



MHEC
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Maryland Higher Education Commission Higher Education Fiscal 2022 Budget Overview

Testimony of Dr. James D. Fielder, Jr., Secretary of Higher Education, to the Senate Budget and Taxation Subcommittee on Education, Business and Administration and the House Appropriations Committee

February 5, 2021

Issues

Page 23. MHEC should comment on what steps are being taken to ensure that it is complying with the requirements of CCRCOA and when this data will be available.

Our current MHEC data collections do collect some information regarding transfer. For example, we can identify if a student was enrolled at college A in fall 2015 and then subsequently enrolled in college B in spring 2016. However, this only tells us movement between institutions and not explicitly the transfer of credit.

Similarly, specific data elements in our collections can provide limited information regarding transfer. For example, we currently collect data on the number of “native credits earned” and “total credits earned.” A simple calculation implies that the subtraction of these two values would quantify transfer credits; however, in some instance the calculation may include noncollegiate (e.g., AP, CLEP) or experiential (e.g., life experience) credits rather than solely postsecondary credit. Further, these data points do not identify the number of credits that were denied transfer, nor the details of the credits that were transferred. While MHEC does have access to course-level data (at public institutions only), the detail needed to identify barriers around transfer may or may not be able to be discerned through the course-level data.

Finally, we do collect data on the source of transfer credit, but only for students who graduate with an associate or bachelor’s degree from public institutions. As with the prior example, this provides data on source of credits and total credits awarded, but not on how those credits were applied to the degree (general education, degree-specific requirements, or electives) or on credits that were not applied to the degree. Credit data on those who graduate, while of value, does not provide insight into the credit-related barriers to student progress and completion.

In general, the available data related to transfer found in our current collections ultimately mask the challenges students face when transferring between institutions, particularly the issues around credit loss. Therefore, an existing collection must be modified, a unique, standalone collection would be established, and/or additional creative solutions (e.g., paying for services administered

by the National Student Clearinghouse, creating a short-term collection from the institutions to perform an in-depth policy study) would be implemented.

Transfer is a complicated phenomenon, particularly when considering the fact that students often chose what courses they wish to take and navigate transfer in highly variant ways. Before any step is taken, a thorough and statewide discussion regarding the purpose of the endeavor (and subsequently identifying the research questions expected to be answered) needs to occur. At this time, it appears that the main focus regarding transfer is credit loss. However, time to degree, academic success, and enrollment patterns may be of additional interest when investigating issues around transfer. Questions regarding transfer that would help this investigation may include: Upon transfer, did a student remain in the same major or academic discipline?? Are there specific admissions requirements for a given academic program (separate and apart from institutional admissions requirements)? Are there articulation agreements that are – or are not – being adhered to? Did the student take time between enrollment at one school and enrollment at another (i.e., non-continuous enrollment)? Does the student have an outstanding account balance at an institution that prevents releasing the transcript? Did the student receive the minimum course grade needed to transfer the course? These questions go beyond a quantitative data collection.

House Bill 460 may help in requiring institutions to submit annual reports to MHEC regarding the denial of the transfer of credit. Should House Bill 460 pass, that report may create the foundation for a transfer collection that better captures credit loss when transferring.

MHEC expects to explore the next steps on collecting data on transfer in the coming months. It is worth noting that the agency recently prioritized a new non-credit data collection with the community colleges, particularly considering recent legislation that now awards state scholarship funds to these programs. Previously, MHEC had very little insight into student-level data for non-credit programs at community colleges. This new collection took over 12 months to develop and is in a two-year pilot phase, as some institutions needed time to implement a new data collection on their campuses. These are similar considerations that will need to be taken when developing any new data collection.

Finally,, MHEC cannot find evidence that the CCRCCA required MHEC to collect and report college credit transfer data annually for Maryland students. At this time, MHEC believes it is in compliance with the requirements of CCRCCA.

Page 24. MHEC, USM, Morgan State University (MSU), SMCM, MICUA, and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) should comment on what steps are being taken to assist the transfer student population, specifically identifying actions that have been taken as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to more easily facilitate the student transfer process for these students.

In 2017, MHEC established regulations regarding transfer that conformed to the requirements of the 2013 CCRCCA legislation. Specifically, these regulations establish admissions requirements for transfer students at public institutions, the transfer of credit earned at public institutions, the transfer of non-traditional credit, the transfer of general education credit and the reverse transfer

of credit. More recently, MHEC developed an articulation agreement template and made additional amendments to the regulations to include similar protections for “first-time students with advanced standing” (meaning, recent high students who earned college credit while in high school). MHEC is aware, and supportive of, the collaborations between the public 4-year institutions and the community colleges to overcome the domain-specific challenges that transfer students face. MHEC is also aware of potential (and necessary) updates to ARTSYS; as a USM tool, USM can provide further information on ARTSYS updates.

With regards to COVID, many students – including students intending to transfer – had to consider their own unique circumstances when contemplating reenrollment for the fall 2020 semester. MHEC will support the work of Maryland campuses in ensuring that students, including transfer students, are given every opportunity to successfully pursue a high-quality postsecondary education.