

# Supporting transfer students in Oregon:

## An update of The Ford Family Foundation's 2019 report



August 2025

## About Education Northwest

Education Northwest is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping all children and youth reach their full potential. We partner with public, private, and community-based organizations to address educational inequities and improve student success. While most of our work centers on the Pacific Northwest, our evaluations, technical assistance, and research studies have national impact and provide timely and actionable results.

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### Suggested Citation

Fujita-Conrads, E., Hodara, M., & Brey, L. (2025). Supporting transfer students in Oregon: An update of The Ford Family Foundation's 2019 report. The Ford Family Foundation.  
<https://www.tfff.org/supporting-oregon-transfer-students/>

### Acknowledgments

Education Northwest and The Ford Family Foundation would like to thank the many individuals and institutions that made this report possible. We thank the Higher Education Coordinating Commission for providing helpful feedback on the draft report. We extend a deep thanks to the six community colleges and universities that served as case study sites and the dedicated staff members and students who helped organize the site visits and participated in interviews and focus groups. We are so grateful to you for sharing your time and experiences with us. Your feedback and insights were invaluable and made this report possible.

# Contents



|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Executive summary</b>  | <b>3</b>  |
| Findings  | 3         |
| Recommendations   | 8         |
| Conclusion and next steps                                       | 8         |
| <b>Introduction</b>   | <b>10</b> |
| Project genesis   | 10        |
| Report overview   | 10        |
| <b>Findings</b>   | <b>14</b> |
| Contextual factors  | 14        |
| Features of a strong transfer culture                           | 20        |
| <b>Recommendations</b>  | <b>36</b> |
| Investing in credit transfer and degree audit technology tools  | 36        |
| Investing in supports and resources for transfer students       | 36        |
| Developing and maintaining transfer agreements and partnerships | 37        |
| Leveraging data for continuous improvement                      | 39        |
| <b>Conclusion and next steps</b>                                | <b>41</b> |
| <b>References</b>   | <b>43</b> |
| <b>Appendix A. Case study data collection and methods</b>       | <b>44</b> |
| Case study approach   | 44        |
| Data collection   | 44        |

## Colleagues,

We are pleased to partner once again with Education Northwest to explore the state of transfer in Oregon. This report builds on an earlier study completed in 2019 which drew on state data to raise up examples of positive policies and practices at six state institutions – three universities and three community colleges – all experiencing better than anticipated outcomes for transfer students overall or for specific populations, particularly rural students. From this initial research came four recommendations:

- Invest in and continue to refine credit transfer and degree audit technology tools
- Invest in more supports specific to transfer students
- Develop and maintain transfer pathways across the state and strengthen state transfer agreements
- Leverage longitudinal data to help stakeholders better understand how to support successful transfer outcomes

This report returns to those six campuses to learn what has changed – or not – since 2019.

While many of the promising practices, policies, and pathways that we documented in 2019 have been sustained and even strengthened at the institution level, the findings show that little progress has been made toward the system-level recommendations from the original report, although they remain relevant. Oregon has enacted several laws designed to streamline transfer over the past 15 years, but these efforts have not yet yielded the hoped for results for Oregon students. During this timeframe, the pandemic also exacerbated challenges being faced by postsecondary institutions.

The goal of the first report was to highlight policies and practices that could help contribute to strong transfer outcomes for Oregonians, and the second report continues to lift up promising policies and practices at the institutional level. The Ford Family Foundation continues to be committed to this goal and seeks to be a partner and catalyst for coordinated leadership in this space.

The Foundation looks forward to collaborating with our policy and institutional partners to celebrate successes and take an honest look at what is keeping us from making systems-level progress and supporting meaningful steps in removing those barriers.

As always, we are grateful for the thoughtful, committed practitioners and policy makers who seek solutions and continue to raise up student voice. We believe that Oregon can successfully implement effective support for transfer student success, but we must collectively invest in the solution. As colleagues, partners, and champions for student success, we look forward to hearing what this report raises for you and your ideas for a brighter transfer future.

In partnership,



Denise M. Callahan



## Executive summary

Transferring from a community college to a four-year college or university provides an affordable pathway to a bachelor's degree but can be difficult to navigate. Most students who begin their postsecondary career at a community college intend to transfer, yet nationally transfer rates and the percentage of transfer students who earn a bachelor's degree are persistently low (CCCSE, 2023; Velasco et al., 2024).

Improving transfer outcomes requires changes to practice, policy, and culture at the community college and university levels (La Violet et al., 2025; Wyner et al., 2016). In 2019, The Ford Family Foundation commissioned a collaborative research study to better understand the transfer landscape in Oregon and highlight policies and practices that could contribute to stronger transfer outcomes for Oregonians. The 2019 study drew on state data to understand students' transfer pathways and provided case studies of three community colleges (Linn-Benton Community College, Rogue Community College, and Southwestern Oregon Community College) and three universities (Oregon State University, University of Oregon, and Western Oregon University) with better than expected outcomes for transfer students overall or for specific populations, particularly rural students.

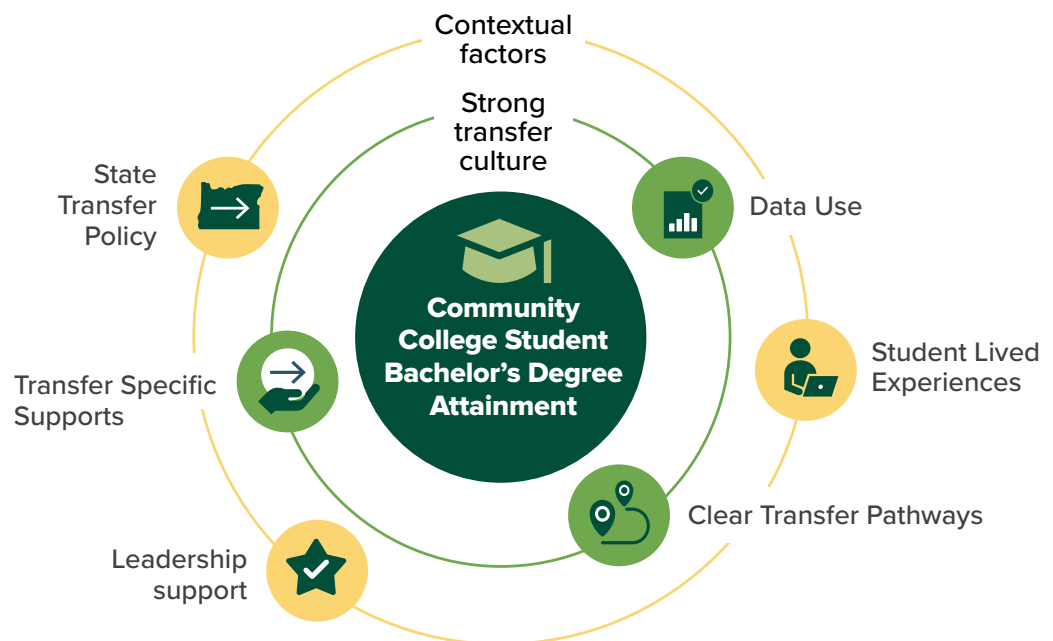
This study builds on the [previous study](#) by returning to the same six community colleges and universities to learn what has changed since 2019, how the pandemic has impacted the transfer landscape in Oregon, and what progress has been made on state policy initiatives intended to improve transfer outcomes. In fall 2024, we conducted interviews and focus groups with faculty members, advisors, administrators, and university transfer students from all six institutions about their experiences and perspectives. While promising practices were often sustained at the institutional level, we found that little progress had been made toward the system-level recommendations from the 2019 report, although they remain relevant. Oregon has enacted several policies intended to create clear transfer pathways for students, but efforts have not yielded the hoped for results. Additionally, the pandemic exacerbated the heightened challenges for postsecondary institutions.

