Fixing Transfer Barriers During COVID-19

POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

The potential for increased student mobility from the COVID-19 pandemic has refocused attention on the need for institutional leaders and policymakers to take immediate action to improve transfer student outcomes. Any short-term actions should be aligned with longer-term strategies to overcome longstanding impediments to improving degree attainment, advancing racial equity, and bolstering institutional sustainability through transfer-oriented reforms.

With this in mind, the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program asked transfer experts Shanna Smith Jaggars, Marcos Rivera, Bruce Vandal, Lara Couturier, and Juana H. Sanchez to weigh in on how to immediately support transfer students through this turbulent time while simultaneously setting up transfer systems to work better over the long haul. Below is a distillation of their recommendations.

	INSTITUTIONS CAN	POLICYMAKERS CAN
DEMONSTRATE THAT TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS IS A HEIGHTENED PRIORITY	**Include community college transfer students explicitly** in student success and equity agendas for 2020-2121 **Establish a task force** of transfer students, faculty, and administrators with a clear charge to eradicate barriers to transfer student success	**Issue a joint statement** from state, system, and postsecondary leaders that says supporting students through transfer is a core priority during (and after) the COVID-19 pandemic **Establish a statewide transfer commission** and relevant working groups to identify both immediate and longer-term barriers and solutions to transfer through an equity lens
DESIGN ACADEMIC POLICIES TO BETTER FACILITATE TRANSFER SUCCESS	**Institute a university-wide guarantee** that all academic programs will not penalize transfer students who took credits on a pass-fail basis because of COVID-19 and will apply those credits to academic major requirements in an equitable way Immediately start the process of **devising** (or comprehensively reviewing) **program maps** for the three highest-volume transfer programs **Identify one or two programs with strong community college transfer partnerships as potential pilots for dual enrollment programs**; start by authorizing program staff and deans to initiate a review of relevant program maps and identify practices or policies that may require revision to move forward with a pilot	**Apply all credits recognized within 2+2 articulation agreements**, regardless of whether students complete the full set of courses within the transfer agreement before transferring **Waive residency requirements** that require students to complete a certain number of credits at an institution to receive a degree or credential from that institution Require community colleges and four-year institutions to i**dentify and communicate a set of 10 transferable courses** within the top 10 programs into which students typically transfer that will be accepted and applied, regardless of whether letter grades or pass-fail grades were earned, for students who transfer between spring 2020 and (at least) fall 2021

ACTIVATE CLEAR AND CONCISE COMMUNICATION TO STUDENTS ON TRANSFER POLICY AND PATHWAYS CHANGES	**INSTITUTIONS CAN**	**POLICYMAKERS CAN**
	Address student uncertainty by providing clear, consistent, and up-to-date information to advisors—at the institution and partner community colleges—about changes in transfer policy, through formal training or user-friendly documentation regarding key changes	**Clearly document and communicate any COVID-19-related changes** to academic policies and practices, such as changes to admission requirements, placement processes, or grading options, to institution leaders, student support professionals, students, and families
	Appoint a transfer specialist working across the colleges who can build relationships with advisors; ensure that transfer-related training or documentation is updated, accessible, and consistent across programs; and help align information, processes, and services for transfer students	**Initiate a statewide/systemwide student outreach campaign**
	Engage staff and faculty across the university in the development and communication of transfer practice and policy changes to mitigate potential barriers during implementation	**Fund a statewide/systemwide professional development campaign to train advisors and faculty** on culturally responsive practices to support students during COVID-19 and beyond
MODIFY DATA AND TECHNOLOGY STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS	**Develop and incorporate flags within student information systems** that identify transfer students and note whether they transferred from a community college or a four-year institution	**Enact auto-renewal for state financial aid applications** and ensure continuing students do not have to reapply for aid when they move across institutions, thereby reducing administrative barriers and delays for students
	Use this information to **understand where and how transfer students may be underrepresented** in academic programs and other key experiences, such as undergraduate research or internships	**Explore how existing technology systems could support automated evaluation of credit** during the COVID-19 response period (e.g., digital transcript exchanges, degree audit systems that facilitate reverse transfer, and initiatives that identify efficient paths to credential completion for students with some college credits)

Alongside other policy and practice recommendations contained in the briefs, these ideas make clear that there is plenty that institutional leaders and policymakers can do right now to improve transfer students' experiences and, ultimately, their success. So much has already been disrupted for students in their academic and personal lives. Implemented together, these ideas can help establish the certainty, support, and transparency students need and improve their chance at success—and as a result, drive economic recovery for years to come.

Access the full briefs at **http://highered.aspeninstitute.org/next-generation-transfer**.