About Credit When It’s Due

The Credit When It’s Due (CWID) initiative is funded by six foundations and is supporting 15 states to develop reverse transfer programs and policies. Reverse transfer enables students to receive an associate’s degree when students meet associate’s degree requirements after transfer to a 4-year college or university.

State Implementation Context

The public higher education system in North Carolina consists of the University of North Carolina (UNC) system and the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS). The UNC system consists of 16 public constituent universities and the NCCCS system includes 58 public community colleges. North Carolina’s CWID efforts are engaging all 58 community colleges in reverse transfer and as of June, 2015, and 11 of the 16 universities will be involved. All 16 universities will be participating by the end of 2015.

Key Implementation Strategies

Reverse Transfer Project Manager. North Carolina hired a full-time project manager early in the grant period to provide grant coordination and lead the reverse transfer efforts. The project manager has been critical in developing and promoting reverse transfer around the state, meeting one-on-one with pilot institutions, building relationships, revising institutional and system policies to accommodate reverse transfer, supporting the implementation of institutional reverse transfer efforts, creating a marketing plan, ensuring FERPA compliance, and creating scenarios with community colleges to assist with the degree audit process.

Developing Shared Technology Solution. Given that the public community college and university systems are structurally separated in North Carolina, a core strategy of the CWID grant was to develop a degree audit and notification system for the purpose of reverse transfer. The Student Data Mart (SDM) system, the development of which began before the CWID grant was received, is the primary mechanism whereby transcript-level information can be used to regularly determine students’ eligibility for reverse transfer based on the number of credit hours that students earn. The lead college for the CWID grant, Central Piedmont Community College, developed a report to evaluate the degree audit of each student and to report by student what courses were needed in order to graduate the student. This will decrease the time needed for degree evaluation.

Improving Course Articulation and Equivalencies. NCCCS has an expansive statewide common course library, however, not all courses are taught at every community college. Whereas some community college student information systems include extensive course equivalencies, other systems do not. To aid in the processing of reverse transfer degrees, UNC has developed a crosswalk that articulates one university course with up to three different community college courses. Each community college receives a transcript report from UNC that includes course equivalencies for each eligible student. This will increase reverse transfer degree audit processing and allow community colleges to articulate more university courses toward associate’s degree requirements.

Reverse Transfer Process

Based on a review of implementation across CWID states, OCCRL developed a framework for the reverse transfer process that consists of five broad processes, and North Carolina’s process is applied to this framework. The following process is based on the implementation efforts at the pilot institutions in Spring 2014.

1. **Student Identification:** The pilot UNC campuses queried records to identify students who met the defined reverse transfer eligibility criteria.

2. **Consent:** North Carolina has implemented an opt-in policy. The pilot 15 universities contacted students by email during the first week of classes and asked them to provide consent by logging into a custom built web portal. The universities sent follow-up emails to non-responders each subsequent week for five weeks. Nearly all of the universities offered cash incentives and two universities offered students priority registration to increase participation. To maximize the proportion of students consenting to participate and ensure sustainability of reverse transfer, North Carolina developed technology that ensures both FERPA compliance and increased response rates. This technology utilizes the student services account to require all eligible students to “opt-in” or “opt-out” to the reverse transfer program, meaning that students must actively consent to participate.

3. **Transcript Exchange:** The UNC SDM collected the transcript data on the eligible students and placed it on a secure server. The individual community colleges, once authenticated, accessed the transcript data via SDM.

4. **Degree Audit:** The community colleges conduct the degree audit using existing institutional technology and the lead community college created technology processes to report what a student is

| Credentials awarded as of May 2015: | 665 |
| Credential Type(s): | Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Applied Associate of Science, Associate in General Education, Transfer Diploma in Arts |
5. **Degree Conferral and Advising:** Students who meet all degree requirements were conferred a degree and notified by the community college.

