

The following update is the first of a series of newsletters on the development and implementation of CSCU's Transfer and Articulation Policy (TAP). After a brief description of TAP, it turns to two areas of concern, (1) TAP's compliance with NEASC standards and (2) TAP's possible impact on the community colleges and their associate-degree programs. We appreciate the suggestion by CSCU's new interim provost, Dr. Estela Lopez, to inaugurate this latest effort to keep CSCU campuses informed about TAP.

An introduction from Dr. Lopez:

Since I arrived, I have heard praises regarding TAP and how it represents a faculty governance process that serves our system well. Let me affirm that I take seriously concerns expressed about the TAP process.

Recently, concerns have been expressed regarding TAP's compliance with accreditation standards. We have taken seriously these concerns and consulted with NEASC. I have consulted with both NEASC and NACIQI, the Federal Agency that oversees and recognizes accrediting bodies such as NEASC. I am also familiar with the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) from the years I served as a provost in one of the state public institutions. The IAI format is similar to TAP's, and IAI has always been in compliance with accreditation standards and has become a national model for transfer and articulation.

Based on these investigations, I am confident that TAP not only is in compliance with NEASC standards but helps fulfill the mission NEASC requires of CSCU.

A second concern that has been raised regards the draft document, "Board of Regents for Higher Education: Policy Statement on Associate Degrees." The policy does not seek to prevent the existence or development of associate-level career degrees, to hinder the existence or development of transfer degrees with non-CSCU institutions, to limit student choice regarding where to transfer, or to place the community colleges in a lower-tier position relative to the CSUs. If you see language in the draft document that would lead to any of these undesired consequences, please let me know. We want to ensure this policy has no unintended consequences.

I welcome your comments and suggestions.

Description of CSCU's Transfer and Articulation Policy (TAP)

TAP is a student-centered, faculty-driven initiative for ensuring Connecticut community college students complete degree programs that transfer to Connecticut State Universities and Charter Oak without either losing or generating excess credit. Students in a TAP pathway will complete the first 60-63 credits of a bachelor's degree at a community college and the final 60-63 credits at COSC or a CSU. Through TAP, students enrolled at a Connecticut Community College can select from over twenty concentrations that prepare them to complete bachelor's degrees. New transfer degree pathways will be available to students entering the community colleges in Fall 2016.

Initiated in 2012 by the BOR's interpretation of the state Assembly's Public Act #12-31, TAP has three key elements:

- a common, competency-based, general education core,
- common lower-division pre-major pathways that include at least thirty credits of transferable general education credits, and
- guaranteed junior status upon transfer.

At the center of the plan for developing and implementing TAP was the understanding that TAP be driven by the principles of faculty governance and curricular control.

TAP has been distinguished from a number of system-wide transfer models in other states by having its content developed entirely by faculty. Beginning with the TAP Steering Committee and ten Sub-Committees that designed the competency-based general education core and defined each of the competencies during the 2012 Summer, faculty have been the primary engines for developing and implementing TAP. Thus, faculty from each of the seventeen CSCU campuses compose the voting membership of the Framework Implementation and Review Committee (FIRC). FIRC has primary responsibility to oversee the general education framework and to monitor how the pathways are integrated with that framework. Faculty compose the Pathway Work Groups responsible for developing pre-major pathways; each work group's members are disciplinary faculty, one from each campus where the program is offered. And teaching faculty—one from a CSU, one from a Community College—take primary day-to-day responsibility as the Program Co-Managers for implementing TAP and facilitating communication among all groups about TAP.

Faculty members representing CSCU colleges and universities participate at every level of the design, approval, and implementation process. In addition to the committees and work groups directly involved with TAP, the approval process for each pathway works with the governance process established on each campus. By working together in these established, collegial ways, faculty are able to provide input and feedback at each step, thereby ensuring that meaningful pathways are delineated for students to follow.

NEASC Compliance

Within its Standards for Academic Programs, NEASC includes a statement on the “Transfer and Award of Academic Credit”: **“It is important for reasons of social equity and educational effectiveness, as well as the wise use of resources, for all institutions to develop reasonable and definitive policies and procedures for acceptance of transfer credit to ensure that these policies are easily available to students and prospective students”** (page 1, [https://cihe.neasc.org/downloads/POLICIES/Pp75 Transfer and Award of Academic Credit.pdf](https://cihe.neasc.org/downloads/POLICIES/Pp75%20Transfer%20and%20Award%20of%20Academic%20Credit.pdf)).

We consulted with NEASC to verify their perspective on policies for transfer and award of academic credit. They confirmed that institutions need to have such policies and design them in keeping with system practices.

In the same document, NEASC addresses transparency in admissions and degree purposes:

At some institutions there may be differences between the acceptance of credit for admission purposes and the applicability of credit for degree purposes. A receiving institution may accept previous work, place a credit value on it, and enter it on the transcript. However, that previous work, because of its nature and not its inherent quality, may be determined to have no applicability to a specific degree to be pursued by the student.