## Findings

Drawing on prior research, we developed a framework to organize the findings of this report around contextual factors (outer circle) and features of a strong transfer culture (middle circle). At the center of the framework is the goal of **community college student bachelor's degree attainment**.

Figure ES1.  
**Contextual factors and features of a strong transfer culture that contribute to community college students' bachelor's degree attainment**

Source: Education Northwest



## Contextual factors



### State transfer policy

Oregon policy has focused on transfer since at least 2011 with the Transfer Student Bill of Rights. The transfer bill of rights states that students have a “right to junior standing” if they complete the state transfer degree, but it does not articulate well with some majors, primarily in the sciences and arts (Student-Ready Strategies, 2025). To address the limitations of Oregon’s transfer degrees, Oregon passed legislation in 2017 and 2021 to develop statewide core and major transfer maps (HB 2998) and common course numbering (SB 233). Together, core transfer maps, major transfer maps, and common course numbering are intended to maximize credits to apply toward students’ degrees and certificates, decrease time-to-degree completion, save students time and money, and reduce the number of excess credits beyond what is needed for degree completion. We found that in practice, however, there are challenges around major transfer map implementation.



### Leadership support of a strong transfer culture

One of the three key strategies from the transfer playbook is to “prioritize transfer at the executive level to achieve sustainable success at scale” (LaViolet et al., 2025). Leadership can support the review and implementation of policies, programs, and partnerships that respond to the unique needs of transfer students and help sustain transfer pathways. For example, Oregon State University participants spoke of the visibility of transfer culture at their institution at events, offices, and programs across campus. The university participants reflected that transfer is “ingrained into the fabric of the institutions, which helps to make it more sustainable.”



### Student lived experiences

Students’ lived experiences navigating transfer must be considered in the design and implementation of transfer policies and practices. A description of student experiences highlights the diverse realities of transfer students’ lives in relation to statewide transfer policies and how policy and transfer-specific support play out in the real world. On the next page we summarize the various degree options pursued by Oregon transfer students who participated in our focus groups.

## Focus group student experiences with Oregon transfer pathways



### **Institution-to-Institution Articulation**

**Agreements:** Articulation agreements are formal agreements or partnerships between a university and community college documenting the transfer policies and course equivalencies for a specific academic program. Community college and university staff members described the various articulation agreements developed between institutions to support student transfer pathways within a particular major or academic program.

**We added a new articulation agreement with Southern Oregon University in Healthcare Administration. It has been great to have a pathway from a CTE program to a bachelor's degree. We're trying to make sure that, if you do choose to do a career program, there is a transfer path available to you. And healthcare is one. There's now a clear transfer path."** Community college administrator



**State Transfer Degree:** Oregon has a set of transfer degrees that satisfy the lower division general education requirements at the public universities, but do not necessarily guarantee junior standing in a particular major. Students described having success transferring their community college courses to fulfill a university's general education requirements through the state transfer degrees.

**"Even though a lot of the classes I was taking didn't transfer one-to-one to anything here, because I was able to get the AAOT [Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer] that waives a lot of the arts and letters and other area requirements that I would otherwise have had to go back and take. Even if I took similar classes, they didn't transfer over one-to-one, but that whole system worked really well for me at least."** Transfer student who completed the AAOT



### **Dual Enrollment through Degree Partnership**

**Programs (DPP):** DPP allows students to be jointly admitted and enrolled at a four-year university and any of its community college partner schools. DPP is intended to improve the transition from community college to university by allowing students to enroll in both at the same time. Students and staff members reflected on how the degree partnership program allows for flexibility in course enrollment between the community college and university.

**"I was talking to an advisor; I was told community college is a great idea. However, for the Biology 200 series, specifically, you might want to take that at OSU instead because the lab component includes working with cadavers at OSU, not LBCC [Linn-Benton Community College]. I would definitely recommend other people doing it, like I was doing some at community college and then switching."**

Transfer student



### **Core Transfer Maps and Major Transfer Maps (MTMs):**

The Core Transfer Maps are a set of 30 credits that are part of the MTMs. If a student successfully completes a Core Transfer Map, all credits are expected to transfer to any participating public university and count toward its core bachelor's degree requirements. The MTMs are a set of about 90 credits for a specific major. If a student successfully completes an MTM, Oregon public universities with programs of study in the MTM subject are expected to accept all of the MTC credits and count them all toward a bachelor's degree in the specific major. Community college and university staff members told us that there has been limited use of the MTMs due to barriers to implementation. As a result, MTMs are not widely used by students and only achieved while working toward other state transfer degree options.

**"Our students aren't coming here to get an MTM, they're coming here to get something else, and they pick up an MTM. I'm not sure anybody's really been able in the community college world to articulate why you would really want to get an MTM."** Community college advisor



### **Common Course Numbering (CCN)**

is a process for aligning course information for the most transferred lower-division courses in Oregon. These courses are usually transferred between community colleges and public universities (vertical transfer), but students also transfer between institutions for other reasons (for example, community college to community college, university to university). Common course numbering is a somewhat common transfer policy: According to the Education Commission of the States (July 2022), 20 states have common course numbering. While students did not recognize what an MTM is, a few noticed the indication of a common course on their transcripts, which is denoted with a "z."

**"Is that the 'z' at the end of it? Yeah, I'm aware of that."** Transfer student





### Transfer-specific student supports

Many of the promising transfer practices that we documented in 2019 have been sustained and strengthened. In addition, colleges added practices related to holistic supports centered on students' basic needs and career-connected learning opportunities. However, impacts of the pandemic have created significant capacity constraints for institutions as they endeavor to provide students with effective transfer-specific support.

| Promising practices   | Challenges  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Transfer advising continues to be characterized by backwards planning, relationship-building, and helping students navigate credit transfer</li> <li>● Transfer-specific programming and spaces at a university are critical to helping transfer students build community and a sense of belonging</li> <li>● New transfer-specific technology helps advisors and students make course selections and understand the number of course credits they will receive for each transferred course</li> <li>● Oregon Promise has been a key source of support for transfer students, and colleges continue to use flexible financial aid and scholarships to support transfer students</li> <li>● Colleges have bolstered supports centered on holistic student needs and well-being. However, there are still unmet needs for transfer students</li> <li>● Universities provide career-connected learning opportunities for transfer students</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● While advising capacity and funding are critical to transfer, since the pandemic, some colleges have experienced dips in student enrollment and budget cuts, which have led to cuts to essential transfer programming and positions</li> <li>● Transfer advisors lack time and resources and have high caseloads and multiple responsibilities</li> <li>● Community college advisors find it challenging to stay up to date on university degree requirements</li> <li>● Institutions vary in how transfer supports are centralized and distributed across campus</li> </ul> |





## Clear transfer pathways

The journey to a four-year degree can require navigating complex and evolving transfer pathways and policies that vary across colleges and programs. We found that existing partnerships have been sustained and deepened since 2019, and institutions are combining resources in new ways to facilitate a seamless transition for students. We also found that, while existing state policies show promise for supporting clear transfer pathways, the MTMs have also introduced a new set of challenges for Oregon institutions to navigate as they develop and implement clear transfer pathways.

| Promising practices   | Challenges  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community colleges and universities continue to expand partnerships through personal relationships, dedicated transfer positions, and long-standing partnerships</li> <li>Community colleges and universities continue to collaborate through annual articulation retreats and major-specific convenings, and new state policies have offered an opportunity for faculty and staff members from across the state to collaborate within and across institutions</li> <li>Community colleges and universities are combining their resources in new ways to provide infrastructure and facilitate a seamless transition for students</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some participants questioned whether MTMs are the best way to address key challenges prospective transfer students face</li> <li>Developing MTMs can be challenging and require changes to community college and university curriculum</li> <li>MTMs are implemented inconsistently across community colleges as they attempt to align with diverse university requirements</li> </ul> |



## Data use

We found that institutions have continued to use a variety of metrics to understand transfer students' needs and experiences, set goals around transfer student success, and assess outcomes. Institutions report limitations to tracking transfer students from community college to university, leading to challenges evaluating the success of various transfer initiatives.

| Promising practices  | Challenges   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enrollment data and transfer-related metrics in strategic plans help institutions prioritize transfer</li> <li>New data collection efforts have allowed colleges to better understand and assess transfer students' outcomes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transfer students often have non-linear pathways between colleges and universities, which can be difficult to capture in existing data systems</li> <li>Coordination across institutions can create challenges with data use for community colleges.</li> </ul> |

## Recommendations

Oregon higher education institutions are invested in transfer and seek to build and maintain student-centered systems that support transfer student outcomes. Based on interviews with community college and university case study sites, we recommend the following next steps to support strong transfer pathways.

