

INTEGRATING THE TRANSFER DEGREE INTO A GUIDED PATHWAY

Introduction

The Associate of Arts-Direct Transfer Articulation Agreement (AA-DTA) is the single largest transfer degree awarded by the community and technical (CTC) colleges. The traditional goal of this degree is completion of general education requirements in order to prepare for transfer to a four-year institution. However, a Guided Pathways framework suggests careful consideration of the student's eventual major and inserting electives with marketable skills into the degree to make distinct pathways and align programs into meta-majors.

In this brief,ⁱ we compare post-CTC college transfer rates of AA-DTA students to students in other major ready transfer degrees. We also look at the post-CTC college employment outcomes for students who earn an AA-DTA degree but do not transfer. We discuss the implications of these outcomes for thinking about how to deploy the AA-DTA degree in a pathway framework to buttress degree completion, post-degree student success and close equity gaps. Finally, we look at students through another student outcomes analysis lens, the Student Achievement Transfer Cohort. The Student Achievement Transfer Cohort includes a broader group of students than the first time in college students in the Guided Pathways cohort. We compare these students and how they are selected into each cohort to look at the spillover importance of Guided Pathways for student success.

Academic transfer degree relationship to transfer rates

While the number of students who transfer to a public/private four-year institution both with and without a degree are somewhat comparable (3,806

and 3,025 respectively), students who complete a transfer degree are substantially more likely to transfer to a four-year institution than students who do not complete a transfer degree. However, the type of degreeⁱⁱ also matters. Students who complete transfer degrees that are more targeted to their eventual four-year major transfer at rates that are at least 10 percentage points higher than students who transfer with the more generic and far larger AA-DTA.

Figure 1.

Students that transferred to public/private four-year institutions within two years after leaving CTC's

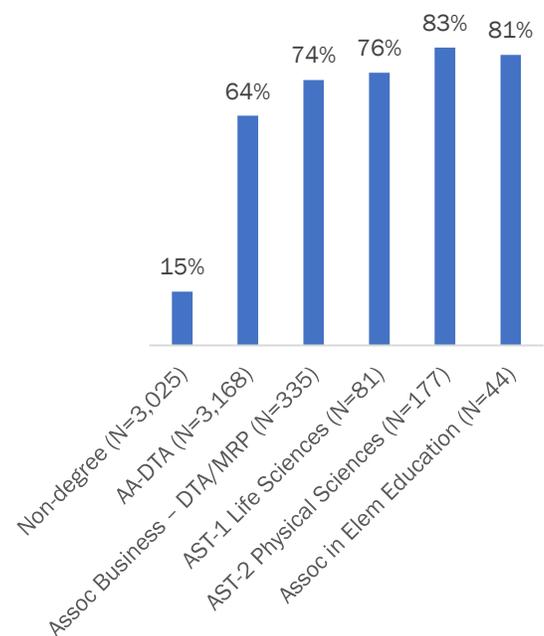
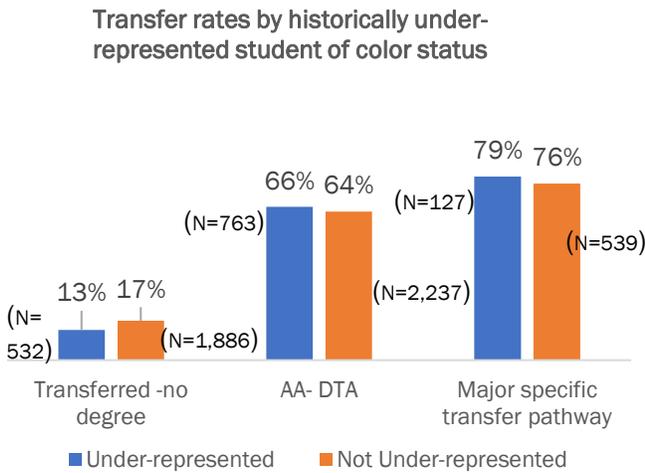


Figure 2 demonstrates that transfer degree completion raises transfer rates for all students. Black/African American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American/Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students (historically under-represented groups in post-secondary education) are slightly less likely than white and Asian students to transfer without a degree. This relationship flips once students earn their transfer degree.

Figure 2.



Role of major pathway planning

Knowing and incorporating college major into pathway planning and meta-majors may help students become more certain of the pathway they want and more likely to take the next step after they leave community and technical college.

