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Executive Summary

Transfer of credit between colleges and universities in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system is an issue that precedes the system itself. Creation of the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC) was a significant step in 1994 toward easing credit transfer for students attending state colleges and universities. However, whether reflective of changing need, an increase in credit transfer or changing student expectations, the issue of easy-to-navigate transfer of credits among MnSCU institutions has again become visible.

After a recent increase of expressed concern among students, the Minnesota State College Student Association (MSCSA) and the Minnesota State University Student Association (MSUSA) approached the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), Office of the Chancellor to conduct a comprehensive survey of transfer students to determine what barriers might hinder seamless transfer.

Key Findings:

- Although a majority of respondents rated their transfer experience positively, one-third rated the experience as fair or poor.
- A large majority of respondents indicated that their transfer experience met or exceeded their expectations, but one-fourth said it did not meet their expectations, regardless of whether they were transferring Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC) credits or program/major credits.
- By far, the most common type of credits respondents reported transferring were within the MnTC, followed by major or program credits.
- A significant number of respondents did not seek advice in the transfer process.
- Many respondents planned for transfer too late in the process to make good decisions.
- While a large number of respondents used online resources in their transfer planning, they are much more likely to use institution websites than system online resources.
- 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.
- Many respondents who were not able to transfer credits as they expected reported that credits were accepted as electives rather than as intended major requirements.
- The majority of respondents are unaware that an appeals process exists for transfer decisions.
- For the few respondents who appealed when courses did not transfer, a high number of them had some or all credits accepted upon appeal.

Summary of Recommendations:

- Develop uniform and on-going education for staff who train advisors
- Clarify the use of syllabi, course outlines, or other course equivalency documents
- Review messaging around effective transfer within the MnSCU system and elsewhere
- Improve marketing of electronic planning tools and provide better student training in the use of these tools in transfer planning
- Explore barriers to credit transfer that result in appealed transfer credits that were initially rejected
- Work to advise students of the appeals process, and monitor appeals and their results at the system level to help identify future issues
- Increase central office staff to more adequately meet transfer goals
- Assure accuracy of and compliance with equivalency data in electronic tools
- Evaluate the complexity of the current transfer system and engage in ongoing improvement
- Engage in a study session on transfer mechanisms nationally, and review models that could be used in Minnesota
- Implement systematic monitoring of transfer data as a part of the Board of Trustees' annual work plan
- Include a measure of transfer on the system's accountability dashboard

Background

Transfer of credit between colleges and universities in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system is an issue that precedes the system itself. Prior to the creation of the MnSCU system, the legislature recognized the importance of creating degree pathways between two-year colleges and four-year institutions, directing public institutions to create a “transfer curriculum.” The Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC) was developed in 1994 as a general education agreement around ten goal areas. Transfer was also a primary reason for the legislative merger of colleges and universities in the creation of the MnSCU system in 1995.

The Minnesota State College Student Association (MSCSA) began to hear pronounced student concerns regarding transfer beginning around 2006. In 2007, the Board of Trustees asked MSCSA to identify the “top three” issues facing students in the future as part of the Board’s planning for 2020. MSCSA President Scott Formo mentioned seamless transfer as one of those “top three” issues. Staff within the Office of the Chancellor began to work with the student associations at that time to improve communication on transfer across the system. This led to a “revamp” of the www.mntransfer.org website and joint presentations at MnSCU conferences. The Office of the Chancellor, MSCSA, and the Minnesota State University Student Association (MSUSA) presented jointly at the system’s conference for Chief Academic Officers/Deans, Transfer Specialists conference, the system’s Multiculturalism and Student Services conference, and the Realizing Student Potential conference. MSCSA continued to work with their student membership to identify specific transfer concerns through roundtable discussions and trainings.

In the spring of 2009, MSCSA students led a “transfer hotline” campaign across the system’s two-year college campuses to identify problems students encounter in navigating the current transfer system set up within the MnSCU system. The purpose of the campaign was to gauge, through specific student experiences, where in the transfer process students faced continuing difficulty, in the hopes that solutions could be identified that could be implemented system-wide to improve the rate of successful seamless transfer. This “hotline,” established at the MSCSA office, offered students at any college in the MnSCU system the opportunity to call or email MSCSA to share their experiences with the transfer process. Staff from MSCSA tracked, collected, and responded to the student participants. The “hotline” was marketed on campus through student senates, and posters and business cards were disseminated on campuses. Some senates tabled for the campaign, gave class “raps,” or provided the materials to academic advisors and transfer specialists to distribute. The campaign ran from January to May 2009, resulting in approximately 30 student responses from ten colleges across the state.

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 during the 2009-2010 year. MSUSA conducted roundtable discussions and trainings with their student memberships throughout the fall. MSCSA and MSUSA also joined together to research student concerns about credit transfer, probing into student concerns gathered anecdotally through the “transfer hotline.” To further this research, MSCSA and MSUSA sought assistance from the Chancellor’s office to conduct a more comprehensive survey of transfer students to determine what barriers might hinder seamless transfer.

Responsibility

The student leadership of MSCSA and MSUSA approached Chancellor McCormick in the fall of 2009 and asked for assistance in conducting a student survey around credit transfer. The Chancellor agreed to provide staff resources to assist in the development, administration, and analysis of the survey. Office of the Chancellor staff involved in the survey included Mike Lopez, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Leslie Mercer, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research, Planning and Effectiveness, Louise Hoxworth, Director for Collaboration and Transfer, Craig Schoenecker, System Director of Research, Nancy Bunnett, Program Director for Planning, and Michelle Blaney, Online Technologist for Minnesota Online. The survey was conducted using RightNow Customer Relations Management software and administered through the Distance Minnesota office of Minnesota State Community and Technical College.

The survey questions were developed by the student associations, with input from the Office of the Chancellor and other constituent groups. The questions were developed around patterns and issues identified through the MSCSA “transfer hotline” and MSUSA’s discussions with student leadership. These topics included: accuracy of transfer information and advice given to students, marketing of the availability of both campus and system level appeals processes, use of electronic resources, student expectations, use of academic advising throughout a student’s program, and the overall complexity of the transfer process. The survey questions were revised with input from Office of the Chancellor staff, the Transfer Oversight Committee, and the Transfer Advisory Group. Survey topics were also shared with faculty at the 2010 Realizing Student Potential conference and with IFO and MSCF leadership.