### *Investing in credit transfer and degree audit tools*

- Invest in and continue to refine credit transfer and degree-audit technology tools at the institution and state levels, as well as student-friendly resources available through a transfer portal, which are useful to registrars, advisors, and students

### *Investing in supports and resources for transfer students*

- Invest in more advising supports for transfer students and transfer-specific financial aid and programming, and collect student feedback to ensure these supports meet transfer students' needs

### *Developing and maintaining transfer agreements and partnerships*

- Strengthen existing transfer partnerships, such as DPP, articulation retreats, and annual meetings
- Strengthen and fund policy implementation that addresses the limitations of the MTMs
- Develop clear messaging about statewide transfer degrees and MTMs in order to increase understanding of their distinct purposes and advantages and to build trust across public institutions in their mutual support for the development, use, and acceptance of MTMs

### *Leveraging data for continuous improvement*

- Build institutional data capacity to support transfer student tracking at an institutional level and develop cross-institutional data systems to support continuous improvement of transfer-specific supports and evaluation of state transfer policies, including the MTMs

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## Conclusion and next steps

The recommendations highlighted in this report build on the recommendations from 2019 and point to areas of persistent need over the past five years. We hope that the Oregon higher education community uses this report to learn about promising practices that are being sustained and nurtured over time to strengthen transfer outcomes and to begin to take action to address the system-level challenges in the Oregon transfer landscape.



**For over 30 years, The Ford Family Foundation has supported students in achieving their dream of a college education.** The Foundation's postsecondary investments are interconnected. From direct-service scholarship programs that include wraparound support for high need, traditionally underserved students to strategic grantmaking, research and evaluation, opportunities to learn alongside a diverse group of students and partners help focus the work of creating pathways to opportunity. One persistent challenge the Foundation encounters is the complexity and lack of clarity associated with navigating the process of transferring between community college and a four-year institution.



# Introduction

## Project genesis

Transfer from a community college to a four-year college or university provides an affordable pathway to a bachelor's degree but can be difficult to navigate. Most students who begin college at a community college intend to transfer, yet transfer rates and the percentage of transfer students who earn a bachelor's degree are persistently low (CCCSE, 2023; Velasco et al., 2024). Only about a third of students enrolled in community college in fall 2015 transferred to a four-year institution, and less than half of the students who transferred earned a bachelor's degree within six years, which means only 16 percent of this community college cohort earned a bachelor's degree (Velasco et al., 2024). Oregon's outcomes are lower than the national average: Only 27 percent of students who enrolled in community college in fall 2015 transferred to a four-year institution, and 43 percent of these students earned a bachelor's degree within six years, meaning only 11 percent of this Oregon community college cohort earned a bachelor's degree within six years.

Improving transfer outcomes requires changes to practice, policy, and culture at the community college and university levels (La Violet et al., 2025; Wyner et al., 2016). In 2019, The Ford Family Foundation commissioned a collaborative research study to better understand the transfer landscape in Oregon and highlight policies and practices that could help contribute to stronger transfer outcomes for Oregonians. The 2019 study drew on state data to understand students' transfer pathways and provided case studies of three community colleges (Linn-Benton Community College, Rogue Community College, and Southwestern Oregon Community College) and three universities (Oregon State University, University of Oregon, and Western Oregon University) with better than expected outcomes for transfer students overall or for specific populations, particularly rural students.

Based on interviews with college staff members, faculty members, and students, the previous study identified three key features of a strong transfer culture: clear transfer pathways, robust advising systems, and strong and consistent use of data. Based on these findings that study included four recommendations for Oregon:

- Invest in credit transfer and degree audit technology tools that are useful to registrars, advisors, and students
- Invest in more supports for transfer students (e.g., advisors, training, transfer-specific financial aid and programming)
- Develop and maintain partnerships across the state to maintain existing transfer agreements that are working, develop new agreements, and strengthen the use of Major Transfer Maps (MTMs)
- Leverage Oregon's longitudinal data system to help stakeholders better understand how to support successful transfer outcomes and develop plans for scaling successful efforts

This current study builds on the previous study by returning to the same six community colleges and universities to learn what has changed since 2019, how the pandemic has impacted the transfer landscape in Oregon, and what progress has been made on state policy initiatives. We use the current study findings to share updated recommendations to help strengthen transfer outcomes for Oregon students.

## Report overview

### Community colleges and universities featured in this report

In fall 2024, we returned to the six community colleges and universities that participated in the 2019 study. These six institutions enrolled between 1,700 and 35,495 students in the 2023–24 academic year, with between 2 percent and 62 percent of undergraduate students living in rural counties (table 1).

**A comparison of enrollment and transfer data across institutions between the 2018–19 and 2023–24 academic years revealed the following:**

- All institutions saw shifts in enrollment, with all three community colleges experiencing declining enrollment, and two of the universities seeing increases in enrollment
- The rates of students receiving Pell grants were consistent over the two timepoints and across all institutions
- Transfer rates fluctuated, with two of the community colleges showing an increase and one showing a decrease
- Six-year completion rates for transfer students increased for all three universities and were similar to the six-year completion rates for non-transfer students, except at one university where they were much higher

**Table 1. Enrollment and transfer outcomes for participating institutions in the 2018–19 and 2023–24 academic years**

|   | Linn-Benton<br>Community<br>College | Rogue<br>Community<br>College | Southwestern<br>Oregon<br>Community<br>College | Oregon<br>State<br>University | University<br>of Oregon | Western<br>Oregon<br>University |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2018–19: enrollment*  | 7,959                               | 6,543                         | 2,182  | 29,664                        | 20,572                  | 7,658                           |
| 2023–24: enrollment*  | 6,132                               | 5,262                         | 1,700  | 35,495                        | 21,096                  | 6,092                           |
| Percentage of students living in rural<br>counties in 2023–24*              | 2%                                  | 32%                           | 62%  | 6%                            | 3%                      | 10%                             |
| 2018–19: Pell recipients  | 23%                                 | 46%                           | 37%  | 24%                           | 36%                     | 25%                             |
| 2022–23: Pell recipients  | 24%                                 | 43%                           | 36%  | 22%                           | 22%                     | 24%                             |
| 2018–19: Students enrolled full time**                                      | 6%                                  | 5%                            | 12%  | 32%                           | 48%                     | 26%                             |
| 2023–24: Students enrolled full time**                                      | 7%                                  | 5%                            | 13%  | 26%                           | 48%                     | 27%                             |
| Transfer rates for fall 2014 cohort   | 42%                                 | 34%                           | 22%  |                               |                         |                                 |
| Transfer rates for fall 2019 cohort   | 40%                                 | 29%                           | 28%  |                               |                         |                                 |
| Six-year completion rates for transfer<br>students, 2014 cohort             |                                     |                               |  | 75%                           | 68%                     | 71%                             |
| Six-year completion rates for first-time<br>full-time students, 2014 cohort |                                     |                               |  | 72%                           | 76%                     | 52%                             |
| Six-year completion rates for transfer<br>students, 2017 cohort             |                                     |                               |  | 76%                           | 73%                     | 79%                             |
| Six-year completion rates for first-time<br>full-time students 2017 cohort  |                                     |                               |  | 73%                           | 73%                     | 50%                             |

\* Enrollment excludes high school students, non-credit students, and graduate students.

