

Massachusetts Community College Council

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December 1, 2008

To: Francesca Purcell, Ph.D., & the Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group
From: Joe LeBlanc
Re: Response to CTAG's Final Report

To begin, I would like to commend the Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group's efforts to address issues and problems with the college transfer system. The committee's work is impressive and its recommendations are compelling. The Massachusetts Community College Council, representing more than 5,000 full- and part-time faculty and professional staff, endorses the report, its principles, goals, recommendations and action plan. Our Board of Directors urges full and aggressive action at the earliest possible opportunity. To do anything less shortchanges our students, faculty, professional staff and the Commonwealth.

Our education system faces many challenges in these tough times. Our students are the best in the nation, but their achievements aren't good enough. To succeed in the global economy, they must acquire skills applicable to the real world, and they must enter the workforce sooner rather than later.

Thousands of new students begin their higher education at our community colleges each year. Our faculty and professional staff help them to succeed in remedial courses and in college level general education, elective courses and courses in the major. We give them skills to apply in the real world. We work hard to address the achievement gap, a troubling and persistent difference in student success rates between poor and minority students and everyone else.

We struggle to take down barriers confronting our students. Our students persist and thousands succeed each year. They graduate or prepare to transfer. Then they hit the "Transfer Wall" and its pitfalls and obstacles to student success. It is an often-confusing world with more than 1,000 separate transfer articulation agreements, a long-neglected "system" where one never really knows for certain whether even general education courses will transfer.

Our Board of Directors commends the Department of Higher Education's Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group for its efforts to bring order to the confusion and chaos. The MassTransfer policy will create a "single streamlined policy" with a "full transfer and applicability of credit, guaranteed admission and tuition discount." It will provide a "portable general education transfer block across public higher education institutions."

The stakes are high for all of us. Fifty percent of community college students aspire to earn a bachelor's degree, but only 25 percent succeed in transferring to a four-year college. CTAG's final report highlights serious barriers to student success, including confusing and inadequate transfer policies and agreements and "inconsistent access to transfer information and to an appeals process."

We support CTAG's recommendations for MassTransfer, especially the following:

- Statewide transfer website;
- Statewide electronic transcript with online degree audits;
- Annual Transfer Report to the Joint Committee on Higher Education;

- Transfer ombudsperson at each public college or university to ensure compliance with transfer policies;
- Directory of statewide course-to-course equivalencies among all public higher education institutions (see detailed response to recommendation 4B, next page); and
- An online system to support faculty review of course syllabi and development of common student learning outcomes.

The Board of Higher Education approved MassTransfer in June with implementation set to begin in Academic Year 2009-2010. For our students, this change couldn't come soon enough. Our students deserve a transfer system marked by fairness and transparency. Our future and theirs depend on it.

One final note: If there is a need to pursue legislation to ensure the smooth transfer of credits, MCCC intends to participate fully in this effort.

Copies to: Education Secretary Paul Reville, BHE Chair Fred Clark, Commissioner of Higher Education Aundrea Kelley, Higher Education Co-Chairs Senator Robert O'Leary and Rep. Kevin Murphy, Community College Council of Presidents, Arthur Pippo, MTA Division of Higher Education

Response to CTAG Recommendation 4B

The MCCC urges the Department of Higher Education to make Recommendation 4B of the Final Report from the Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group a top priority.

Recommendation 4B reads: “Build a directory of statewide course-to-course equivalencies among all community colleges, state colleges, and University of Massachusetts campuses based on comparable course content and common student learning outcomes.”

This recommendation speaks to the need for a transfer grid that is accessible to students, parents, and faculty and staff in all segments of public higher education in Massachusetts. The construction of the grid should focus not only on ease of transfer, but on the premise that once the student has transferred a course that student should be prepared to take the next course at the receiving institution. It is not enough to grant transfer credits; the sending and receiving institutions should be sure that the content and outcomes are equivalent so that the student is prepared for work in the receiving institution.

The development of this directory should be faculty-driven. Faculty members know best the details of their courses and are best able to determine equivalencies. It cannot be assumed that courses with the same name are equivalent - many examples to the contrary exist. The CONNECT Writing and Mathematics groups in Southeastern Massachusetts have established a model for faculty-driven work on transfer equivalencies. Their organizational format could be shared with other regions to facilitate the work.

The task of constructing a transfer grid is enormous. It needs to be given top priority and done thoughtfully and efficiently. Without such a grid, students, parents, and college personnel are making decisions based on false or incomplete information.

The MCCC recognizes that such a task brings great staffing requirements, and supports creating or freeing up the staff needed at the Department of Higher Education and on the college campuses.