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Methodology

The survey was sent to a random sample of 9,878 transfer students who transferred credits into any institution in the system during the fall semester of 2008 (fiscal year 2009). The total universe of students who transferred credits into the system during fiscal year 2009 was approximately 26,000. An invitation to participate and a link to the survey was sent to students at their college or university email addresses. The survey was open from January 22, 2010 through March 1, 2010. A pre-survey email was sent to the student sample on January 19, an email with the survey link was sent on January 22, and two reminder e-mails were sent on February 8 and February 22.

Survey Topics

The survey asked students about the following topics:

- The types of institution students transferred credits to and from
- The types of degree or credential students completed prior to transfer
- Time elapsed between students' previous attendance in college and transfer
- When students began to plan for transfer
- The amount and types of credits students attempted to transfer
- The number of colleges or universities that students had attended prior to transfer
- Knowledge of, frequency of use, and results of the campus and system appeals processes
- Use of electronic tools in transfer planning
- Where students get advice
- How prior credits earned transferred for students (as major requirements, electives, etc.)
- How well transfer experiences match the expectations of students
- Satisfaction with the overall transfer experience

Results

There were a total of 1,023 completed student surveys for response, for a response rate around 10%.

The overall surveys sent and responses were as follows:

- 9,878 surveys were sent
- 9,843 surveys were delivered successfully
- 3,487 recipients opened the email
- 1,167 recipients clicked the survey link
- 1,146 surveys were started
- 1,023 surveys were completed

Demographic information on survey respondents was compared to the characteristics of all transfer students. Overall, in terms of demographic characteristics, the respondents were similar to the population of transfer students.

There were, however, several differences between the survey respondents and transfer students. First, respondents were much more likely to transfer to a university (64%) than the general transfer population (43%). Respondents also transferred more credits (43 on average) compared to other transfer students (39 on average). Similarly, respondents also transferred records from more institutions. 43% of respondents attended three or more institutions compared with 33% of transfer students generally. Survey respondents, therefore, presented somewhat more complicated transfer profiles than all transfers into the MnSCU system, perhaps adding to their ability to identify problems that could be addressed to improve transfer for all students.

Survey Findings

Demographics

Type of Institution

Approximately half of survey respondents transfer within the MnSCU system. Students transfer into both four-year and two-year institutions.

Of the survey respondents, 72% transferred from a college or university within Minnesota, and 28% transferred from a college or university outside of Minnesota.

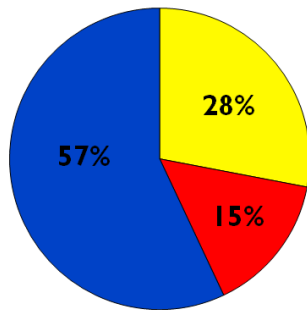
Fifty-seven percent transferred within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system: 23% transferred from a state community college, 14% from a state community & technical college, 14% from a state university, and 6% from a technical college. 15% of the respondents transferred most recently from the University of Minnesota or a Minnesota private college or career school.

Sixty-four percent of respondents indicated that they had most recently transferred to a state university, 15% to a community college, 13% to a community & technical college, and 8% to a technical college.

Nearly half of respondents (45.3%) indicated that they did not consider any other colleges or universities other than their current institution when transferring.

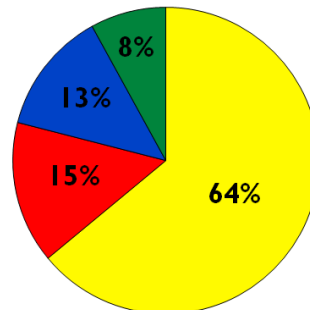
Respondents Transfer Patterns

Transfer From



- Outside Minnesota
- Within Minnesota but not the system
- Within the system

Transfer To



- State University
- Community College
- Community & Technical College
- Technical College

Degree Completion Prior to Transfer

The majority of respondents did not complete a degree prior to transfer.

Fifty-seven percent of respondents did not complete a degree, certificate or diploma prior to transfer of credits. 17% completed an Associate in Arts (A.A.) degree, a degree intended to transfer toward a bachelor's degree. Completing an A.A. degree was more common among respondents transferring within Minnesota.

Six percent of all respondents completed an Associate in Applied Science degree, 7% completed an Associate in Science degree, 7% completed a bachelor's degree, and 6% completed a certificate or diploma prior to transfer.

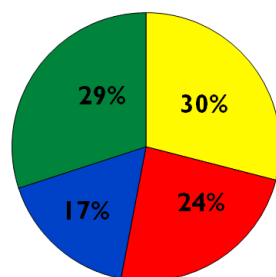
Completion of Minnesota Transfer Curriculum

Respondents who completed the MnTC prior to transferring were more likely to be satisfied with their transfer experience than other respondents.

Thirty percent of respondents indicated that they had completed the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum prior to transferring to their current college or university, and 24% indicated that they had completed some MnTC courses or goal areas. 17% stated that they did not complete the MnTC, and 29% stated that they did not know whether they had completed the MnTC.

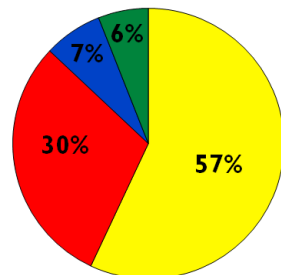
After breaking the data down further, 34% of respondents who transferred from a college or university in Minnesota indicated that they had completed the MnTC, and 27% did not know whether they had completed the MnTC. In addition, respondents who completed the MnTC prior to transferring were more likely to be satisfied with their transfer experience. Although not all programs require the completion of the MnTC, it is important that students are well-informed about this degree requirement and its transferability.

Completion of Transfer Curriculum and/or Degree



Completion of MnTC prior to transfer

- Completed prior to transfer
- Completed some courses/goals
- Did not complete
- Did not know whether completed



Degree completion prior to transfer

- Did not complete degree/certificate/diploma
- Associate
- Bachelor's
- Certificate/diploma

Continuous Enrollment Prior to Transfer

The majority of respondents transferred within a year of attending their previous college or university.

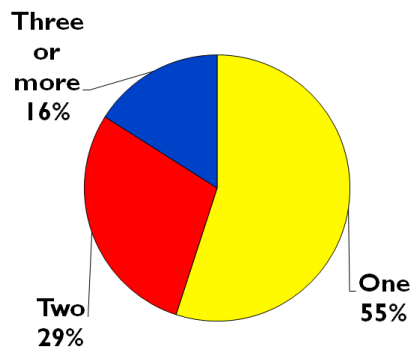
Nearly two-thirds of respondents (66%) transferred within one year or less after leaving their previous college or university. Eight-nine percent attempted to transfer credits within five years of attending their previous institution. Seven percent of respondents had a time lapse of more than ten years in their enrollment prior to transfer.

Number of Institutions Attended

While half of respondents attended only one institution prior to transfer, many transferred credits from multiple institutions.

