



Joann A. Boughman, PhD  
Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs  
University System of Maryland

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The picture of the “traditional” student population is as diverse as it is evolving. Today’s student is less likely an 18-year old first-time, full-time, freshman taking up residence in a campus dormitory. More and more often we see students in multiple roles including the part-time adult learner commuting to college in the evening hours. They are veterans with multiple deployments in their immediate past or individuals who work full-time and have dependents at home.

Transfer students, especially those coming to universities with substantial credits earned at community colleges account for a growing portion of our population. For example, two of every 3 students coming into the 12 institutions of the University System of Maryland (USM) are not freshmen. They are transfer students -- this year well over 20,000 -- half of whom come from Maryland community colleges. The number of community college transfers increased 8% in this last year and 25% in the previous five years. Over 70% of Maryland’s transfer students enrolled full time, and of those, more than 80% matriculated at either the sophomore or junior status. Over half graduate within four years of transfer, no matter the attendance status as part- or full-time, and 66 percent of those enrolling full time graduated within four years (a rate comparable to the freshmen six-year graduation rate). While the statistics are compelling, it is most important to share our lessons learned.

Leadership and partnerships are critical. Each higher education segment from community colleges, public 4-year universities and the private colleges and universities has worked hard on the development of meaningful transfer and articulation policies and processes. With Maryland’s modest population of just under 6 million people, we are able to reach out to other educational leadership in

the State with the reasonable expectation that we can conduct face-to-face conversations on our many issues. We have an active and engaged P-20 Council in the Office of Governor Martin O'Malley. The community college and the public university presidents meet regularly. Nearly each month, the Maryland Higher Education Commission, the state's overarching coordinating board, convenes the Segmental Advisory Council that represents all segments of higher education in the state.

In 2013, the state legislature passed Senate Bill 740, the Maryland College Completion and Readiness Act of 2013. The new law sets the bar very high with legislative mandates for programmatic and process improvements. These include:

- Implementation of a statewide transfer agreement that stipulates at least 60 credits of an Associate of Art (AA) or Associate of Science (AS) degree will transfer.
- Demonstration that at least 30 credits can reverse transfer from a bachelor's degree curriculum back toward an associate's degree.
- Establishment of incentives for students to complete their associate's degree before enrolling in a public sector higher education institution (2+2 Transfer Scholarship).
- Development of programs to re-enroll near completers.
- Implementation of pathways systems and degree plans at all institutions.
- Capping of degree requirements at 60 credits for an associate's and 120 for a bachelor's with some exceptions granted for accreditation requirements.
- Implementation and restructuring of payment for dual enrollment programs
- Enhancement of the online statewide articulation system.

### **TRANSFER CREDIT**

The Articulation System for Maryland Colleges and Universities (ARTSYS) is an online portal that provides browsers with comprehensive information about the articulation across all Maryland postsecondary institutions. Course equivalences are detailed so anyone can see if a particular course will transfer from one institution to another. Entire transcripts can be evaluated in real time to determine what courses already taken will transfer. Recommended transfer programs are described for any major, so a student may plan to take the courses that will provide the most robust and efficient pathway to degree completion. Tutorials, and extensive help functions are now available in the ARTSYS. Continuous updating and

refining of ARTSYS requires an ongoing investment by all institutions with substantial faculty involvement to ensure coverage of materials and content in courses to be transferred.

Current Maryland regulations already guarantee the transfer of 30-36 credits of general education core toward a bachelor's degree. The Maryland College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013 now calls for the transfer of 60 credits earned as part of an Associate's degree to be applied towards the 120 credits needed for a bachelor's degree.

The continuous evaluation of courses by faculty at the institutions assures students that the course will transfer appropriately. This evaluation process requires faculty commitment of time and energy, but it has worked well for us, and has negated the debate over common course numbering for individual courses across Maryland's 16 community colleges and 12 USM institutions.