\*\*Full time is defined as taking 45 or more credits annually, the minimum needed to complete an associate degree in two years or a bachelor's degree in four years.

Source: Higher Education Coordinating Commission Community College Data Dashboard and Public University Dashboard  
<https://www.oregon.gov/highered/strategy-research/Pages/dashboard.aspx>

## Case study qualitative methodology

Similar to the 2019 report, we used a case study approach—a form of qualitative research that allows for an in-depth study of a complex issue (Harrison et al., 2017). This approach allowed us to gather a variety of perspectives on the issue of transfer across six unique postsecondary contexts in the state of Oregon.

We conducted 31 focus groups and interviews with administrators, advisors, faculty members, and other individuals across the six institutions. We also conducted focus groups with 17 transfer students at the universities (Oregon State University, University of Oregon, and Western Oregon University). We used interview protocols with administrators, faculty members, and staff members. The protocols asked them to review a summary of transfer practices and supports from 2019 and discuss changes, new practices, and lessons learned. Participants also reflected on sustainability, the impacts of the pandemic, and the implementation of statewide transfer policies. Students reflected on their experiences with transfer, what helped them prepare to transfer and adjust after transferring, and opportunities for additional support. See appendix A for a detailed description of the guiding questions and case study methodology.

## Report outline

The report begins with a description of the framework we used to organize our findings, followed by a discussion of three important contextual factors to consider. We then share findings on the three features of strong transfer culture: transfer-specific supports, clear transfer pathways, and data use. Within each section we highlight practices that have sustained and strengthened since the 2019 report and new practices and bright spots. We also discuss challenges faced by the institutions in their work to support transfer students; a discussion of challenges was not included in the 2019 report, but we found through these case studies that the pandemic had far-reaching impacts on institutions with implications for every aspect of transfer. We conclude with recommendations for institutions and policymakers to continue the work of streamlining pathways and strengthening outcomes for transfer students in Oregon.





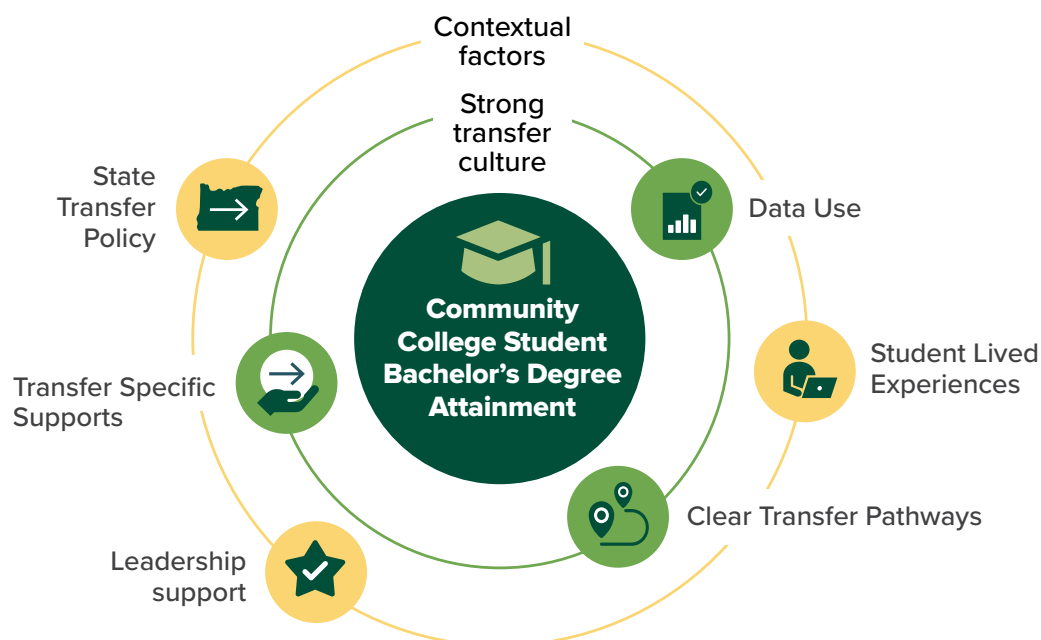


# Findings

This section first presents a framework we developed to organize the findings. The framework includes important contextual factors to consider, and the findings related to the three features of a strong transfer culture: transfer-specific supports, clear transfer pathways, and data use. Each of the finding sections includes a discussion of the practices that have been sustained and strengthened since the 2019 report, new practices, and challenges faced by institutions in their work to support transfer students.

Figure 1.  
**Contextual factors and features of a strong transfer culture that contribute to community college students' bachelor's degree attainment**

Source: Education Northwest



Based on previous research, we developed the above framework to organize the study findings (figure 1).

At the center of the framework is the goal of community college student bachelor's degree attainment. In the middle circle there are three features of a strong transfer culture at the institution and system levels that may influence transfer student outcomes; this report will describe these features in detail. On the outside of the framework, there are three contextual factors. State policy can help to streamline transfer and address challenges with transferring credits from one public institution to another (Hodara et al., 2017). Leadership support is key to prioritizing and supporting transfer work. One of the three key strategies identified in previous research is to “prioritize transfer at the executive level to achieve sustainable success at scale” (LaViolet

et al., 2025). Finally, students' lived experiences navigating transfer must be considered in the design and implementation of transfer policies and practices. A description of student experiences highlights the diverse realities of transfer students' lives in relation to statewide transfer policies and how policy and transfer-specific support play out in the real world.

## Contextual factors

Transfer student success is situated within the broader context of higher education policy, institutions' policies and practices, and the everyday student experience. We begin the findings section with a discussion of three contextual factors that emerged from the data as key considerations when supporting transfer student success: state policy, leadership, and students' lived experiences.



## Oregon state transfer policy

Oregon policy has focused on transfer since at least 2011 with the Transfer Student Bill of Rights. Oregon also has a set of transfer degrees and a transfer module that satisfy the lower division general education requirements at the public universities:

- Associates of Arts Oregon Transfer (AAOT)
- Associate of Science Transfer (AST)
- Associate of Arts Transfer (AAT)
- Associate of Science Oregon Transfer Business (ASOT-Business)
- Associate of Science Oregon Transfer Computer Science (ASOT-Computer Science)
- Associate of General Studies (AGS)
- Associate of Science (AS)
- Oregon transfer module (OTM) – 45 units that satisfy most university general education requirements and represent approximately half of an associate degree or the first year of a baccalaureate degree

The Transfer Student Bill of Rights states that students have a “right to junior standing” if they complete the AAOT, but it does not articulate well with some majors, primarily in the sciences and arts (Student-Ready Strategies, 2025).

To address the limitations of Oregon’s transfer degrees and module, which do not necessarily guarantee junior standing in a particular major, Oregon passed legislation in 2017 and 2021 (table 2).

This legislation primarily focused on developing statewide core transfer maps and major transfer maps (MTMs) and common course numbering, in order to provide more consistent transfer practices across all state institutions of higher education.