Approximately half (55%) of respondents have attended only one institution prior to transfer, reflecting typical assumptions about transfer students. However, the other half attended at least two institutions prior to transfer to their current institution. Twenty-nine percent attended two prior institutions, 11% attended three prior institutions, and 5% attended four or more institutions prior to attendance at their current institution. Students who attended only one institution prior to transfer were more likely to be satisfied with their transfer experience than other respondents.

Number Sending Institutions



Student Satisfaction and Expectations

Transfer of General Education/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum

While a majority of respondents indicated that transfer of general education/MnTC met or exceeded expectations, nearly one-quarter stated it was below expectations.

When asked how transfer of general education/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum credits compared to their expectations, 11% of respondents stated that it was above expectations, 65% stated that their experience met their expectations, and 24% stated that it was below expectations. Respondents transferring from institutions

outside Minnesota were slightly more likely to indicate that transfer of general education credits was below expectations.

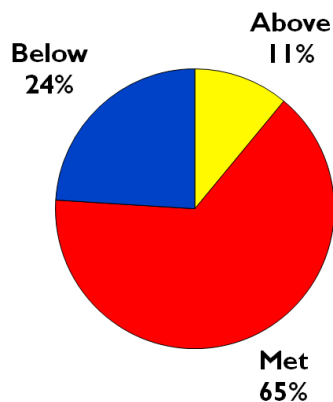
Transfer of Credits Outside General Education/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum

Transfer of credits compared to expectations was fairly similar regardless of the type of credit transferred.

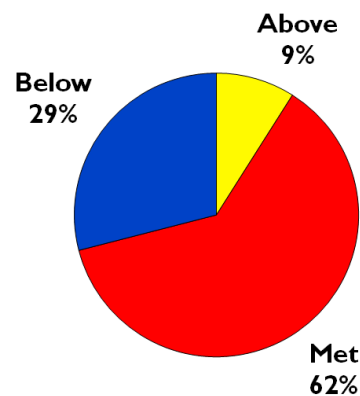
When asked how transfer of credits other than general education/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum credits compared to their expectations, 9% of respondents stated that it was above expectations, 62% stated that it met their expectations, and 29% stated that it was below expectations.

Transfer of Credits Compared to Expectations by Type

Transfer of MnTC & General Ed. Credits



Transfer of Program & Major Credits



Ease of Transfer

The majority of respondents indicated that credit transfer met their expectations or was easier than expected, but one-fourth stated it was more difficult than they expected.

Respondents were asked how easy it was to transfer credits compared to their expectations. Forty-six percent indicated that it met their expectations, and 28% indicated that it was easier than expected. However, 26% indicated that transfer of credits was more difficult than expected.

Respondents who transferred from Minnesota's state colleges were more likely than respondents who transferred from state universities to indicate that transfer of credits was easier than expected, with 30% of college respondents stating that it was easier than expected compared to 23% of university respondents.

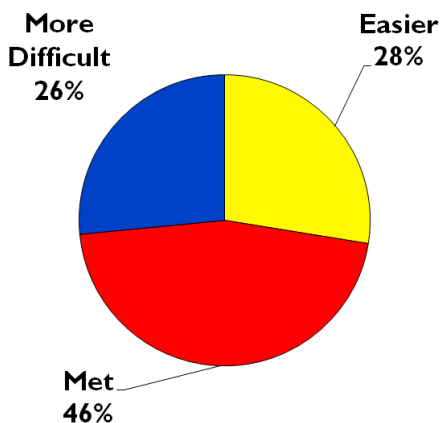
Note that the survey tool did not test what respondents' expectations were, but instead relied upon the respondents to assess their own expectations. The intent was to assess how well their expectations were met, and further research would be needed to define those expectations.

Overall Satisfaction

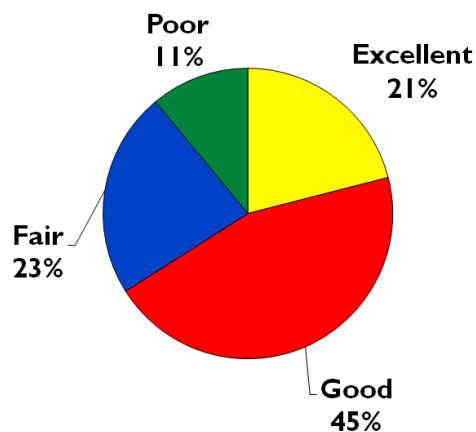
A majority of respondents rated their overall satisfaction with their transfer experience positively, but approximately one-third rated it as fair or poor.

Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their transfer experience. Twenty-one percent rated their transfer experience as excellent, 45% as good, 23% as fair, and 11% rated their transfer experience as poor. It is important to work toward continuous improvement to improve student satisfaction regarding credit transfer.

Ease of Transfer Compared to Expectations



Overall Satisfaction



Planning and Advising

Seeking of Advice

Forty percent of respondents did not seek advice when planning for transfer.

Of the respondents, 60% stated that they sought advice regarding the transfer of their credits, while 40% indicated they did not seek advice. Among respondents who sought advice at their last college or university, Sixty-nine percent went to a counselor/advisor, 22% to an admissions counselor, 20% to a registrar, 17% to a faculty advisor, and 6% to another faculty member. Ten percent of those who sought advice did so only at their current college or university. Eleven percent sought advice from friends, family or fellow students, and 3% cited other.

Respondents indicated that only 25% of admissions counselors referred them to another employee for advice about transfer, as did 30% of faculty advisors and 26% of other faculty members. Thirty-eight percent of friends, family and fellow students referred respondents to an employee who could provide advice regarding transfer.

Transfer Planning Timeline and Frequency

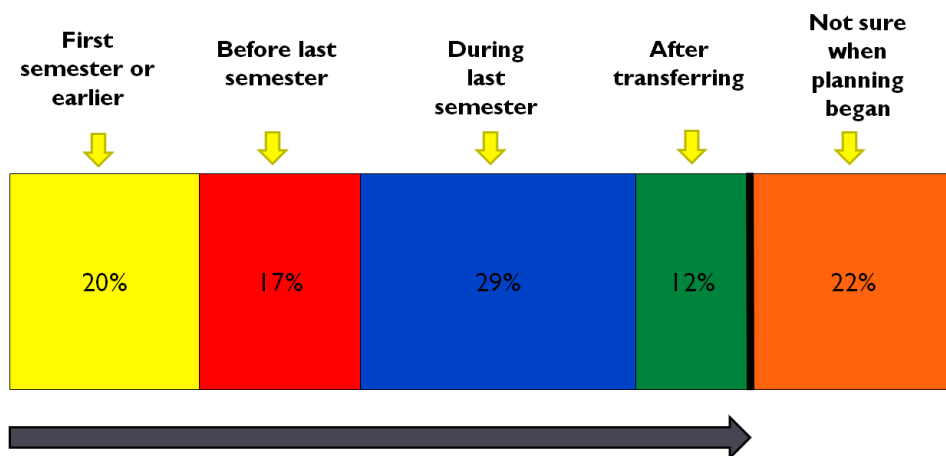
Early planning may impact whether students' expectations are met during transfer.