**Implementation Successes and Challenges**

**Successes:** The first year of the grant period was extremely important—consensus was built among NCCCS institutions and consistent reverse transfer policies and procedures were developed, including a common residency requirement and waiving readmission and graduation fees. At the beginning of the second year of the grant, a marketing strategy was developed and launched. Similarly, the state experimented with consent methods with a relatively high proportion of students agreeing to participate. For example, the “pop-up” technology integrated into the student registration system resulted in a response rate of 91% responding yes/no and 9% deferring decision. Further, most pilot institutions have collected data on students who opted-out and these data have pointed North Carolina to specific areas of needed improvement, namely better communication regarding what reverse transfer is and how it benefits students. Another critical success was the improvement of course equivalencies between UNC courses and community college courses so more UNC courses transfer back to community colleges and eventually apply to associate’s degrees. Finally, several technology enhancements were made at the state and local levels to support reverse transfer. At the state level, the SDM will allow efficient transcript exchange among institutions. At the local level, community colleges have collaborated to share technology related to degree audit and data conversion for reverse transfer that will improve not only the overall efficiency of reverse transfer but the normal degree audit processes in the registrar offices. This collaboration prompted sister community colleges to develop procedures to audit degrees of all current community college students to identify potential degree candidates, and the lead community college has developed training videos and manuals to communicate these shared practices.

**Challenges:** The most significant implementation challenge has been building state and local technology infrastructure that is critical to both large-scale and long-term reverse transfer implementation. Given the complexity of the project and need for technology development, the full implementation of the reverse transfer was planned for the last 9 months of the grant period when the SDM was fully operational. With 58 community colleges and students swirling among these institutions, a second significant challenge was developing a policy to determine the community college that would confer the degree if students attended multiple community colleges. This required meetings of key constituents to develop policies and procedures to comply with both regional accreditation and state and local regulations. Additional technology solutions were also needed to overcome this challenge. Third, despite improvements in the mechanism used to request student consent, 41% of the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 potentially eligible students actively opted-out of the program. Fourth, of the 3,000 eligible transcripts reviewed in the Fall of 2014, only 665 credentials were awarded. We found that many eligible students were missing their associate’s degree because of one or two courses, and in the majority of cases at least one of those missing courses was college-level math. Encouraging transfer students to complete their math requirements earlier should help improve degree completion. Finally, many students who missed receiving their credential wanted to know which classes they were missing. Proper advising is crucial for the program moving forward. It is imperative that reverse transfer students are first advised to complete their bachelor’s degree, but instructed that reaching the associate’s degree milestone might improve 4-year graduation rates, the state is considering how to advise for both. Working with university and community college advisors will be an important priority for the state moving forward.

**Sustainability**

North Carolina’s CVID grant supported the initial pilot, but the UNC system has continued to fully fund the project through the end of calendar year 2015 to ensure full scale-up by North Carolina’s public postsecondary institutions. North Carolina has developed the Reverse Transfer Program to be as automated as possible and include technologies such as automated reminder emails to participating campuses, web-based training materials, and comprehensive FAQ sheets. Despite these efforts, the program will require some level of system oversight.

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**Institutions Participating in Credit When It’s Due**

| Alamance Community College | Appalachian State University | Appalachian State University \- Technical College | Beaufort County Community College | Bladen Community College | Blue Ridge Community College | Brunswick Community College | Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute | Cape Fear Community College | Carteret Community College | Catawba Valley Community College | Central Carolina Community College | Central Piedmont Community College | Cleveland Community College | Coastal Carolina Community College | College of the Albemarle | Craven Community College | Davidson County Community College | Durham Technical Community College | East Carolina University | Edgecombe Community College | Fayetteville State University | Fayetteville Technical Community College | Forsyth Technical Community College | Gaston Community College | Guilford Technical Community College | Halifax Community College | Haywood Community College | Isothermal Community College | James Sprunt Community College | Johnston Community College | Lenoir Community College | Martin Community College | Mayland Community College | McDowell Technical Community College | Mitchell Community College | Montgomery Community College | Nash Community College | North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University | North Carolina State University | Pamlico Community College | Piedmont Community College | Pitt Community College | Randolph Community College | Richmond Community College | Roanoke-Chowan Community College | Rockingham Community College | Robeson Community College | Rowan-Cabarrus Community College | Sampson Community College | Sandhills Community College | South Piedmont Community College | Southeastern Community College | Southwestern Community College | Stanly Community College | Surry Community College | Tri-County Community College | University of North Carolina Asheville | University of North Carolina Charlotte | University of North Carolina Greensboro | University of North Carolina Penbrooke | University of North Carolina Wilmington | Vance-Granville Community College | Wake Technical Community College | Wayne Community College | Western Piedmont Community College | Wilkes Community College | Wilson Community College |"