Table 2. Oregon policies affecting transfer

| Oregon state policy   | Policy description   |
|---|--|
| Transfer Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities<br>House Bill 3521   2011*     | Called for the Joint Boards of Education to develop standards for how students could apply community college credits to baccalaureate degrees at state institutions of higher education. Soon after, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) was formed and assumed responsibility for developing and implementing these standards.  |
| Foundational Curriculum and Unified Transfer Agreements<br>House Bill 2998   2017** | Directed the HECC and Oregon’s community colleges and public universities to improve transfer pathways and reduce the loss of credit. HECC became responsible for convening institutions to develop common foundational curricula that are now called the Core Transfer Maps and Major Transfer Maps (MTMs). So far there are seven approved transfer maps (Biology, Business, Computer Science, Elementary Education, English Literature Human Development and Family Services, and Sociology), and three in development (Psychology, Communications, and Criminal Justice).  |
| Common Course Numbering and Transfer Council<br>Senate Bill (SB) 233   2021***      | Directed public institutions of higher education to adopt a common course numbering system and establish a Transfer Council. Common course numbering is perceived to be successful and helpful for students. Common Course Number (CCN) focuses on aligning the most transferred lower-division coursework to help students receive credit when they transfer between institutions across the state. Alignment includes course title, name, number, subject code, credits, description, and learning outcomes. The council is charged with developing recommendations to the HECC on a common course numbering system, MTMs, and other credit and transfer-related concerns. |

Sources:

\*ORS 350.395 – Transfer Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

\*\*<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2017R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/HB2998/Enrolled>

\*\*\*<https://www.oregon.gov/highered/about/transfer/Documents/Transfer-Resources/OR-SB-233.pdf>



Together, state policies related to the core and MTMs and common course numbering are intended to do the following:

- Save students time and money: Maximize credits to apply toward students' degrees and certificates, decrease time-to-degree completion, and save students time and money
- Reduce barriers to completion: Remove obstacles and barriers that delay or derail transfer students who currently take longer to graduate and who graduate with more credits than students who do not transfer, despite being similarly prepared
- Improve equitable pathways for underserved groups: Better support underrepresented students of color, low-income students, and students from rural areas who often start at a local community college ([see HECC website](#))

The university and community college staff members we spoke with see the value of the MTMs in supporting student credit transfer into their intended degree. For example, one university administrator described how, in theory, the MTMs could improve outcomes for students by supporting credit transfer.

**"The dream of the MTM is to make the pathways clearer for students. I hope that that dream is actualized as we move forward, because right now it's still hard. For example, a student could take 90 credits in a degree partnership and come into OSU as a science major and still not have taken enough science. Even if they took 90 credits that transferred, because they didn't take enough science at the community college, they're not going to end up in the same place as a student that was here and advised by our advisors. And that's why I think that MTM work is so important—to make sure students aren't just transferring credits, they're transferring the right credits for the major they want to be in."**

University administrator

We found that in practice, however, there are challenges around MTM implementation. One challenge is that MTM implementation began prior to establishing common course numbers, which can simplify the process of creating state transfer pathways (Student-Ready Strategies, 2025). Senate Bill 233 addresses this challenge by requiring the development of common course numbering for courses that can be transferred and applied toward major requirements at public institutions across the state. Participants across all six institutions recognized the value of common course numbering, although there is still work to be done to establish common course numbering for more courses.

**"That's where the common course numbering can really help. Right now, that's still one of the biggest issues. You could be a student at a particular community college with a business and industry interest, but when you transfer you find out it wasn't exactly the right course."**

Community college advisor

Transfer students we spoke to also saw the value of common course numbering. For example, one student reflected on having to retake courses at their university due to major-specific requirements.

**"The only reason I have to retake some biology is because I'm switching to a science-focused major and I had to take a slightly harder version of the same biology course."**

Transfer student



## Leadership support of a strong transfer culture

Placing transfer at the center of institutional priorities is key to strengthening transfer practices, programs, and services. Leadership can support the review and implementation of policies, programs, and partnerships that respond to the unique needs of transfer students and help sustain transfer pathways. For example, Oregon State University participants spoke of the visibility of transfer culture at events, offices, and programs across campus. The university participants reflected that transfer is “ingrained into the fabric of the institution, which helps to make it more sustainable.”

With the increasing interest on certificates and short-term degrees, institutional leadership

must also consider how they message the transfer pathway to prospective students and how they continue to prioritize transfer culture at their institutions. As one community college administrator reflected,

**“The certificates and short-term programs—they’re easy for us to sell, if you will. Students want those. But we have never marketed transfer. And now it’s almost like we’re going to have to market the idea of what transfer is and really help students understand, you could start at a community college for much less money and then transfer and end with the same degree.”**

Community college administrator



## Student lived experiences

Many student focus group participants said they chose to start their journey at a community college primarily due to its lower cost and convenience, including the flexibility it offered for those who work or care for family members. Student focus group participants also reflected on how the pandemic and the movement to online classes influenced their decision to start at a more affordable setting.

**“I was like ‘OK, this [the pandemic] is a way bigger deal than I thought it was going to be.’ I’m assuming the first year is going to be kind of rough if I do go to a four-year, because I’m going to spend a bunch of money to just sit in a room. I’m going to save money by going to [community college].”**


Transfer student

**“For me, it was closer to home. I wasn’t able to go to a four-year [college] because of the limits of the costs and how far away it was from home.”**

Transfer student

Once at community college, academic advisors supported students in determining their transfer pathway and identifying which degree options would support credit transfer to their intended university. Table 3 summarizes the various degree options Oregon transfer students in our focus groups pursued. Students we spoke with shared that they found success with the state transfer degree options and dual enrollment through the Degree Partnerships Program (DPP), and staff members confirmed these experiences, sharing that these pathways are working for students. Staff members also shared that fewer students are being awarded applied baccalaureate degrees. No students we spoke with across the three universities were aware of the MTMs, and staff members shared that the MTMs have yet to be implemented consistently.

Table 3. Focus group student experiences with Oregon transfer pathways

| Description  | Exemplary quote   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Institution-to-Institution Articulation Agreements:</b> Articulation agreements are formal agreements or partnerships between a university and community college documenting the transfer policies and course equivalencies for a specific academic program.</p> |  <p>Community college and university staff members described the various articulation agreements developed between institutions to support student transfer pathways within a particular major or academic program.</p> <p><b>We added a new articulation agreement with Southern Oregon University in Healthcare Administration. It has been great to have a pathway from a CTE program to a bachelor's degree. We're trying to make sure that, if you do choose to do a career program, there is a transfer path available to you. And healthcare is one. There's now a clear transfer path."</b></p> <p>Community college administrator</p> |
| <p><b>State Transfer Degree:</b> Oregon has a set of transfer degrees that satisfy the lower division general education requirements at the public universities, but do not necessarily guarantee junior standing in a particular major.</p>                           | <p>Students described having success transferring their community college courses to fulfill a university's general education requirements through the state transfer degrees.</p> <p><b>"Even though a lot of the classes I was taking didn't transfer one-to-one to anything here, because I was able to get the AAOT [Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer] that waives a lot of the arts and letters and other area requirements that I would otherwise have had to go back and take. Even if I took similar classes, they didn't transfer over one-to-one, but that whole system worked really well for me at least."</b></p> <p>Transfer student who completed the AAOT</p>  |





| Description   | Exemplary quote  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Dual Enrollment through Degree Partnership Programs (DPP):</b> DPP allows students to be jointly admitted and enrolled at a four-year university and any of its community college partner schools. DPP is intended to improve the transition from community college to university by allowing students to enroll in both at the same time.</p>  | <p>Students and staff members reflected on how the degree partnership program allows for flexibility in course enrollment between the community college and university.</p> <p><b>“I was talking to an advisor; I was told community college is a great idea. However, for the Biology 200 series, specifically, you might want to take that at OSU instead because the lab component includes working with cadavers at OSU, not LBCC [Linn-Benton Community College]. I would definitely recommend other people doing it, like I was doing some at community college and then switching.”</b></p> <p>Transfer student</p> |
| <p><b>Core Transfer Maps and Major Transfer Maps (MTMs):</b> The Core Transfer Maps are a set of 30 credits that are part of the MTMs. If a student successfully completes a Core Transfer Map, all credits are expected to transfer to any participating public university and count toward its core bachelor's degree requirements.</p> <p>The MTMs are a set of about 90 credits for a specific major. If a student successfully completes an MTM, Oregon public universities with programs of study in the MTM subject are expected to accept all of the MTC credits and count them all toward a bachelor's degree in the specific major.</p> | <p>Community college and university staff members told us that there has been limited use of the MTMs due to barriers to implementation. As a result, MTMs are not widely used by students and only achieved while working toward other state transfer degree options.</p> <p><b>“Our students aren’t coming here to get an MTM, they’re coming here to get something else, and they pick up an MTM. I’m not sure anybody’s really been able in the community college world to articulate why you would really want to get an MTM.”</b></p> <p>Community college advisor</p>   |
| <p><b>Common Course Numbering (CCN)</b> is a process for aligning course information for the most transferred lower-division courses in Oregon. These courses are usually transferred between community colleges and public universities (vertical transfer), but students also transfer between institutions for other reasons (for example, community college to community college, university to university). Common course numbering is a somewhat common transfer policy: According to the Education Commission of the States (July 2022), 20 states have common course numbering.</p>   | <p>While students did not recognize what an MTM is, a few noticed the indication of a common course on their transcripts, which is denoted with a “z.”</p> <p><b>“Is that the ‘z’ at the end of it? Yeah, I’m aware of that.”</b></p> <p>Transfer student</p>  |