While 20% of respondents began actively planning for transfer before or during their first semester at their last college or university, 29% did not begin planning for transfer until one semester before they planned to transfer, and 12% stated they did not begin planning until after they were already enrolled in their current college or university. Seventeen percent began planning after their first semester but before their last, and 22% indicated that they were not sure when active planning began. Respondents who transferred within the state of Minnesota were slightly more likely to plan earlier.

Of those respondents who met with staff or faculty at their last college or university regarding transfer, 50% met with staff or faculty at least once each semester, 23% met at least once per year, and 27% met less than once per year.

Early planning correlated positively with respondents noting that their expectations were met or exceeded during transfer. However, simply seeking advice did not improve the meeting of respondent expectations. Many respondents were either not seeking advice at all, or were seeking advice too late to make a real impact on their course selection prior to transfer. It is essential that information regarding transfer is available when students need it, and that the importance of early planning is emphasized.

Planning & Advising: Timing on Planning for Transfer



Online Transfer Resources

Use of Online Resources

The majority of respondents used online resources during their transfer experience.

Sixty-three percent of respondents indicated that they utilized online resources to assist them during their transfer experience, while 37% indicated they did not use online resources.

Types of Online Resources

Respondents most frequently used college and university websites as online resources for transfer.

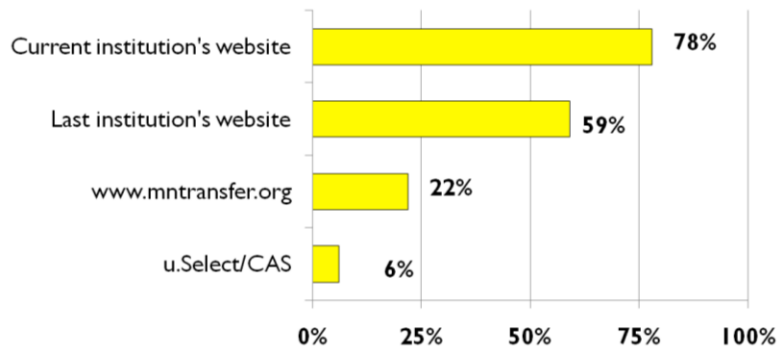
Respondents who used online transfer resources were asked to identify the resources they used. Online resources offered by individual institutions were the most common response, with 78% indicating use of the website of the college/university they currently attend and 59% indicating use of the website of the college/university they last attended. Fewer respondents turned to online resources sponsored by the MnSCU system: 22% of respondents indicated use of the website at www.mntransfer.org, and 6% indicated use of u.Select/CAS. Two percent indicated use of other online resources.

It is clear from the responses that students are much more likely to depend on the information on college and university websites than to seek out other system sources of information online. However, the online tools that have been created at the system level can be a very useful resource for students planning for transfer. It is essential, then, that colleges and universities ensure that information and links to system resources are widely available on their websites.

In addition, it is essential that information available to students and advisors regarding course equivalencies is accurate, updated and available via online resources, and that this information is available to students when they need it to determine which courses to register for and to prove course equivalency during transfer.

Use of Online Transfer Resources

- ▶ 63% of respondents used online resources during transfer
- ▶ Type of resources included:



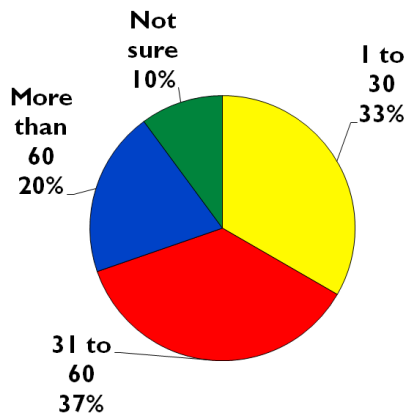
Transfer of Credits

Total Number of Credits Transferred

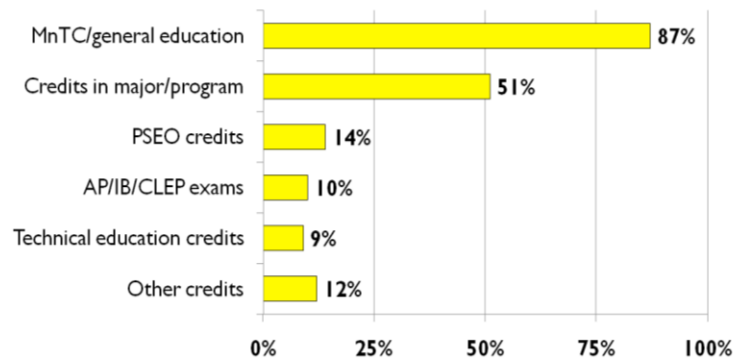
Respondents are attempting to transfer a wide span of credits.

Sixteen percent of respondents attempted to transfer 1 to 15 credits. 17% had 16-30 credits, 12% had 31-45 credits, 25% had 46-60 credits, and 20% attempted to transfer more than 75 credits. Ten percent of respondents weren't sure how many credits they had attempted to transfer.

Number of Credits



Types of Transfer Credits



Type of Transfer Credits

The most common type of credits respondents attempted to transfer was credits in general education/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum, followed by credits in a major/program.

Respondents were asked to identify the type of credit they attempted to transfer. Eighty-seven percent attempted to transfer general education/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum credits, and 51% attempted to transfer credits in their major/program. In addition, 14% attempted to transfer PSEO credits and 10% attempted to receive credit for course requirements met by AP, IB or CLEP exams. Nine percent attempted to transfer technical credits, 2% attempted to transfer military credits, 2% international credits, and 12% of credits identified as other.

Regardless of where they transferred from and to, the most common type of credits respondents attempted to transfer was general education/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum, followed by credits in a major/program. In addition, many respondents are transferring a large number of credits, but many are not completing a degree or the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum prior to transfer. In fact, only one-third of respondents transferring 46 credits or more indicated that they had completed the MnTC prior to transfer.

