

CWID DATA NOTE

The Influence of Reverse Transfer Eligibility Requirements

by Sheena A. Kauppila and Jason L. Taylor

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Introduction

This Data Note is the fifth in a series of publications that share results from research associated with the Credit When It's Due (CWID) initiative. CWID is a multi-state initiative that supports the development and implementation of reverse transfer programs and policies that confer associate's degrees to transfer students when they complete the degree requirements while en route to the baccalaureate degree. Using data from Colorado, this Data Note focuses on how state-level eligibility criteria influence how many students are potentially eligible for reverse transfer. State-level eligibility criteria are important because they identify how many and which transfer students may be eligible for reverse transfer. Taylor and Bragg (2015) documented the state-level eligibility criteria in CWID states (see Table 1), and although these criteria vary in nuanced ways, the three common criteria used to determine if students are potentially eligible for reverse transfer are: (1) the community college residency requirement; (2) the number of cumulative college credits; and (3) no prior associate's degree attainment.

Colorado Context

In 2012, the Colorado legislature passed C.R.S. 23-1-131 that required the Commission on Higher Education to develop a process to confer associate's degrees to transfer students with adequate credit to meet the degree requirements. The legislation stipulated that if a student completes the residency requirement at a community college (15 college credit hours from one community college), transfers to a university, and accumulates 70 credit hours (including transferred credits) at the university level, then the student must be notified that they may be eligible to receive an associate's degree from the primary, sending community college. Thus, both the community college residency requirement and the cumulative college credit eligibility criterion were written into state legislation. Among states with reverse transfer legislative policies, it is not common for legislation to specify these eligibility criteria (Garcia, 2015). Colorado used three criteria to determine which students were potentially eligible for reverse transfer: (1) student earned 15 college-level credits at a CO community college (residency requirement); (2) student had not earned an associate's degree or higher; and (3) student earned 70 cumulative college-level credits.

Purpose and Significance

What is unknown and is the focus of this Data Note, is the extent to which these eligibility criteria influence the number of students potentially eligible for reverse transfer within a state. In this Data Note, we explore the possibility that eligibility criteria eliminate students who might otherwise be potentially eligible for an associate's degree via reverse transfer. Policies that determine which students are potentially eligible for reverse transfer by default also determine which students are ineligible.

As Taylor and Bragg (2015) argued, the cumulative college credit criterion is too high and may not optimize the reverse transfer process. If one goal of reverse transfer is to increase the number of students who complete degrees, should policies be limited to students who have already earned a large number of credits (e.g., 70 cumulative college credits), or should policies reflect a developmental approach whereby students are notified earlier in their transfer pathway and advised of ways to benefit from reverse transfer. If reverse transfer programs are intentional and integrated early into students' pathways, more students would receive associate's degrees on the way to attaining their bachelor's degree. As Taylor and Bragg (2015) suggest, a developmental approach will likely require more resources so states, systems, and institutions need to balance resource constraints with expected outcomes. However, as reverse transfer programs expand and student awareness increases, it is possible that student demand for associate's degrees may increase.

Methods

The following two research questions are answered in this Data Note: (1) How many transfer students met reverse transfer eligibility requirements; and (2) How many transfer students would meet reverse transfer eligibility requirements if the cumulative college-level credit eligibility criterion was lowered to 45 credits, not 70 credits?

To answer the research questions, we used student-level data from the CWID Impact Study dataset provided by the Colorado Department of Higher Education. The dataset included 18,670 students that transferred with any college credit to one of eight public universities between Fall 2012 and Spring 2013. The dataset only included students who transferred from one of the 16 public community colleges to one of the eight public universities that piloted reverse transfer. Consequently, students who transferred from private institutions or institutions outside of Colorado were not included in the dataset.