## Features of a strong transfer culture

In this section, we explore findings related to the three features of a strong transfer culture: transfer-specific student supports, clear transfer pathways, and data use. Within each section we highlight practices that have been sustained and strengthened since the 2019 report, new practices and bright spots, and the challenges faced by case study institutions in their work to support transfer student success.



### Transfer-specific student supports

Many of the promising transfer practices that we documented in 2019 have been sustained and strengthened. In addition, colleges added practices related to holistic supports centered on students' basic needs and career-connected learning opportunities. However, impacts of the pandemic have created significant capacity constraints for institutions as they endeavor to provide students with effective transfer-specific support.

### Promising practices

**Transfer advising continues to be characterized by backwards planning, relationship-building, and helping students navigate credit transfer.**

In 2019, community college and university advisors sought to provide prospective and matriculated transfer students with a continuum of support from community college entry to degree completion. Five years later, we found that community college and university advisors continued to support students through personalized advising. Advisors typically supported students through “backwards planning” by first identifying student’ long-term career goals and then developing a list of classes and timeline to support students.

**“If I’m working with a transfer student then I’m looking to identify their ultimate goal and their education plan and the specific classes they need, as well as the timeline and what that would look like, so that they understand their time with us and their time to graduation.”**

Community college advisor

Guided pathways reforms have accelerated in Oregon since 2019, providing a framework for community colleges to redesign their policies, programs, and services to support the mapping of pathways to students’ goals, help students choose and enter a program pathway, and keep students on the pathway toward graduation or transfer (Jenkins et al., 2018). All three case study community colleges were, at some point, involved in guided pathways reform. Many reflected on how the model helped guide students toward their long-term career goals. As one advisor explained: “This guided pathways component of the career piece is very important. It helps us advise toward a degree, while also keeping that [career] component on the other end in mind.”

In addition to personalized support, advisors reflect on the importance of forming relationships with students across the transfer pathway and being the point of contact for the student to reach out when navigating the transfer process.

**“The human touch and really trying to know them as people and not just a number. And that starts with the outreach that we do during admissions. They have that relationship with an admissions counselor, and we really try to keep that [relationship] going. You know: Ask me any questions. And also, having those very specific information sessions that can help them understand the transfer experience and help integrate them while still honoring that they’re unique.”**

University advisor

**Transfer-specific programming and spaces at a university are critical to helping transfer students build community and a sense of belonging.**

Community college and university staff members balance personalized, one-on-one student support with campus-wide transfer-specific programming and spaces that support community building. Reflecting on the diversity of the transfer experience, university staff members emphasized the need to understand the transfer student population to develop programs and services that meet their needs.

**“Transfer students are extremely diverse. Their minimum threshold is 24 or more transferable credits. So, developing programming with intentionality is extremely challenging when you’re dealing with such diversity. It’s hitting a moving target, oftentimes, and trying to understand who they are and their specific needs. You have to individualize it but also scale it.”**

University administrator

For example, University of Oregon and Oregon State University provide an orientation session specifically for transfer students. The session includes advisors and presents information on course planning, academic resources, community-building, financial aid, and navigating campus. In addition, both universities offer a first-year seminar that is specific to the unique needs of transfer students and helps build community. Oregon State University changed its policies to allow students admitted to the degree partnership program to attend a campus-based orientation and other welcome activities, even if the student does not plan to matriculate for another couple of years. This allows students an opportunity to gain a better sense of belonging and knowledge of the resources available to them at the university level.

**“There’s an entire seminar just for transfer students. We meet once a week. It’s run by one of the counselors, and it gives you resources and opportunities and basically all the information you need that might be hard to seek out on your own. It talks about more than just academics. It talks about help with buying groceries and meeting people and stuff that you wouldn’t think about or that is hard to reach out about. It’s been really helpful.”**

Transfer student

In addition, University of Oregon is developing transfer-specific residential housing and Western Oregon University provides guaranteed transfer housing so that transfer students have the option to live on campus. Other supports include clubs specifically for transfer students and other affinity groups to build relationships across intersecting identities, such as students of color, first-generation students, nontraditional students, and others.

**New transfer-specific technology helps advisors and students make course selections and understand the number of course credits they will receive from each transferred course.**

Technology is critical to helping community college students understand whether the courses they are taking will transfer into the degree program. The community colleges we talked to emphasized the need to strengthen technology and systems to share information from the community college to university to support a seamless transition for students.

There is still much work to be done to address these needs, but since 2019 universities have been implementing new transfer-specific technology to help advisors and students make course selections. For example, some colleges and universities are using features of MyDegrees, such as AcoLog and Curriculumlog, which are online platforms with program maps. Advisors can compare the program map with a student’s degree audit to determine which courses will transfer and what courses a student still needs to take and when. Oregon State University implemented a student dashboard called Beaver Hub, which provides students with tools and resources around advising, class schedules, course completion, and other resources. The hub provides a centralized platform in which transfer students, advisors, faculty members, and financial aid staff members can communicate about the articulation of a transfer student’s credits, thereby providing better guidance.



**“We’re using Salesforce. We call it Beaver Hub, but it’s a [customer relationship management] system. What’s been really nice about it is that if our office communicates with a student about an articulation—or let’s say they actually petitioned for us to re-review something—and we have communication in there with the student, then an advisor can see it. Previously, the only time others could see advising notes or something like that was if they were in our degree audit tool on MyDegrees. Now, an advisor in admissions, a records processor in our office, an articulations person, financial aid—everyone can see the note, so that we can guide that person down the right path.”**

University administrator

Often, universities are unable to review transfer course credits until after students have enrolled and registered for classes. This creates a barrier for students who do not know to what extent their credits transferred until their first term. While colleges may use the same technology to track student progress (i.e., MyDegree) the programs are unable to speak to each other to support the sharing of student course information and to determine which courses will ultimately transfer to the university.

**“If I had a wish, it’s that we could share our MyDegrees information with the other colleges. Most of the colleges have MyDegrees, but there’s no bridge between the systems. So, for example, we’re having trouble right now trying to figure out how to transcript the core transfer map, which is a smaller unit than our degrees, so that when students transfer they won’t lose out if they were in the wrong general education core. And it would be really easy if universities could just see MyDegrees with us.”**

Community college advisor

To address this challenge, Oregon State University is in the process of using optical character recognition technologies to review student transcripts and determine which credits will transfer at a faster rate. The university plans to develop a self-service portal where prospective transfer students can upload their transcripts to determine which courses will transfer, even without applying and being accepted to the university.

**“We launched optical character recognition technologies. It will speed up our turnaround time on credit in two ways. First, even an unofficial transcript provided to us, the system reads it and within hours can at least give [the student] an unofficial evaluation of their transcripts. Second, there will be a self-service portal where students can upload a transcript, even without applying, and it will provide that evaluation. That will really help them make the decision about whether they want to apply. We think that’ll be a huge, huge benefit, particularly for hard-to-keep students.”**

University administrator

In addition, universities develop and maintain a set of self-led online transfer guides for students to use if they’re transferring from an Oregon community college. The guides help students determine which courses will transfer to the university. For example, Western Oregon University is currently developing transfer advising guides for each academic major, listing the course sequence by year. This will support advisors and students at both the community colleges and the universities. Administrators, faculty members, and advisors note that, over time, online transfer tools have become more student-centered and accessible.