Of the respondents who stated that transfer was more difficult than expected, 26% were attempting to transfer general education/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum credits, and 32% were attempting to transfer credits in a major/program. In addition, respondents who transferred from technical colleges were more likely to indicate that general education/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum credits transferred below their expectations. This may indicate a need for more clarity and definition within the term “general education” as it is used at technical colleges, as respondents may not draw a distinction between MnTC courses and other general education courses that do not transfer in a similar manner.

Reasons for Transfer Decision

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.

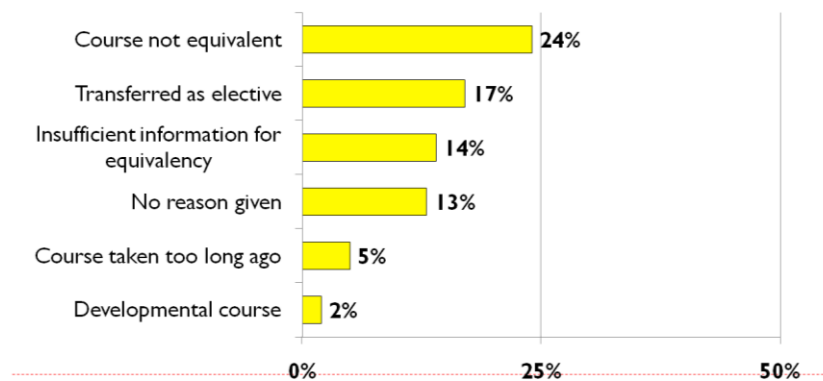
Respondents were asked to identify the reason(s) given for a decision not to initially accept credits in transfer as they expected. Twenty-four percent stated that a course was not deemed to be equivalent to the required course, 17% indicated that credits transferred in as an elective rather than a major requirement, 14% stated that there was

not enough information to prove course equivalency, 5% stated the course was taken too long ago, 4% stated that there was no articulation agreement available between programs, and 2% stated that the credits were developmental or remedial credits.

Of those respondents who indicated that they had begun planning for transfer before or during their first semester at their last college/university, 20% of respondents indicated that a course was not deemed to be equivalent, 16% had credits transferred in as an elective instead of a major requirement, and 8% indicated that there wasn't enough information to prove course equivalency. Only half of the respondents who did early planning indicated that their courses transferred as expected. It is concerning that even respondents who planned early still did not have the accurate information necessary to either make appropriate decisions or prove course equivalency. It is important that proof of course equivalencies is easy to access for students and advisors, as well as those evaluating transcripts. It is also important that the credits students take prior to transfer are meaningful and are not simply counted as elective credits rather than toward the intended major requirements at the receiving institution.

Reasons that Credits Didn't Transfer as Expected

- ▶ 47% of respondents reported credits transferred as expected
- ▶ Reasons credits didn't transfer as expected:



Appeals

Knowledge of Campus Appeals Process

Two-thirds of respondents were not aware of the credit transfer appeal process.

Respondents who indicated that their credits did not initially transfer as expected were asked whether they were aware of an appeals process at their current college or university. Only 33% indicated that they did know about an appeals process, while 67% indicated that they did not know about an appeals process. Awareness of a system appeals process that could be pursued if the outcome of the institutional appeals process was unsatisfactory was even less common.

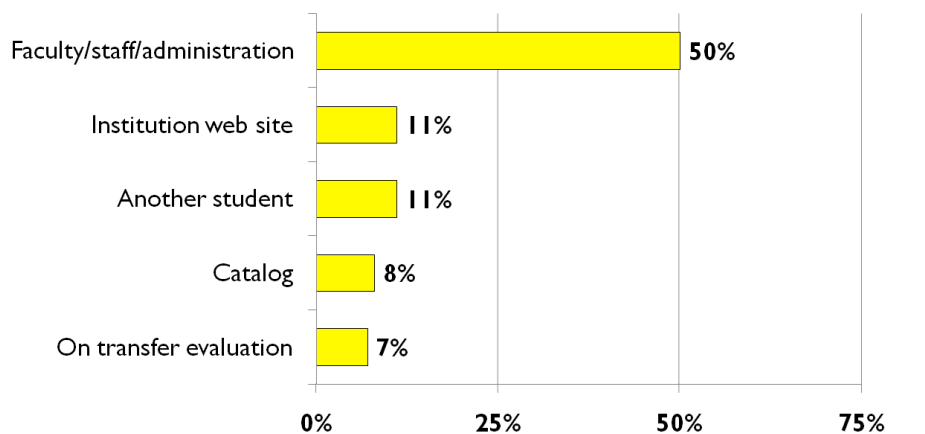
Source of Information

Respondents learn about the appeals process from a variety of sources.

Respondents who were aware of the college or university appeals process were asked how they learned about it. Fifty percent heard about it from faculty, staff or administrators on their campus, 11% stated it was on their college or university website, 11% heard about from another student, 8% stated that it was in the college or university course catalog, and 7% stated that it was on their credit transfer evaluation. The one respondent who indicated knowledge of the system appeals process learned about it on the college or university website. Providing information about appeals in a variety of ways, including as a part of the credit transfer evaluation, will help ensure awareness of the appeals process.

Awareness of Appeals Process

- ▶ 67% were not aware of appeals process
- ▶ 33% of respondents who were aware learned about process from:



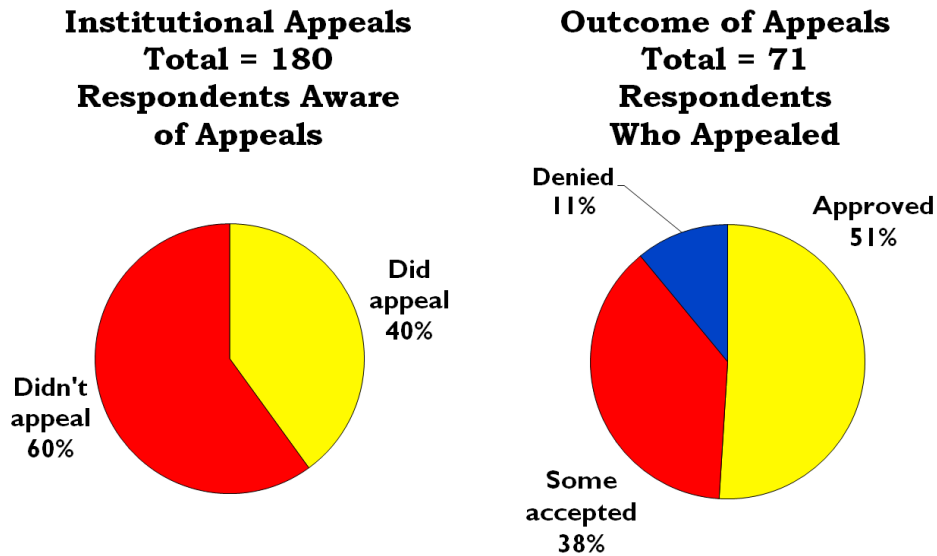
Result of Appeal

Respondents who appeal transfer decisions are largely successful, with almost 90% having at least some credits accepted on appeal.