Institutions have a responsibility to make this distinction, and its implications, clear to students before they decide to enroll. This should be a matter of full disclosure, with the best interests of the student in mind.

From the beginning, TAP has had this goal in mind. The NEASC recommendations go on to add,

[i]nstitutions also should make every reasonable effort to reduce the gap between credits accepted and credits applied toward an educational credential. (page3)

This effort to ensure that credits are applied toward credentials is at the center of TAP.

We went beyond NEASC and also requested clarification from NACIQI, the Advisory Group at the US Department of Education that recommends recognition of accrediting agencies. Under their standards for recognition, NACIQI includes the following:

Transfer of credit policies. The accrediting agency must confirm, as part of its review for initial accreditation or preaccreditation, or renewal of accreditation, that the institution has transfer of credit policies that (1) are publicly disclosed in accordance with 668.43 (A)(11); and (2) include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education. (page 16,
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/hea08/34cfr602.pdf>)

In addition, we reviewed transfer of credit practices in other states and institutions, including Illinois:

The Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) is a statewide transfer agreement which is transferable among more than 100 participating colleges or universities in Illinois. IAI works best for students who know they are going to transfer but [are] undecided on the college or university that will grant their baccalaureate degree.

All colleges and universities participating in the IAI agree to accept a “package” of IAI general education courses in lieu of their own comparable lower-division general division requirements. . . . IAI also includes major recommendations for the first two years of college in several popular majors. Faculty panels, which have expertise in the major field of study, created these recommendations.
<http://www.itransfer.org/IAI.aspx>)

Associate-degree Programs at Community Colleges

The document, “Board of Regents for Higher Education: Policy Statement on Associate Degrees,” was drafted at the request of the BOR’s Academic and Student Affairs Committee. At its 18 December 2014 meeting, the committee unanimously approved “a moratorium on the approval of new associate degree programs until a policy is approved by the Board of Regents to clearly differentiate between TAP programs and other associated degree programs. In addition, programs in the TAP category shall have completed the TAP process before coming before the Academic and Student Affairs Committee for approval.” Afterwards, Committee Chair Merle Harris asked ECSU Provost Rhona Free, MxCC Academic Dean Steve Minkler, and TAP Co-Managers Candace Barrington and Ken Klucznik to draft a policy.

Until a policy is adopted by the BOR, no new associate degree programs can be approved.

The resulting draft reflects extensive conversations among members of the CSCU Academic Council and with community college faculty (facilitated by FIRC and FAC members as well as, in some cases, Chief Academic Officers). Also, it factors in Connecticut General Statute 10a-80 and the ways it has historically been interpreted by the community college system.

Subsequently, that draft policy document has been revised based on feedback received after it was circulated to FIRC, FAC, the Academic Council, the Presidents’ Council, and community-college campuses.

As it currently reads, the document creates a policy and a process that clarify the types of associate degrees colleges award and the purposes the degrees serve. As Dr. Estela writes in her introduction to this newsletter, the policy does not seek to prevent the existence or development of associate-level career degrees, to hinder the existence or development of transfer degrees with non-CSCU institutions, to limit student choice regarding where to transfer, or to place the community colleges in a lower-tier position relative to the CSUs. If you see language in the draft document that would lead to any of these undesired consequences, please let us know.

There may be an increased degree of homogenization of major program requirements that might not be the case if individual articulation agreements were created between each community college and each four-year school. Each college maintains its autonomy in regard to how students meet general education competencies and meet, when available, open or unrestrictive electives. The intent of the BOR policy as developed in 2012, however, is to focus on full transferability, transparency, and flexibility for students. In this case, students will not be at a disadvantage if they move from institution to institution within the system. That said, in some cases, work groups have found ways to leave increased flexibility within the selection of major courses by sending institution when the specificity and sequencing of program requirements for the baccalaureate allow.

In addition, and in order to prevent confusion for students, TAP pathways will replace some existing articulations between the community colleges and the CSUs and CO. A preliminary audit of transfer agreements in the system shows that many pathways degrees will establish articulations that do not currently exist. In these cases, no degrees will be replaced. College of Technology degrees constitute a considerable number of existing agreements between community colleges and Central Connecticut State University and, by BOR resolution, will continue in place as they exist. The audit of other agreements also shows that many guarantee admission. They do not, however, provide a mechanism for ensuring that all credits completed

at the community college will apply to the degree at the four-year campuses. The purpose of TAP pathways is to ensure, as much as possible, complete transfer of credit towards specific degree completion at the four-year schools. Articulation agreements with institutions outside of the system are not affected by TAP, although the policy does encourage such agreements to consider adopting or adapting existing TAP pathways, when possible, as a way to reduce confusion for students and to provide them with as many options as possible as they work to complete their work at community colleges.

We want a policy that allows community colleges and their faculty members to develop degrees through their own governance process while also clearly defining the purpose of each degree. Such clarity of purpose means students can better understand their different career and transfer options and is clearly a requirement of NEASC.