**“We do still have self-led tools that prospective students can use online to search for transfer guides if they’re from Oregon. And then there is a course-by-course search tool. I would say that that site has gotten a nice refresh over the years. It’s much easier to use. And they’ve done a good job of updating not only the tool and the courses that have been articulated over the years, but also how to use it, what the acronyms mean, how to interpret the reports and things like that. There’s a lot more accessible guidance on how to use those kind of self-select tools for prospective students, which has been a nice change.”**

University administrator

**Oregon Promise has been a key source of support for transfer students, and colleges continue to use flexible financial aid and scholarships to support transfer students.**

Most of the student focus group participants said advisors at their high school played an important role in their decision to attend a community college and apply for scholarships to cover the costs. The Oregon Promise Grant, a state grant that helps cover tuition costs at any Oregon community college, was a critical resource for these students, many of whom said they could not otherwise have afforded to attend.

**“Oregon Promise was huge for all of us because it covers 12 credits, which is full-time. Community college is already cheaper than university, but with Oregon Promise, it was like night and day.”**

Transfer student

While transfer students typically have higher financial need than incoming first-year freshman, they are often admitted after those students, which can put them last in line for financial aid and other institutional resources (Wyner et al., 2016). To ensure

fair and equitable access to financial aid, four-year universities should review aid disbursements and ensure that resources are held for transfer students (Wyner et al., 2016). Each of the case study university participants offered transfer students off-cycle and transfer-specific scholarships so that students beginning classes mid-point in the year can access the necessary financial aid. For example, Western Oregon University offers a scholarship specific to transfer students and moved the deadline to fall and spring terms.

**Universities provide career-connected learning opportunities for transfer students.**

For college students, internships and research opportunities serve as critical experiences that open professional doors to careers and graduate school. However, the transfer student focus group participants spoke of unequal access to career learning opportunities compared to students who begin their educational journeys at a four-year university. Many reflected that students who start at a four-year institution have more opportunities to build connections with professors and gain needed research and career experience.

**“The chance to get into research or internships—that’s what I feel most behind in as a transfer. There are other juniors who are taking 300-level classes that already have a connection with the professor and have attended those Intel meetings for computer science, at least.”**

Transfer student

Universities are addressing this need by developing career-connected learning opportunities specifically for transfer students. Oregon State University integrates career readiness into its two-credit Transitions course for transfer students. The course helps students think about the steps they want to take at the university to prepare them for a career or to continue their education after graduation. University of Oregon assigns professional mentors (usually university alums) to each transfer student to help them explore post-graduation career opportunities.

**“The other piece is they’ve already completed two years of education. They’re probably graduating in about two years. They’re looking for jobs. And so, we’ve actually started a process where we assign professional mentors to every transfer student if they want it. Because we know getting through your degree efficiently and finding a job are typically the two most important things. So, we want to make sure that those two processes are well supported.”**

University advisor

**Colleges have bolstered supports centered on holistic student needs and well-being. However, there are still unmet needs for transfer students.**

During the pandemic, higher education institutions received federal aid that helped them increase aid to students experiencing basic needs insecurity. The NPSAS survey is administered by the National Center for Education Statistics and is a nationally representative survey of students enrolled at Title IV-eligible institutions across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The NPSAS 2020 survey found that 23 percent of undergraduate students experience food insecurity and 8 percent experienced homelessness. Black, Native, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native students experienced rates of food insecurity that were 13 to 17 points higher than white and Asian students (Riggs & Hodara, 2024). Over time, community colleges and universities in Oregon began creating new staff positions that are specifically focused on addressing students’ non-academic needs, such as basic needs navigators and mental health counselors. While many of these supports are provided for all students, some university participants noted that they are particularly impactful for community college transfer students or are specifically tailored to that population.

**“We hired a full-time staff member, housed in [academic program], to support mental health ... And she’s also doing some workshops and events for transfer students, especially in the first term, which is when we have the most transfer students coming in. And that’s been really beneficial to have that resource for those students, whether they’re experiencing anxiety or just having difficulty making the transition.”**

University advisor

Despite these positive changes, participants noted that students still face challenges with basic needs insecurity. In particular, institutional representatives and transfer students spoke of the challenges with finding affordable housing after transferring to the four-year institutions. This can lead to challenges with completing courses and making timely progress toward graduation.

**“Transfer students have great difficulty finding housing within the timeframe that they are potentially admitted, and so it becomes really challenging. University housing is not set up for families. If you are a transfer student, if you’ve missed a term because of housing and you have to defer until the next term, then it also delays your access to education.”**

University administrator

## Challenges

While some colleges and universities have maintained and developed new transfer supports, many others have faced capacity constraints that specifically impact their ability to support this student population. For many, the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting budget cuts and staff turnover exacerbated already existing capacity constraints.



**Since the pandemic, some colleges have experienced dips in student enrollment and budget cuts, which have led to cuts to essential transfer programming and positions.**

The community colleges saw dips in enrollment, and all six participating institutions noted budget challenges that had impacted their transfer programming or positions. These enrollment decreases align with national trends, which show greater drops in enrollment for two-year institutions as colleges shifted to online learning and many students postponed or sought alternative options to college (American Council on Education, 2022).

**“We don’t have a university center anymore. That position was eliminated. I think that has presented some challenges, because that person really was very aware of what was going on with the universities, could help faculty if they did want to start a transfer path, could help with advising students. And so, when we lost that capacity, it minimized some of our more direct interactions with universities.”**

Community college administrator

Participants at community colleges noted that when programs or staff positions were cut, it left a large burden on the remaining staff members to support students and rebuild relationships that were impacted.

**“We were impacted simply because a lot of the responsibility fell on us to handle the situation, because it was hard for the faculty who were being cut to be motivated to engage with other community relationships. For example, I realized right away we have [another program] here that’s being eliminated. I had to help with how we’re going to articulate this and make that work. Some of the workload, a large part, fell on our area.”**

Community college faculty member

**Transfer advisors lack time and resources and have high caseloads and multiple responsibilities.**

Limited advisor capacity was consistently identified as the biggest challenge. While case study participants emphasized the importance of advising in supporting transfer students along their educational pathway, advisors have increasingly limited capacity to provide personalized support. Faced with high caseloads, staff turnover, and budget cuts, advisors often have limited ability to form relationships with students, provide proactive support to students who are off track, and build relationships and coordination across offices and colleges (Chamberlain & Parnell, 2022). While best practice is that colleges hire dedicated advisors, due to capacity constraints, colleges often rely on faculty advising (Vasquez & Scrivener, 2020). Faculty provide important discipline and industry specific information about careers and connections to four-year universities. However, faculty must advise students in addition to their teaching responsibilities and often receive limited training. Across community colleges and universities, faculty and advisors have overwhelming caseloads of students to advise.

**“The advising front is one of the critical issues ... The fact that the advisor-to-student ratio is absurd. Well, in business it’s what, 600, 700? Retention of advisors has been an issue here with our staff.”**

Community college advisor

While advisors would like to proactively support transfer students who appear to be off-track or taking classes outside of their educational plans, many do not have the capacity. As a result, advisor support is driven by the students who seek help and make appointments with the advisors.

**“I don’t feel like I have a lot of capacity to screen for who’s following the plan or who might need some extra help. It’s pretty rare that I get the time to do that.”**

Community college advisor

### **Community college advisors find it challenging to stay up to date on university degree requirements.**

Transfer students often face challenges transferring their community college credits to a four-year institution, or the credits are accepted but not applied toward their major (Emrey-Arras, 2017). Similarly, community college advisors described a persistent challenge of staying up to date on university degree requirements. Given capacity constraints and different degree requirements at each university, many advisors find it challenging to advise students on whether their transfer credits will count toward their major at the four-year university. Some advisors mentioned instances in which they thought a student's credits would transfer, and they were not accepted by the university.

