

## **DO ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS LEAD TO STUDENT SUCCESS?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the barriers and benefits of articulation at a small public liberal arts university in Oregon. Students transferring to the university with 45 or more credits were categorized and compared based on whether they transferred in with an articulated associate's degree or not. The purpose was to determine if program-to-program articulated degrees serve a useful purpose for students. Do they help students reach their goal of a bachelor's degree more efficiently?

Southern Oregon University (SOU) first began doing program-to-program articulations in a formal way in 2004. Currently, SOU has 41 articulations agreements in place with community colleges. The problem is there is no tracking of these students once they have graduated from the community college. There is no proof these articulation agreements are helping students reach their goal of a bachelor's degree more efficiently and effectively.

This study consisted of 1,944 subjects selected by conducting a query in SOU's student database. Those selected for inclusion in the data query were those who were enrolled at the University between fall 2005 and fall 2009 and who transferred in 45 or more credits from an Oregon community college. Using the University's database, the students were classified as (a) completers (those who graduated), (b) currently enrolled, and (c) leavers (those who have not been enrolled for more than one term and have not earned a bachelor's degree). Students were coded as having transferred to the University with no associate's degree, with a state-designed general transfer degree (state transfer), or with a program-to-program articulated degree (articulated program). Several factors were compared including drop-out rates, grade point average, transfer rate, and change of major.

#### **Drop Out Rates**

Dropout rates appear to be higher for students who did not transfer in with some type of associate's degree (40%). The dropout rate for students with an associate's degree was only 28%. Among those who came from an articulated program, the dropout rate was only 13%.

#### **Grade Point Average**

Students who transferred in from an articulated program enrolled with a higher GPA and graduated with a higher GPA than students with a state transfer degree or with no associate's degree.

#### **Transfer Rate**

The percentage of students who completed an articulated program degree and who actually transferred as intended was 74%. In comparing this with the state transfer degree, only 51-55% actually transferred to an Oregon four-year institution. It would appear that the articulated degree programs are having a positive effect on transfer.

### **Change of major**

In comparing graduates who transferred to SOU with an associate's degree and those who transferred without an associate's, it appears that students with an associate's degree again fare better. Associate degree holders complete more credits at the community college (less expensive), graduate with fewer total credit hours, and complete their bachelor's degree in less time than someone who transfers without an associate's degree. The difference in money spent on tuition could be around \$4,000 (assuming \$170 per credit for tuition at the university).

When comparing the state transfer degree students with the articulated program students, the articulated degree holders are less likely to change their major and complete their bachelor's degree with fewer credits. It's not a significant amount, but when a student is paying \$150-\$200 per credit, it can be substantial to the student.

### **Conclusion**

Transfer students will persist and succeed if timely and accurate information and support is provided. If both sides of the transfer process value transfer, the students benefit from having clear goals, fewer barriers in the process, and less time and money toward the completion of their goal. To support the ease of transfer from two-year to four-year institutions, comprehensive transfer centers staffed by academic advisors is a great place to start. Transfer centers should be housed on both sides of the transition: the community colleges and the universities. Advisors within these centers should look for ways to communicate and collaborate to support students on both ends of the transfer. In addition, program-to-program articulations should be fostered. Statewide transfer degrees, common course numbers systems, and other well-intended guarantees for transfer students have somewhat eroded the value of articulation agreements. These efforts don't recognize other important factors that go into transfer like a clear program of study, faculty cooperation and coordination, and better advising. Program-to-Program articulations better serve the transfer students and the institutions involved.