought, and private institutions in particular are competing to find new sources of qualified students.

Community colleges offer a largely untapped pool of high-potential students, but two-year and four-year institutions need to work together to overcome the many obstacles to transferring.

● **What can be done to facilitate recruiting and admissions of high-potential transfer candidates from community colleges?**

One of the biggest challenges is insufficient collaboration and coordination between four-year institutions and community colleges. The articulation agreements governing student transfers tend to cover a relatively small number of feeder colleges, and they are inconsistent, uncoordinated, and subjective, making the transfer process unnecessarily complex. But perhaps the most complicated and potentially problematic aspect of the transfer process is the lack of consistency in credit evaluation.

Simple steps such as **early identification** of promising students, combined with **academic support** as students prepare to transfer to four-year institutions and **regular evaluation** of their readiness for these institutions would have a marked impact on the transfer rate. There should also be an emphasis on **data collection and analysis** to inform college transfer programs. Having a national database will make it possible to measure the success of these programs and the benefits to transfer students and the institutions they attend.

● **How can four-year institutions help ensure the success of community college transfers once they matriculate?**

Many first-time college students don't have access to the information they need. Less than 50% of the schools surveyed by Edvance offer

targeted orientation programs or ongoing support for transfer students. This support is crucial given the relatively low academic bar for transfer candidates – only 10% of the colleges and universities surveyed require a grade point average of 3.0 or better – which means that many students are unprepared for the rigors of undergraduate work.

The **establishment of virtual bridge programs** is an effective way to help prepare transfer students for the demands of four-year institutions. Additionally, mentoring, targeted counseling, and peer-group networks all have been shown to increase the success of transfer students.

● **What are the next steps?**

The Edvance Foundation proposes the creation of a **college transfer partnership** to facilitate a seamless transfer pathway for community college students. This partnership would seek to disseminate the **best practices** identified through this research across many more universities and colleges, including efforts to standardize academic expectations and credit evaluation processes. It would also drive the development of a **national database of transfer benchmark statistics** and technology applications to support early identification and skill building for transfer candidates.

Making the college transfer partnership a reality will require **collaboration among both two- and four-year institutions as well as the business and nonprofit communities**, which stand to benefit from a better-educated workforce. To that end, the Edvance Foundation will seek additional foundation and corporate funding support while inviting participation from a broad cross-section of colleges and universities.