



**A Critical Reflection on the Footprint of Articulation Agreements at  
Select College-University Pairs**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Previous research on student transfer has primarily focused on the student experience. A number of studies have explored student understanding of and satisfaction with the credit transfer process, but the same rigor has not been expended to explore the institutional perspective on credit transfer. The purpose of this study is to understand the reasons institutions undertake the development of articulation agreements, and the type of criteria that the faculty members and administrators involved in their development believe should be included in the documentation of those agreements. In addition, institutional policies and procedures related to the monitoring of articulation agreements were examined to determine how agreements are kept current and how they are monitored for markers of student success such as retention and graduation. The goal of this study was to see where commonalities existed in these processes across institutions to identify best practices for developing and maintaining effective articulation agreements. Data analyses were conducted based on a content analysis of the articulation agreements available at each of the institutional pairs, an analysis of themes present in a series of semi-structured interviews, and student transfer data provided by each of the participating universities.

The reasons that institutions develop new articulation agreements are similar for both colleges and universities. Program alignment and previous relationships between institutions were identified as the most prominent reasons for developing new agreements. Universities placed emphasis on developing agreements where there was adequate alignment between programs, while colleges placed emphasis on developing agreements that provided their students with sufficient credit for their previous coursework.

Many articulation agreements include guidelines to ensure the agreements remain current. These guidelines include renewal dates and procedures for keeping the partners updated on program changes. Despite the presence of these guidelines, interview data revealed that poor communication between institutional partners often results in agreements not being regularly updated. Interview data, combined with the student data, also revealed that there are gaps in the way transfer student success is monitored post-transfer. The majority of receiving institutions were unable to identify which of their transfer students had used specific articulation agreements to facilitate their transfer leading to significant challenges with monitoring of specific articulation agreements. In addition to this, two out of three receiving institutions were unable to

identify the college program that transfer students had previously completed. Although data does exist to enable tracking of transfer student success, accessibility of data and resource constraints have not allowed articulation developers to use this data to inform the development of better articulation agreements.

One of the key findings of this study was that having a strong working relationship between institutional partners was imperative to the development and maintenance of articulation agreements. To strengthen institutional relationships, it is recommended that institutions work towards implementing standardized procedures for developing and maintaining agreements that encourage frequent communication with their institutional partners. It is also recommended that a movement towards standardizing formal agreements through institutional templates has the potential to save resources and ensure consistency when developing new agreements. The use of a consistent, comprehensive template affords an opportunity to make the transfer process more transparent for both students and institutions alike.

An important finding of this study was that more attention should be given to monitor the success of students post-transfer. Although data on retention and graduation is available for transfer students, these students are not flagged as having moved through an articulation agreement, meaning that it is difficult to monitor the success of these students as a cohort. A key recommendation that could improve monitoring for student success would be to collect more information about transfer students to enable tracking for student success outcomes. Another recommendation is that this data be shared with the institutional stakeholders who develop articulation agreements, so these individuals are made aware of the types of agreements that work versus those that do not. Finally, it is recommended that the sharing of student success data between institutional partners become part of an annual effort to monitor the effectiveness of these agreements.