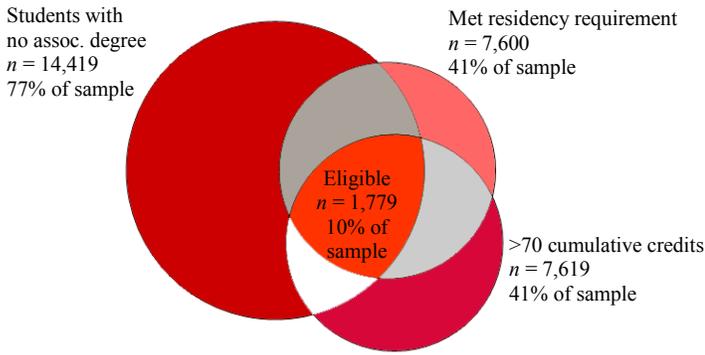


Figure 1. Venn Diagram of Colorado Reverse Transfer Eligibility Criteria

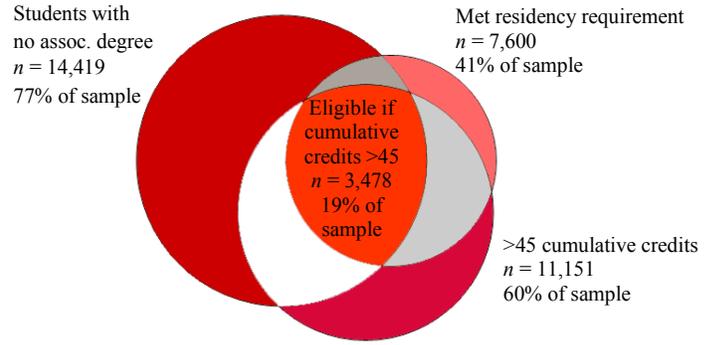


Figure 3. Venn Diagram of Expanded Reverse Transfer Eligibility Criteria

Results

Figure 1 is a Venn diagram that reports results to the first research question pertaining to each of the three eligibility criteria. Figure 1 shows that of the 18,670 transfer students in the sample:

- $n = 7,600$ (41%) met the residency requirement of at least 15 college-level credits awarded by a CO community college.
- $n = 14,419$ (77%) had not attained an associate's or higher degree
- $n = 7,619$ students (41%) earned at least 70 cumulative college-level credits.

When these three eligibility criteria are applied to the total sample of transfer students, only 10% ($n = 1,779$) met all three criteria and were potentially eligible for reverse transfer. Based on the existing eligibility criteria, a large percentage of students are not eligible to benefit from the state's reverse transfer policies.

These findings lead to the second research question, which used these data to model how many students would be potentially eligible for reverse transfer if the cumulative college-level credit criterion was 45 credits rather than 70 credits. Figure 2 shows the distribution of cumulative credits of the entire sample and shows that 3,866 students completed between 45-70 cumulative college credits. If the cumulative credit criterion was lowered from 70 to 45, the number of students who meet this criterion would increase from 7,619 to 11,151.

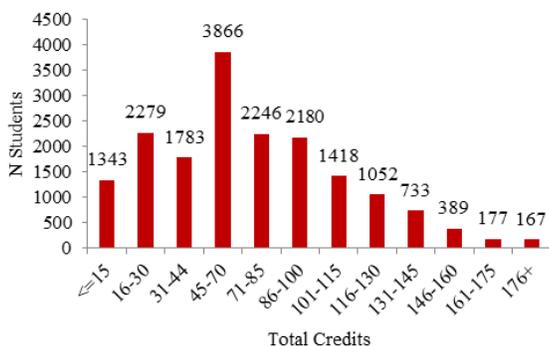


Figure 2. Distribution of Cumulative Credits ($n = 18,670$)

Using the same method as Figure 1, Figure 3 is a Venn diagram that shows the increase in the number and percentage of students that would be potentially eligible for reverse transfer assuming an eligibility criterion of 45 cumulative college credits. This figure reveals that 3,478 students, or 19% of the sample, would be potentially eligible for reverse transfer. Thus, lowering the eligibility criterion from 70 to 45 cumulative college credits nearly doubled the number of students potentially eligible for reverse transfer from 1,779 in Figure 1 to 3,478 in Figure 3.

What Does This Mean?