Of those respondents who were aware of an appeals process, 40% appealed a transfer decision. Of those, 89% had at least some credits accepted (51% indicated that their appeal was approved, and 38% indicated that some credits were accepted and some were denied.) Eleven percent of appeals were denied.

The high rate of success on appeal raises questions regarding initial decisions made when evaluating transcripts. Additional research is recommended to evaluate this process and determine changes that can be made to reduce the need to appeal transfer evaluations.

Appeals and Outcomes

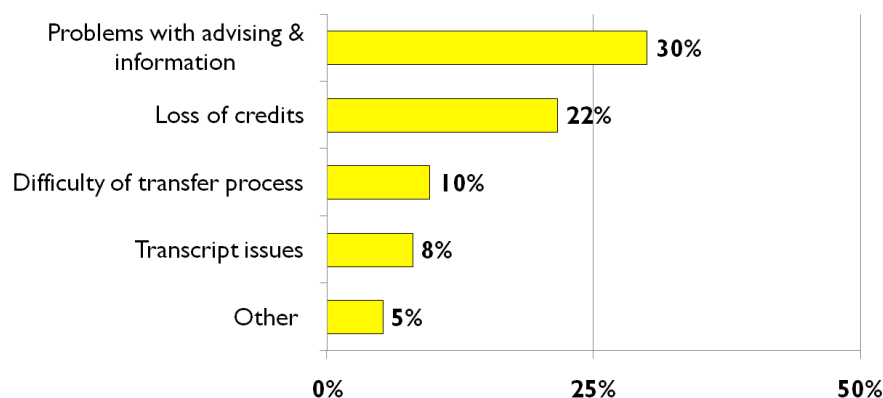


Student Comments

Respondents who completed the survey had the opportunity to make comments about their transfer experiences at the end of the survey. 250 respondents provided comments, with 19% providing positive comments and 74% indicating detailed concerns in a variety of areas (a few additional comments were on the survey in general or miscellaneous topics). The categories of complaints included problems with advising and information, loss of credits, difficulty of the transfer process, and transcript issues.

Comments on Transfer and Process

- ▶ 24% of respondents (250) provided comments
 - ▶ 19% were positive comments about transfer
 - ▶ 74% were complaints about the following aspects of transfer



Recommendations

The following reflect recommendations for further work on credit transfer in several areas based on survey findings. These recommendations are presented to Minnesota State Colleges and Universities by the Minnesota State College Student Association and the Minnesota State University Student Association.

Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC)

- Develop uniform and on-going education for staff who train advisors

Course Equivalencies and Acceptance of Credit

- Clarify the use of syllabi, course outlines, or other course equivalency documents

Transfer Information and Resources

- Review messaging around effective transfer within the MnSCU system and elsewhere
- Improve marketing of electronic planning tools and provide better student training in the use of these tools in transfer planning
- Explore barriers to credit transfer that result in appealed transfer credits that were initially rejected
- Work to advise students of the appeals process, and monitor appeals and their results at the system level to help identify future issues
- Increase central office staff to more adequately meet transfer goals

Transfer Tools and Data Entry

- Assure accuracy of and compliance with equivalency data in electronic tools

Accountability

- Evaluate the complexity of the current transfer system and engage in ongoing improvement
- Engage in a study session on transfer mechanisms nationally, and review models that could be used in Minnesota
- Implement systematic monitoring of transfer data as a part of the Board of Trustees' annual work plan
- Include a measure of transfer on the system's accountability dashboard

Minnesota Transfer Curriculum

The student associations recommend that the Office of the Chancellor work to develop uniform, compulsory and on-going education for staff who train faculty and staff who advise students academically. This training could include a standardized training curriculum, an advising checklist, or other ways that transfer staff can assess the success of advising. Furthermore, well-trained transfer specialists on each campus could provide system staff with a clear understanding of who is doing advising in order to facilitate better communication and opportunities for training for individual advisors or faculty members.

Course Equivalencies and Acceptance of Credit

The student associations recommend that the Board clarify and direct the usage of a document that all institutions will find sufficient to determine whether a course is equivalent. Whether this is a course outline, a syllabus, or a completely new template document, statewide agreement on the definition, use, and sufficiency of course information will ensure that students are not stuck in the "catch 22" of not having enough information to receive credit at their new institution.

Transfer Information and Resources

The survey made clear that students need to take responsibility and plan effectively for transfer. Increased training, improved tools, and better access to information will help inform students, but the associations also recommend that the Board review the messaging around transfer, both within the MnSCU system and at

competing institutions. The way in which transfer is framed may set up student expectations, which should align with the reality of transfer as much as possible.

The student associations also recommend that in-person and online advising tools, resources, and planning information should be better marketed to students, and consistent student training opportunities ensure that students are acclimated to using these tools successfully. Also, because the academic plans of students are often changing, this training should occur through multiple channels throughout a students' academic career, taking a "just in time" approach to transfer advising. Information on transfer should be highly visible on campus and online, including information explaining how degree choice and articulation agreements can affect transfer. Ensuring clear, complete, and accessible information will help to inform students so that they can make responsible academic decisions.

Transfer Tools and Data Entry

In order to ensure transfer information is meeting student needs, the associations recommend that the marketing and dissemination of information undergo periodic evaluation. Evaluation should extend to all electronic tools and information, including U-Select and any type of graduation planning tool or course equivalency platform that arises from the Students First initiative. Another recommendation is that the system work to improve the functionality of U-Select by allowing the import of data from DARS, as well as the import of student coursework from ISRS. Additionally, the accuracy of electronic tools is essential to their usefulness; the student associations recommend that the system work to assure both accuracy and compliance with the equivalencies established and published in electronic tools.

There is also an opportunity for the Board to take immediate action to ensure accountability within the campus and system appeals processes. The survey illustrated that the majority of students are not aware of their right to appeal transfer decisions at the college or university level, much less to the system office. The Board should discuss how these appeals mechanisms can be better communicated to students. More importantly, however, the Board should create a mechanism for monitoring the frequency of appeals and the results of appeals in order to establish a baseline for how transfer decisions are made throughout the system. This will assist the Board in identifying patterns of course applicability. The associations also recommend that the Board engage in an evaluation of the transcript review process in order to identify barriers that result in courses that are initially rejected being successfully appealed.