We began our analysis with first time in college (FTIC) transfer intent students who exited college with and without a degree. By virtue of completing their degree, we can deem all of these students to be both college and transfer-ready. We have shown that transfer rates are between 10 and 20 percent higher for students who earn major-related transfer degrees than for students who earn the more generic AA-DTA. As we further study the factors that account for the difference in transfer rates, explanations associated with degree completion such as math readiness, and characteristics for race/ethnicity and gender fall away. The plausible distinctions in specificity between the degrees may be a more definite connection and clarity to the intended college major. This suggests that as the AA-DTA applies to meta-majors, more than generic transfer should be stressed and counseled. In the next

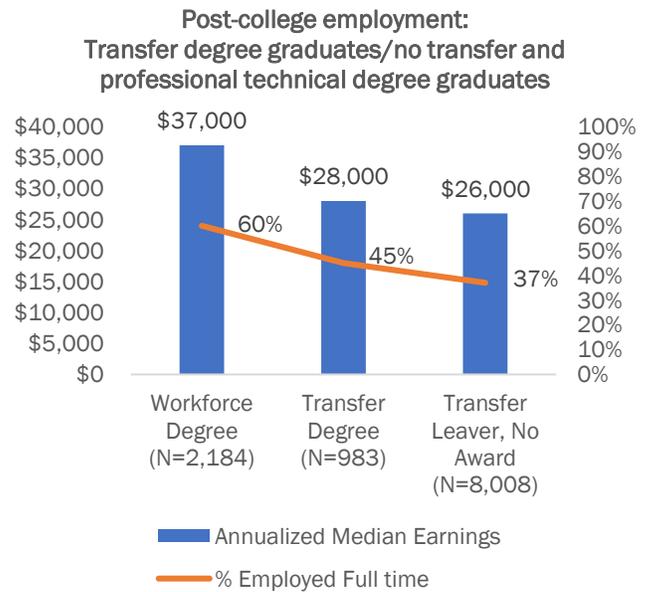
section, we look at transfer degree graduates who do not transfer. The implications raised here can add further meaning for placement of the AA-DTA within pathway meta-majors.

Marketable skills in the AA-DTA

Adding electives for marketable skills to the AA-DTA can help graduates who go to work immediately following the degree. These electives may also be useful to align the AA-DTA degree with other professional-technical programs into Guided Pathways meta-majors.

Overall, if about two-thirds of transfer graduates transfer, what happens to the other one-third? How helpful is their degree to full-time employment and their earnings? The data within Figure 3 comes from the Guided Pathways dashboardsⁱⁱⁱ. It shows the percentage employed full-time and annualized earnings in the year after leaving college for students who earn an academic transfer degree but do not transfer. These outcomes show that the transfer degree is worth substantially less than a professional technical (workforce) degree in terms of earnings and full-time-employment after graduation. The transfer degree provides only a modest bump in earnings compared to transfer students who exit and go directly to work with no degree.

Figure 3.



These findings are similar to another research study conducted by Burning Glass Technologies^{iv}, noting that the degree by itself falls short of putting students on a pathway to higher wages. The report, which studied graduates in five states, cites a wage deficit of anywhere from \$6,000 to \$15,000 five years after graduation for students who earn an AA degree compared to a professional technical degree.

Based upon analysis of 32,000 job openings in its own database, Burning Glass identified skills in management and business, sales, marketing, software applications and coding as examples of areas that, if included as electives within the AA-DTA degree, could substantially enhance employability for graduates who go directly to work rather than on to the bachelor's degree. For the CTC's, adding pathway specific electives with marketable skills to the AA-DTA may be a way to give students who do not transfer a stronger footing in the immediate job market they are about to enter. It may also help more students to transfer by strengthening the connections between bachelor degree completion and better paying jobs and careers afterwards.

Math pathways provide an example to colleges for giving pathway relevance and specificity to a course critical to AA-DTA attainment. To do so, faculty had to work together across subject disciplines to identify and apply relevant math pathways to students' bachelor's degree majors. If these electives can articulate to and be built upon after transfer, they may both make the degree more marketable for those who go directly to work and make degree completion and transfer more relevant by clarifying the long term plans and goals at time of meta-major assignment.

