



# President's FOCUS

## *Monthly Report to the Board*

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### **Pathways Out of Montgomery College: Transfer**

For many students, community college is an important step on the path to a four year degree. But getting to that degree depends heavily on an effective transfer process. The guidance that students receive about requirements for transfer has important implications for the cost of their education, time to degree, and success at four-year institutions. This President's Focus will explore the transfer process at MC, supports and planning tools, transfer scholarships, and the growing importance of efficiency in transfer processes. Redesigning America's Community Colleges, by Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins explores this topic in some detail and I will point to their research on best practices and challenges, as they illuminate MC's processes.

Students who stumble in the transfer process can waste valuable time and money if credits they thought would transfer end up being rejected by the receiving institution. This stalls many students' educational ambitions and some students leave, entirely out of frustration. One study cited by Bailey et al. found that "the biggest barrier to bachelor's degree completion for community college students who transferred was the credits lost in the transfer process." A 2014 study showed that students who had almost all of their credits from a community college transfer to a four year institution, were two and a half times more likely to earn a four-year degree than students who were able to carry fewer than half their credits.

Economic research shows that students who do not persist and earn a degree are stunted in their entry into the skilled labor market and in their



earnings potential. In Maryland the difference between a worker with an associate's degree (average salary of \$62,900) and a bachelor's degree (average salary of \$90,300) is significant. With the cost of living in Montgomery County hovering well above the national average—\$83,000 for a four-person family with two working parents covers basic necessities—every rung on the ladder of higher education completion makes a difference.

For this very reason, student transfer has received attention from state legislatures across the country. Thirty states, Maryland among them, have adopted Common Core agreements, meaning that public four-year colleges will accept an agreed-upon set of general education requirements from community colleges. Six states have gone as far as to create common course numbering systems to facilitate seamless transfer among state institutions. Maryland does not have this feature, but legislation requires major-related transfer pathways policies that provide for coherence among the expectations of community colleges and four-year institutions. The state's requirements contained in the Code of Maryland Regulations ("COMAR") expect open and transparent communication among institutions when courses, curricula, or program offerings change.

Additionally, COMAR stipulates that transfer students shall not be required to repeat "equivalent" course work that has already been completed at a community college. To aid this process, ARTSYS, the Articulation System for Maryland Colleges and Universities, an online resource for students and advisors, allows students to research the transferability of credits from one institution to another; which courses successfully transfer into a specific degree program; how their transcripts compare to requirements at different institutions; and which institutions offer which majors.

According to the state's regulations, students who complete 56 credits with a GPA of at least 2.0 are guaranteed admission to one of the public, four-year institutions, but on a space-available basis and not into a specific major. They may still need to compete with other transfer students for admission. Additionally, a student's completion of a general education package at any community college in Maryland satisfies the lower-divisional general education requirements at the receiving state institution.



At MC, “transfer students” are defined as students who move to a four-year institution with 12 credits or more. According to data covering 2014 from the National Student Clearinghouse, 4,766 MC students transferred to more than 350 institutions. Transfer students were most likely to be enrolled in three areas of study: general studies (44 percent of all MC transfers), arts and sciences (a compilation of several majors grouped under the categories of “arts” or “sciences” (14 percent), and business administration (12 percent).

The majority of MC students transfer to the University of Maryland College Park (UMCP), the University of Maryland University College (UMUC), the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), Towson University, and Salisbury University. The Universities at Shady Grove (USG) has specialized transfer access programs that facilitates transfer to the UMCP, the University of Baltimore, and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES). Partnership programs are established by the individual institutions themselves in order to support transfer students. They offer a variety of options including guaranteed admission, priority advising, early access to student services, application fee waivers, and tuition discounts. Some examples include the Maryland Transfer Advantage Program; UMBC’s Transfer Student Alliance; and UMUC’s Community College Alliance Program.

Keeping so many students informed about the process of transfer, including course requirements, deadlines, and available scholarships, is an effort that involves the collaboration of faculty, staff, and administrators. At MC a number of tools help make the transfer process easier and more comprehensive than it has been in the past: an articulation website, specialized transfer counselors, transfer fairs, and a monthly publication on transfer issues.

MC’s transfer website combines all the information students need to transfer successfully. In addition to a list of articulation agreements and transfer access programs, the site includes step-by-step instructions on how to transfer, advising sheets for the most popular degrees and disciplines, and a complete list of on-campus visits by various four-year partners. The website also has information about TRANSFERmation, the newly launched program to ease the process of partnering with MC on transfer processes. The Maryland Higher Education Commission also provides a comprehensive Student Guide to Transfer. MC’s website also has a wealth of



information on how MC academic programs align with programs at Maryland institutions to which most MC students transfer. In step-by-step, accessible language, even a novice MC student can navigate the transfer process at MC.

Even with the extensive online information about transfer, consulting with an advisor or counselor at MC is highly recommended. Each campus has specialized transfer advisors, although all advisors are trained to guide students through the transfer process. Students also have the opportunity to meet with university representatives through individual campus visits and Transfer Fairs, held twice a year on each campus. Each semester about 800 students attend the fairs, with an average of 50 or more institutions represented.

Another resource for students is MC Transfer Times. This blog has snapshots of individual majors, “Pre-medicine and Pre-Dental Transfer Advising,” for example; explorations of individual schools, such as “Advising Links for Terp Hopefuls”; and thematic articles such as “How Do I choose a Major?” With dozens of similar articles, there is a wealth of information at students’ fingertips. The site averages more than 35,000 hits per year.

Finally, transfer scholarships are also widely available and promoted by MC. The Universities at Shady Grove provides more than \$1 million a year in transfer scholarships, and, since at least 70 percent of USG students have taken a class at MC, our students have certainly benefitted from them. The Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer scholarship, now worth \$40,000 a year, was won by two MC students in 2014. Other transfer scholarships, including ones from MHEC, the University System of Maryland, the Regents, and dozens of institutions around the US that focus on specific degree-programs, general academic excellence, or financial need. MC students can access the full list with tips on preparing their applications on the MC site. The Montgomery College Foundation awarded more than \$87,000 in transfer scholarships to students during the 2015–2016 academic year. This year a \$1 million grant made by the Healthcare Initiative Foundation jointly to the College and the Universities at Shady Grove will provide scholarships to 112 nursing, social work, and public health students as they complete their degrees. These, and other programs, are highlighted at the annual Transfer Scholarship Conference, which gives



students the chance to meet with college representatives and to attend workshops on resume and essay writing.

Support for transfer students is extensive and MC devotes a significant amount of time and resources to making the process clear and accessible. Students have a wide range of options to collect the information they need to put themselves on the most efficient, cost-saving paths. Research shows that all of these tools increase the probability that students will transfer successfully and complete a bachelors' degree.

As community college outcomes become a larger part of national dialogue about higher education, transfer processes will no doubt become part of the conversation. When this happens, MC can boast many best practices, some impressive results, and some very accomplished students.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. What stood out to you in this report?
2. Do you see any ways in which MC could support transfer students more thoroughly?
3. Do you see any challenges to transfer that are not being addressed by MC?