The current number of staff dedicated to transfer and collaboration centrally is also inadequate. Although the economic climate creates obstacles to hiring more central staff, the issue of transfer of credit is an essential centralized academic function of the system and should have staffing levels commensurate with transfer's importance and complexity. The student associations recommend that the Office of the Chancellor consider adding staff to meet the significant work involved with accomplishing continuous improvement in credit transfer. Increasing the system's capacity to enhance transfer and collaboration within the system would support the recommendations and findings throughout this report. These staffing levels will also help support the transfer activities of staff and faculty on campus, from advising to ensuring integrity of transfer data.

Accountability

The student associations believe that the results of the survey demonstrate a need to re-examine the complexity of the current transfer system to investigate whether or not a more easily-navigable and efficient system could be developed. As a large comprehensive system with the need to create efficiencies due to continuously decreasing state funding, the MnSCU system is in an ideal position to think boldly and take swift action to become a national leader in the transfer of credit. The student associations encourage the Board to look at ways of aligning curriculum to pare down the complexity of the transfer system while maintaining high-quality educational outcomes. Opportunities for alignment that could be discussed include a move to core competencies, statewide articulation, the expansion of major pathways, uniform course numbering/naming, etc. Some of these ideas may not be workable in Minnesota or may be burdensome in implementation. However, just because the task may be difficult does not mean it is not worth a thoughtful conversation and determination about the value to the MnSCU system.

The associations recommend that the Board conduct a study session or series of conversations about other transfer mechanisms that could be implemented over time including articulation councils, systemwide articulation, or the provision of a written transfer “guarantee.” Students expect the additional 20 credits they take beyond the transfer curriculum within an A.A. degree program to be meaningful. In the mid-nineties, the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC) was an innovative step and an effective tool to manage transfer around general education, but education continues to change and continuous improvement should be the goal.

Transfer is an issue that requires ongoing efforts in continuous improvement and long-term planning to meet student and business needs. However, as a core function of the MnSCU system, transfer should be monitored in a systematic way. The student associations recommend that frequent, systematic data collection around the success of transfer be implemented within the system. Further discussion should determine what transfer data should be collected annually and reported to the Board. It is also recommended that transfer be added as a component on the accountability dashboard. Reporting to the Board on transfer data regularly will help to identify areas of ongoing concern and guide decision-making around improvements.

Conclusions

Seamless, easily-navigable pathways for credit transfer matter. Transfer is also complex; it involves balancing the curricular expertise of faculty, quality educational outcomes, and the unique programs offered by our colleges and universities with student and state desires for minimal credit loss in transfer and seamless direct pathways to baccalaureate degrees and occupational programs. Though it may be difficult, this balance is essential to the maintenance of vibrant, quality education in Minnesota. Transfer is not just about the tuition or time it takes to complete additional coursework, and it is certainly not about strangling the pedagogical choices of faculty or program offerings of colleges and universities. It is instead about assuaging the very real fears of Minnesota's citizens that we will not have enough college graduates in the future to keep this state economically strong.

The system cannot afford to allow stagnation in credit transfer; the focus must be on continuous improvement to remain competitive in the higher education landscape. Transfer speaks to effectively serving the diverse and changing population in Minnesota. Seamless transfer affects low-income, first generation, and students of color most of all, as they constitute a significant portion of two-year college enrollees. With well-established but flexible pathways for two-year students to four-year degrees, low-income Minnesotans can access college, will be encouraged to stay in college, transfer within the public higher education system, and graduate as quickly as possible.

Flexibility in academic planning is also essential to students. Today's students have changing expectations. Transfer is no longer what A.A. graduates do; it is what students in every program and on every career path do. Students are attending multiple institutions concurrently, and transferring between colleges and universities in both technical and liberal arts programs. Students, especially nontraditional students, have enough obstacles in going to college. Many have families to support financially while they pursue education. Some have children to find caretakers for while they are in class. There are financial barriers as students incur more and more of the cost burden of higher education in Minnesota. Many returning students are intimidated by assessment tests and getting back into the "swing" of coursework. Some students have language or cultural barriers to overcome. Traditional students grapple with college-level coursework and perhaps living away from home for the first time. All of these students deserve to have all the tools available to them to be successful, and this includes access to seamless transfer planned with the assistance of well-trained advising staff and faculty from the beginning of a student's academic career.

In addition to the ease a seamless system creates, such a system also saves money. Students save money as they pay only for the classes they need, and pay for them only once. They also save the costs associated with deferred graduation, both in additional tuition dollars and the cost of their delayed entrance or return to the state's workforce. Significantly, the state also saves money when transfer is consistent and uncomplicated. Although the state no longer appropriates two-thirds of the cost of a public higher education in Minnesota, taxpayers are still support around 50 percent of this cost. If students can graduate in fewer semesters, with fewer credits, the state saves this educational cost and can thus spread accessible higher educational opportunities to more citizens. When students stay in school for longer periods, the state does not receive the same economic benefits of these students in the workforce.

Appendix – Student Transfer Survey Tool

In an effort to improve course transfer at our state colleges and universities, the Minnesota State University Student Association (MSUSA) and the Minnesota State College Student Association (MSCSA) are collecting data and information about students' transfer experiences. We plan to use this information to learn more about students' transfer experiences and work to improve credit transfer. Thank you for your help!

Please fill out the following questions based on your most recent transfer experience.

1. Think about your most recent transfer experience. Did you transfer from a college or university in Minnesota?

- Yes (skip to 2A)
- No (skip to 2B)

2. (A) Which type of school did you most recently attend and transfer credits FROM? (If you attended multiple schools at the same time, select the school where you earned the most credits)

- University of Minnesota
- State University (other than University of Minnesota)
- State Community College
- State Technical College
- State Community & Technical College
- Private College or University
- Private Online University
- Private Career College

(B) Which type of out-of-state school did you most recently attend and transfer credits FROM? (If you attended multiple schools at the same time, select the school where you earned the most credits)

- Public University
- Public Community College
- Public Technical College
- Private College or University
- Private Online University
- Private Career College
- College or University Outside the United States

3. Which type of school did you most recently transfer credits TO?

- State University in Minnesota
- Community College in Minnesota
- Technical College in Minnesota
- State Community & Technical College in Minnesota

4. Other than your current college or university, where did you consider transferring to? (select all that apply)

- I did not consider any other colleges or universities

- o Another Minnesota state college or university (not University of Minnesota)
- o University of Minnesota
- o Private college or university in Minnesota
- o College or university outside Minnesota

5. Did you complete the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum prior to transferring to your current college or university?