Student cohorts

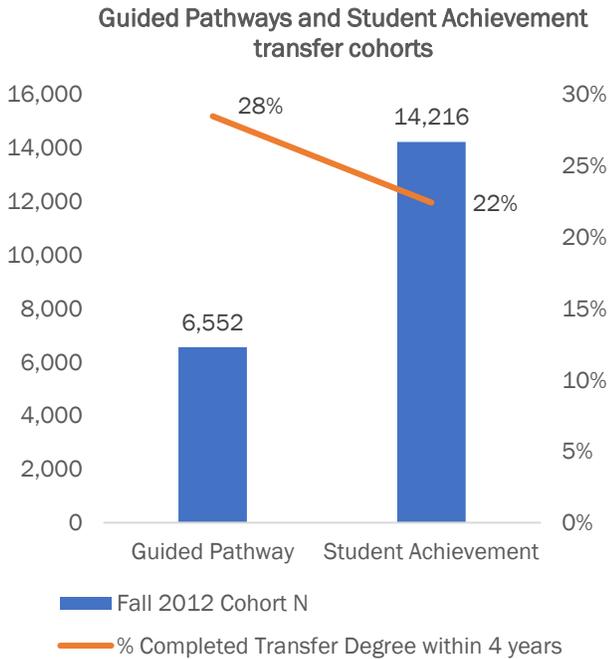
Guided Pathways can be aligned with the Student Achievement Initiative (SAI) to preview an even larger population of students that could benefit from its reforms. A typical community and technical colleges' graduation ceremony in June presents graduates who started their college in many different entering classes. If Guided Pathways is successful in raising graduation rates, we will see changes in the rate and time to completion for every entering class. Graduation will become more common, timelier, and include a more diverse graduating class with more equitable post-college outcomes for transfer and employment. The transformation will take time – six to nine years after a college chooses to implement a Guided Pathways approach.

The Guided Pathways cohort has been carefully selected to represent first time in college (FTIC) students. They have had no prior college experience for the most part. The large majority have at most only completed high school; however, they are not all coming to college directly from high school when the AA degree is compared to a professional-technical degree. There are older students as well as some students who may have had a little college. No student starting in a cohort has ever earned ten or more prior college credits in the CTC system. A small number have transitioned from basic education or returned after an extended absence.

Each Guided Pathways cohort represents a group of students who, for that year, would be most immediately impacted by Guided Pathways reform efforts. As a result, this cohort is the best group to use for tracking outcomes as Guided Pathways gets implemented. However, even before Guided Pathways, the State Board has been measuring students' incremental gains and milestones in the Student Achievement Initiative (SAI). Student Achievement (SA) cohorts is an earlier mechanism for longitudinal tracking for these students. These cohorts include FTIC students, but also represent a much broader set of students than chosen for Guided Pathways. The behavior and experience for many of these additional students is typical of students who start at college, gain little to no academic momentum, leave with no credential, and come back again later. Many have had life intervene with their college completion and are now picking up and starting over. They may continue on from year to year, or start again at a different college. Often their prior experience is not known or taken into account. The vast majority never reach any significant college-level attainment.

Figure 4 presents a comparison from fall 2012 for students between the Guided Pathways and SA cohorts. The students in both cohorts have a final goal for transfer to a four-year institution. Two points are of interest. First, the SA cohort is more than twice as large as the Guided Pathways cohort, which is indicative of the large number of students caught up in academic swirl. Second, the four-year completion rate for the SA cohort is six percentage points lower than the Guided Pathway cohort suggesting completion is even more challenging for students who have a pattern of stopping in and out of college.

Figure 4.



Conclusion

This brief is the first of three reports that review each of the community and technical college mission areas for increasing completions and closing equity gaps. The conclusions suggest that the importance of the AA-DTA as the largest degree awarded by two-year colleges means it must play a critical role in a pathways framework. However, students’ post-college experiences suggest that adding more specific components to the degree may help in planning and guiding students to increase four-year transfer and, for those who do not transfer, make the degree more marketable. Comparison between Guided Pathways and Student Achievement cohort completion rates further suggests the importance of clarifying students’ goals beyond transfer in both cohorts and being more specific in advising for transfer versus other pathway options. Subsequent briefs will focus on professional-technical education and Basic Education for Adults.

ⁱ This paper is the first of three briefs. Subsequent briefs will explore insights and implications for professional technical education and Basic Education for Adults derived from students’ post-college outcomes using Guided Pathways and Student Achievement data analysis tools.

ⁱⁱ The Pre-Nursing DTA is another major-specific Associate degree. We analyzed this degree in our study of the nursing program pipeline. We found then and again here that four-year transfer rates for this degree are very low. However, the majority of students who earn the

Pre-Nursing DTA rely on this degree to bolster their chances for entering a two-year nursing programs. The study can be found at <https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/research/workforce-research/17-1-producing-nursing-grads-and-rethinking-pipeline-for-guided-pathways.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/collegeaccess/research-data/data-main.aspx>

^{iv} https://www.burning-glass.com/wp-content/uploads/RPT_Saving_the_Associates_of_Arts_Degree.pdf



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