

Summary of Student Credit Transfer Findings and Integration of Recommendations

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Minnesota State University Student Association (MSUSA)
Minnesota State Colleges and Universities – Office of Internal Auditing

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The Minnesota State College Student Association (MSCSA) began to hear pronounced student concerns on transfer beginning around 2006. In 2007 MSCSA identified transfer as one of its top issues and continued to work with students to identify specific concerns. Staff within the Office of the Chancellor began to work with the student associations to improve communication on transfer. In the spring of 2009, MSCSA students led a “transfer hotline” campaign across the system’s two-year college campuses to identify student transfer problems. 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 and conducted roundtable discussions with their students. MSCSA and MSUSA also joined together to research student transfer concerns, probing the issues identified through the transfer hotline. MSCSA and MSUSA asked Chancellor McCormick for assistance to conduct a survey of students about their experience with transferring credits. The survey was administered in January through March, 2010.

In a February 17, 2010 letter to trustees, Board Chair Olson assigned the responsibility for studying student credit transfer to the audit committee to address findings identified in the Office of the Legislative Auditor’s program evaluation report, *MnSCU System Office*. The Office of Internal Auditing conducted a quantitative analysis of fiscal year 2009 student records to identify the extent that credits may not have transferred between MnSCU colleges and universities and the reasons for any unsuccessful credit transfers.

A summary of the findings and an integration of recommendations from the two research efforts are presented below:

Finding 1 – Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC)

Student Survey: MnTC credits were the most common type respondents reported transferring, but 29% of them did not know whether they had completed a MnTC goal area or course. Respondents who completed the MnTC were more likely to be satisfied with their transfer experience than respondents who did not complete the MnTC.

Quantitative Analysis: Nine percent¹ of 2009 students experienced some credit loss when transferring credits. MnTC courses or goal areas not recorded as completed at receiving institutions was one of the most significant reasons for credit loss.

- **Suggested Action:** Refer to Academic and Student Affairs Committee
- **Policy Considerations:**
 - 3.29 College and University Transcripts - Consider revising policy to create more uniformity on recording transfer credits on MnSCU transcripts.
 - 3.37 Minnesota Transfer Curriculum

¹ Based on a statistical sampling methodology, with 95 percent confidence, the overall incident rate for student credit loss would be between 5.9 percent and 12.9 percent.

- **Management Recommendations:**
 - Colleges and universities need to ensure that staff members understand the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum requirements.
 - Colleges and universities should advise students on the advantages of completing courses and goal areas within the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.
 - The Public Affairs and Academic and Student Affairs divisions should work with colleges and universities to communicate the advantages of completing the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum courses and goal areas to students.
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should develop uniform required training for staff and faculty who advise potential transfer students.
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should develop a common way for students to assess their progress toward completing the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.

- **Success Criteria:** A subsequent survey will find that substantially more students know about the MnTC and whether they have completed it. A subsequent quantitative analysis will not find instances of credit loss due to unrecorded MnTC goal or course completion.

Finding 2 – Course Equivalencies and Acceptance of Credit

Student Survey: Respondents who reported that their credits did not transfer as expected, cited several reasons including: the courses not equivalent, the courses transferred as electives instead of major requirements, the student had insufficient information to determine equivalency, and the courses were taken too long ago.

Quantitative Analysis: The most significant reason students lost credits in transfer was that similar courses did not have a course equivalency, this was more prevalent for accounting graduates. In addition, there were inconsistencies among institutions regarding acceptance of courses with a D grade. There also were inconsistencies among institutions in the acceptance of credits deemed to be too old. Finally, in a few instances, credits for PSEO courses were not being recognized or accepted.

- **Suggested Action:** Refer to Academic and Student Affairs Committee

- **Policy Considerations:**
 - 3.5 Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO)
 - 3.21 Undergraduate Course Credit Transfer
 - Work to align two and four year programs to reduce the loss of credits.
 - Consider whether a System-wide policy is needed to establish consistent treatment of D grades for transfer eligibility.
 - Consider whether a System-wide policy is needed on the age at which coursework loses its eligibility for transfer.
 - 3.22 Course Syllabi
 - Clarify the use of syllabi, course outlines, or other equivalency documents.

- **Management Recommendations:**
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should ensure that course equivalency information is accurate, available and complied with at colleges and universities
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should develop a standardized degree audit template for colleges and universities to use for degree requirements.

- **Success Criteria:** Need to be defined

Finding 3 – Transfer Information and Resources

Student Survey: Two-thirds of survey respondents whose credits did not transfer as expected were not aware of the appeals process, but 89 percent of those who did appeal had some or all of their credits accepted. Forty percent of respondents reported that they did not seek advice from college or university staff regarding transfer and 41 percent did not start planning for transfer until their last semester before transferring or later. Respondents reported that institutional websites were their primary online resource for information about transfer. Six percent of respondents reported that they had used the uSelect (Course Applicability System) tool during the transfer process. Finally, among respondents who submitted written complaints, the most frequent topic was problems with transfer advising and information.

Comment: 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. Additionally, transfer problems brought to the attention of the system are often anecdotal or involve individual students whose educational records cannot be disclosed to third parties. These limitations hinder the ability to determine whether complaints about the transfer process are valid and need corrective action.

- **Suggested Action:** Refer to Academic and Student Affairs and Advancement Committees.
- **Policy Considerations:**
 - Consider creating the role of “Credit Transfer Ombudsman” to provide students with an independent channel for advice on how to resolve credit transfer problems.
- **Management Recommendations:**
 - The Public Affairs and Academic and Student Affairs divisions should work with colleges and universities to:
 - Develop uniform standards for displaying transfer information on Web sites and to the extent possible create consistent content for informing students about transfer.
 - Advise students on the appeals process.
 - Improve communication to better manage student expectations about the transfer process, transfer tools, sources of transfer information and the value of early planning for transfer.
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should monitor appeals and their results to help identify transfer issues.
 - The Academic and Student Affairs division should consider adding staff to meet the significant work involved with accomplishing continuous improvement in student credit transfer.
- **Success Criteria:** Need to be defined

Finding 4 – Transfer Tools and Data Entry

Quantitative Analysis: The use of eTranscript and Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS) are important tools for college and university staff in supporting transfer. Two percent of 2009 students may have lost some transfer credits due to data entry errors.

- **Suggested Action:** Refer action to management and monitor progress

- **Management Recommendations:**
 - The Academic and Student Affairs should:
 - Ensure that colleges and universities have implemented eTranscript.
 - Ensure that colleges and universities list in-progress courses on DARS degree audits.
 - Communicate the system standard for conversion of quarter credit hours to semester credit hours and verify that colleges and universities are using standard.
 - Colleges and universities need to ensure that they are using DARS degree audits for verifying that program requirements have been met for graduation.

- **Success Criteria:** Need to be defined

Finding 5 – Accountability

Comment: The Board of Trustees has had limited discussion related to student credit transfer since 2004. In addition, the accountability framework does not contain a measure related to student credit transfer.

- **Suggested Action:** Refer to Academic and Student Affairs Committee

- **Policy Considerations:**
 - Implement systematic monitoring of transfer with periodic reporting.
 - Add a transfer measure to the accountability framework.
 - Engage the board in a study session to review other states' transfer models, successes and challenges.

- **Success Criteria:** Need to be defined