- o Yes
- o No
- o No, but I completed some Minnesota Transfer Curriculum courses or goal areas
- o 8 c b Ñ h ' _ b c k

6. If you completed a degree/certificate/diploma prior to transfer, what was it? (select all that apply)

- o AA (Associate in Arts)
- o AS (Associate in Science)
- o AAS (Associate in Applied Science)
- o AFA (Associate in Fine Arts)
- o 6 U W \ Y Degree Ñ g
- o Certificate/Diploma
- o I did not complete a degree/certificate/diploma prior to transfer

7. How much time elapsed between your attendance at your last college or university and enrollment at your current college or university?

- o Less than one year
- o One to two years
- o Three to five years
- o Six to ten years
- o More than ten years

8. When did you begin actively planning for transfer?

- o Before or during my first semester at my last college/university
- o After my first semester at my last college, but before the semester prior to transfer
- o One semester before I planned to transfer from my last college/university
- o After I was enrolled at my current college/university
- o 8 c b Ñ h ' _ b c k # B c h ' g i f Y

9. What is the total number of credits you wanted to transfer to your current college or university?

- o 1-15 credits
- o 16-30 credits
- o 31-45 credits
- o 46-60 credits
- o 61-75 credits
- o More than 75 credits
- o 8 c b Ñ h ' _ b c k # B c h ' g i f Y

10. What type of credits did you attempt to transfer? (select all that apply)

- General education/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum credits
- Credits in my major/program
- PSEO credits (Postsecondary Enrollment Option)
- Course requirements met by AP (Advanced Placement), IB (International Baccalaureate), CLEP (College-Level Examination Program) exams
- Military credits
- Technical credits
- International credits
- Credits obtained through portfolio reviews
- Other credits

11. How did your general education/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum credits transfer compared to your expectations?

- Above expectations
- As expected
- Below expectations

12. How did your credits other than general education/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum courses transfer compare to your expectations?

- Above expectations
- As expected
- Below expectations

13. If your credits did not initially transfer as you expected, what reasons were you given for the decision? (select all that apply)

- My courses transferred as I expected *(skip to 20)* *All other responses skip to 14A)*
- Not enough information to prove course equivalency
- Course(s) was taken too long ago
- Transferred in as elective instead of major requirement
- Developmental/remedial course
- Course not deemed to be equivalent to required course
- The college or university I transferred from did not have an articulation agreement with my current program
- The college or university I transferred from had the wrong type of accreditation
- Was not given a reason
- Other _____

14. (A) Did you know about a transfer/appeals process at your current college or university?

- Yes
- No

(B) Does not apply Skip to Question #20

15. (A) How did you find out about the transfer/appeals process at your current college or university?

- It was in the college or university course catalog
- It was on my college/university website
- It was included in my credit transfer evaluation

- o I heard about it from faculty, staff or administrators on my campus
- o I heard about it from another student
- o 8 c b N h ' _ b c k
- o Other _____

(B) Does not apply Skip to Question #20

16. (A) Did you appeal the transfer decision at your college or university?

- o Yes
- o No

(B) Does not apply Skip to Question #20

17. (A) What was the result of your appeal?

- o Appeal was approved
- o Appeal was denied
- o Some credits accepted/Some denied

(B) Skip to Question #20

18. (A) After your appeal was denied, were you informed about a Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system-level transfer appeals process?

- o Yes
- o No
- o 8 c b N h ' _ b c k

(B) Skip to Question #20

19. How were you informed about the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system-level transfer appeals process?

- o It was in the college or university course catalog
- o It was on my college/university website
- o It was included in my credit transfer evaluation
- o I heard about it from faculty, staff or administrators on my campus
- o I heard about it from another student
- o It was on the appeal denial letter received
- o It was on a MnSCU website
- o 8 c b N h ' _ b c k
- o Other _____

20. Other than a transcript, did your current college or university require you to provide any of the following information about courses you had previously taken? (select all that apply)

- o My college or university did not require more than a transcript
- o Course description
- o Syllabus
- o Course outline
- o Other

21. (A) Were you able to obtain the required syllabus?

- o Yes, I obtained it from the faculty member who taught the course
- o Yes, I had saved my syllabus

- o No, I was not able to obtain it
- o No, I did not try to obtain the syllabus

(B) Does not apply-Skip to Question #22

22. Did you seek advice regarding the transfer of your credits?

- o **Yes**
- o **No**

23. (A) Who did you go to for advice regarding your credit transfer at your last college or university?(select all that apply)

- o Counselor/Advisor
- o Registrar
- o Admissions Counselor
- o Faculty advisor
- o Other Faculty Member
- o Friends/Family/Fellow Students
- o I only sought advice from my current college/university
- o I did not see anyone about my credit transfer process
- o Other _____

(B) Does not apply Skip to Question #28

24. (A) Did your faculty advisor at your last college/university refer you to speak with another employee who could advise you on the credit transfer process?

- o Yes
- o No
- o 8 c b N h ' _ b c k

(B) Does not apply-Skip to Question #28

25. (A) Did your admissions counselor at your last college/university refer you to speak with another employee who could advise you on the credit transfer process?

- o Yes
- o No
- o 8 c b N h ' _ b c k

(B) Does not apply Skip to Question #28

26. (A) Did your faculty member at your last college/university refer you to speak with another employee who could advise you on the credit transfer process?

- o Yes
- o No
- o 8 c b N h ' _ b c k

(B) Does not apply Skip to Question #28

27. (A) Did your friend/family member/fellow student refer you to speak with an employee who could advise you on the credit transfer process?

- o Yes
- o No
- o 8 c b N h ' _ b c k

(B) Does not apply Skip to Question #28

**28. How often did you meet with staff or faculty at your last college/university about transfer?
(Select one)**

- I did not meet with advising staff or faculty before transferring
- At least once every semester
- At least once per year
- Less than once per year

29. Did you use online resources to assist you during the transfer process?

- Yes
- No

30.(A) Which online resources did you use to assist you during the transfer process? (select all that apply)

- Website of college/university I last attended
- Website of college/university I currently attend
- www.mntransfer.org (the MnSCU system transfer website)
- U-Select/CAS
- Other _____

(B) Does not apply Skip to Question #31

31. What is the total number of colleges/universities you have attended, including your current college or university?

- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five or more

32. How easy was it to transfer credits, compared to what you expected?

- It was easier than I expected
- It was more difficult than I expected
- It met my expectations

33. Please rate your overall satisfaction with your transfer experience (including advising, ease of the process, available information, outcome of transfer, etc.)

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

34. Please add any additional comments about your transfer experience(s).