We have addressed the most challenging content areas of transfer directly through statewide articulation agreements in education, engineering and nursing. These three critical workforce areas include focused requirements to facilitate smooth transfer from one institution to another. Faculty from our institutions have been convened to develop clear pathways through an Associate of Arts in Teaching degree, an Associate of Science in Engineering degree and an RN to BSN pathway in a way that is uniform across our community colleges and four-year institutions. These discussions have resulted in the ability for many students to move smoothly from our community colleges to our four-year institutions in these specific areas of interest without "swirling" in non-degree related courses or otherwise encumbering extraneous credits. In fact, students transferring from community colleges with 60 or more credits graduate from our USM institutions with an average of 122.8 credits, only about one course more than the most direct routes to a degree in our four-year institutions. Convening faculty in specific content areas across two- and four-year institutions on a regular basis has resulted in the essential development of relationships that help with curricular development at all institutions involved. It is critical that the faculty maintains control of the content. Faculty investment in the development of these agreements ensures that they have a vested interest in its success.

### **INSTITUTIONAL ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS**

Most of our four-year institutions identify one or a very few primary "feeder" colleges from which a majority of their transfers come. It is critical that those institutions create additional agreements and programs that ensure articulation and

smooth transfer of students from one institution to another. While it is essential that individual courses or credits transfer, it has become obvious that the successful matriculation of students through higher education also requires investment in student services, activities, and cultural engagement by the institutions. Support for students moving from one campus to another, engagement by individuals on the receiving campus, and joint programs and activities have been shown to enhance achievement and improve success.

### **REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION CENTERS: ACCESS & SUCCESS**

The Regional Higher Education Centers in Maryland provide yet another pathway to access and success. Strategically located around the state, the eight centers provide access to baccalaureate, professional and graduate education in regions where distance to a senior institution creates a barrier to continuation. At the two regional centers administered by the USM, the Universities at Shady Grove in Montgomery County and USM Hagerstown in Washington County, the four-year graduation rates for students who started in fall 2009 were 76 percent and 75 percent, surpassing the success rates of full-time transfers to USM institutions overall, as well as the six-year graduation rates for freshmen. The “2+2” articulation agreements and cohort models supported by strong student services and engagement have contributed to this highly successful model.

### **FINANCIAL AID**

Public recognition and appreciation for the increasing cost of higher education, documentation of the reasons for those increases, and all attempts to keep the costs for students under control are essential to instilling the public trust in the higher education system. Well-publicized and articulated programs that assist students with financial aid send very strong messages about retention and completion. The Maryland General Assembly is currently considering USM’s request to establish a more robust 2 +2 Transfer Scholarship program which, we believe, will entice students to stay in community college until they obtain their associate’s degree and then reward them with \$1,000 a year for up to three years upon transfer to a four year institution (\$2,000 if the student transfer into a specific STEM major). Additional state funding for this program sends a very strong message to Marylanders of the importance of all degree completion, as well as addressing our focus on needs in the STEM areas of education. In addition, some of our institutions have initiated programs that guarantee a student continues to pay tuition at the community college rate while pursuing their bachelor’s degree.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The key to any successful transportation project is careful planning that includes an analysis of current conditions and infrastructure, key destinations and access points, and efficient movement throughout the system of roads and highways. To ensure long-standing success, the foundation must be strong and the materials of the highest quality. It is also imperative that there is on-going inspection, maintenance, and improvements based upon input from all stakeholders and responsive to the changing environment. This is a concept that can be applied to the success of transfer students among institutions of higher education.

Support for students across the full spectrum of higher education, including those first-time full time freshmen, will lead to successful retention and completion for students challenged by the cost of higher education and competing family and work needs. Creation and implementation of policies and processes that make those pathways both clear and smooth, while allowing for the flexibility required by individual students and degree programs, will provide the vibrant higher education environment necessary to produce the next generation of critical and creative thinkers our workforce now demands.

Thank you for the opportunity to share some of our lessons learned in Maryland that might help improve the efficiency of pathways for students in their quest for higher education degrees.