The results of the first research question illustrate that the majority of transfer students transfer without the associate's degree (77%), but a large proportion of these students do not meet the other two reverse transfer eligibility criteria. This is important to understand because residency requirement policies, which are largely driven by regional accreditors (Taylor & Bragg, 2015), limit reverse transfer eligibility. Similarly, results to the second research question illustrate that a large proportion of potentially eligible students may not be reached because of a cumulative college credit criterion that may be too high.

As Table 1 suggests, most CWID states' cumulative college credit criterion is between 60 and 70 credits, so Colorado is not unique. The likely rationale for this policy is to not overextend resources by only identifying and contacting students who are most likely to meet associate's degree requirements. However, a tradeoff is that this policy may not encourage states and institutions to engage students earlier in their transfer pathway to inform them of the opportunity to receive a reverse transfer associate's degree. With the advancement of automated degree audit systems and technologies (see Taylor & Bragg, 2015), institutions and systems could use these technologies to audit degrees and engage students as they progress through their program of study to ensure they are aware of courses needed to complete the associate's degree requirements. In an ideal model, reverse transfer would be integrated into students' pathways pre-transfer and students would be aware throughout their pathway of the possibility of reverse transfer. In this ideal model students (and advisors) would have a clear understanding of which credits apply toward which degrees and make informed decisions that enhance their degree attainment options.

Table 1. Minimum Eligibility Criteria to Identify Students Potentially Eligible for Reverse Transfer

| State | Criteria on Student Eligibility for Reverse Transfer |
|----------------|--|
| Arkansas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student does not have an earned associate's degree • Student met residency requirement at a participating institution (ranges from 15 to 21 college credits) • Student earned 16 or 17 courses (~45 college credits) toward the associate's degree |
| Colorado | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student does not have an earned associate's degree • Student met residency requirement at a participating community college (≥ 15 college credits) • Student earned ≥ 70 cumulative college credits |
| Florida | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested state criteria: • Student does not have an earned associate's degree • Student met residency requirement at a participating community college (≥ 15 college credits) • Student completed 36 credit hour general education requirements • Student completed ≥ 60 cumulative college credits • Student is in good academic standing at the community college and the university |
| Hawaii | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student does not have an earned associate's degree • Student met residency requirement at a participating community college (≥ 12 college credits) • Student completed ≥ 61 cumulative college credits • Student has ≥ 2.0 GPA from participating community college |
| Maryland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student does not have an earned associate's degree or higher • Student completed ≥ 15 cumulative college credits prior to transfer • Student is in good standing at the 2-year and 4-year institution with a GPA of 2.0 or higher |
| Michigan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No state policy; but institutional residency requirements range from 12 to 45 college credits. |
| Minnesota | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student does not have an earned associate in arts degree • Student met residency requirement at a participating community college (≥ 12 college credits) • Student does not have an academic suspension on record • Student has not applied to graduate with a bachelor's degree |
| Missouri | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student does not have an earned associate's degree • Student met residency requirement at a participating community college (≥ 15 college credits) |
| New York | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student does not have an earned associate's degree • Student earned ≥ 24 college credits at a participating community college and/or met community college residency requirement (varies) |
| North Carolina | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student does not have an earned associate's degree • Student met residency requirement at a participating community college (≥ 16 college credits) • Student transcript evaluation occurs between 50 and 90 cumulative credit hours |
| Ohio | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student does not have an earned associate's degree • Student met residency requirement at a participating community college (≥ 20 college credits) • Student completed ≥ 45 cumulative college credits • Student has ≥ 2.0 GPA from the university • Student enrolled at a university with intended degree of bachelor's |
| Oregon | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No state policy; institutional residency requirement is ≥ 16 semester credits or 24 quarter credits |

References

Garcia, S.A. (2015). *CWID DATA NOTE: Reverse Transfer: The National Landscape*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Taylor, J. L., & Bragg, D. D. (2015, January). *Optimizing reverse transfer policies and processes: Lessons from twelve CWID states*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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About the Authors: Sheena A. Kauppila is a Ph.D. student studying Higher Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Utah. Jason L. Taylor is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Utah and is Co-PI for the Credit When It's Due initiative research.

Suggested Citation

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