**“The universities won’t really talk or meet with a student about advising until they go through the admission process and are actually there. So, our advisors have to really know what’s going on and stay up to date with any changes that are happening for transfer. It feels like it’s hard to find the information sometimes. And if you’re talking about more than one school, and you’ve got all these schools and are trying to track down all the little caveats, how do you make sure you know that? It takes a lot of work and partnership to make sure that everyone’s staying up to speed. And then getting the right information out there to the staff and also the students.”**

Community college advisor

### **Institutions vary in how transfer supports are centralized and distributed across campus.**

While administrators, faculty members, and advisors all felt that their colleges were providing student-centered services, many reflected on the need for better coordination between community colleges and universities so that the transfer experience is streamlined, thereby relieving some of the pressure on advisors. For example, dedicated transfer positions or a centralized location for transfer information would greatly benefit advisors and help students navigate the transfer process. We found variation in whether campuses have a dedicated transfer position or a centralized center for transfer. Many institutions lost their dedicated transfer specialist after the pandemic, and the lack of a centralized transfer information system leads to variation in transfer student experiences.

**“Transfer students, non-traditional learners—we need to be flexible and student centered to attract them and retain them and help them succeed. We’re not necessarily set up to do that. A lot of that is resource scarcity. Our people are student centered, but our systems are not student centered. When everything is super personalized or hyper personalized, it becomes about who your advisor is and whether they care enough to submit a general education petition for you, or who the person is who you connect with over here and their knowledge base and ability to help you navigate these complex things when you’re a transfer. That doesn’t sit well with me. It’s something we’re actively changing.”**

University administrator



## Clear transfer pathways

The journey to a four-year degree can require navigating complex and evolving transfer pathways and policies that vary across colleges and programs. We found that existing partnerships have been sustained and deepened since 2019, and institutions are combining resources in new ways to facilitate a seamless transition for students. We also found that, while the state policies hold promise for supporting clear transfer pathways, the MTMs have introduced a new set of challenges for Oregon institutions to navigate.

### Promising practices

**Community colleges and universities continue to expand partnerships through personal relationships, dedicated transfer positions, and long-standing connections.**

In 2019 we found that communication and collaboration between faculty members and advisors at community colleges and universities was necessary to develop and maintain successful transfer pathways. Five years later, we heard from case study participants that cross-institutional connections had been developed and maintained through personal relationships, dedicated transfer positions, and long-standing partnerships.

For example, Rogue Community College and Southern Oregon University (SOU) have long maintained a strong partnership. As two institutions in close proximity, most transfer students from Rogue Community College choose SOU. One college administrator stated that the strength of this partnership was based, in part, on personal relationships across the two institutions.

**“I feel like in this area, we know each other, so the registrar at SOU that I work with, I have known him for my whole career, 20-some odd years. We used to work together at SOU. Part of that partnership is that we’ve known each other so long and there are a lot of positions like that. When we think about the partnerships, outside of building articulations, agreements with these other colleges, a lot of that partnership is from department to department.”**

Community college administrator

A dedicated position to support transfer student pathways can help to streamline services and support the sustainability of transfer programs, services, and partnerships (Moore, 2020). With institutional capacity already stretched thin, case study participants reflected on the importance of having a dedicated position, at both the community college and university levels, to develop and maintain partnerships. Linn-Benton Community College and Oregon State University have maintained a strong partnership since at least 1998, when the degree partnership program began. The partnership benefits from this long-standing connection and allocation of resources and staffing.

**“There’s a willingness from Oregon State University and Linn-Benton Community College for that particular relationship to stay very much connected, both sides. People put energy into the meetings and faculty staying connected with faculty, because we know it’s the best thing for students. One thing I’m really grateful for is having full-time staff in this area, despite budget challenges and everything. That’s critical. OSU has five full-time staff members who work on transfer. Approximately half of our students come here to transfer. So of course, it’s going to be the highest priority for us.”**

Community college administrator

Since 2019 colleges have expanded their partnerships across the state to provide more streamlined transfer pathways for students. Each of the case study colleges expanded its partnerships to include additional degree programs for students. For example, Southwestern Oregon Community College expanded its partnerships with universities across the state to create clear transfer pathways for students, including healthcare administration and career technical education programs.



**“We’ve added new ones since then (2019). There’s another one in elementary education to Western Oregon, and we have multiple transfer articulations to the Oregon Institute of Technology. We added a new one with SOU in healthcare administration, which has been great because those pathways from CTE programs are technically terminal—they don’t have to be transfer programs that lead to bachelor’s degrees. But we’re trying to make sure that if a student does choose to do a career program, there still is a transfer path available to them.”**

Community college administrator

**Community colleges and universities continue to collaborate through annual articulation retreats or major-specific meetings, and state policies have also offered an opportunity for faculty and staff members across the state to collaborate within and across institutions.**

In 2019, we heard that community colleges and universities found success in bringing together faculty and staff members to discuss how to align courses and curricula and to create and update articulation agreements. In-person and virtual meetings were not only an opportunity to align courses, documents, and syllabi among community college and university partners, but also helped build relationships and personal connections across institutions.

Five years later, community colleges and universities have expanded their articulation meetings. For example, the Oregon State University School of Business holds a biannual in-person meeting that brings together representatives from every community college and every four-year institution. The meeting provides a space for colleges to share their work and build relationships. As one participant explained, “It’s allowed us to get to know folks across institutions at a personal level.”

Since 2019, Rogue Community College and Southern Oregon University have expanded their annual articulation retreat. The annual in-person retreat brings together college administrators and faculty members to review articulation agreements and course alignment. The colleges now invite advisors, financial aid and TRIO staff members, and researchers, in addition to administrators and faculty members.

**“We just had the retreat and expanded it to do even more. We had the program alignment, but we also brought in advisors, financial aid, TRIO programs, and our assessment people from the teaching and learning center. We also visited SOU, and they gave us tours of all the buildings so that an advisor who is talking to a potential SOU student can give them a much better picture of what the campus is like and where things are located. In the past, we just went and sat in the room and met, and those were great conversations, but we added the tours this time so that people get more familiar with the campus.”**

Community college administrator

Community college and university participants also valued the opportunity for faculty and staff members to come together across the state to collaborate on developing the MTMs.

**“I think some of the things that have really worked with the major transfer map work is full faculty involvement, and the state has done a good job of bringing together faculty teams and making sure that we have rural community colleges involved and the larger colleges and the universities all part of the conversation.”**

University administrator

### **Community colleges and universities weave together their resources in new ways to provide infrastructure and facilitate a seamless transition for students.**

College partners are weaving together their resources, staffing, and funding to facilitate seamless transitions for students from a community college to a university. For example, community colleges are co-locating courses on university campuses. Oregon State University expanded Chinook Hall, which is a space for students to take classes from Linn-Benton Community College. Similarly, Rogue Community College partners with Southern Oregon University to support early childhood classes through the university's Higher Education Center. Allowing students to take community college classes on a university campus supports a seamless transition to the university.

**“We’re looking at having a lot of our classes over in Corvallis, when previously they were here. That provides more support for the transfer students, because a lot of them already live in Corvallis. By relocating some of our classes to Corvallis—and expanding Chinook Hall to accommodate that—I think we’re providing better support for our transfer students.”**

Community college advisor

### **Challenges**

Many of the regional transfer pathways in Oregon are dependent on long-standing relationships and deep personal connections between staff members at community colleges and universities. While these relationships have resulted in successful collaborations, they can also be challenging for long-term sustainability. For example, many participants spoke of losing important information about credit articulation once a key administrator, faculty member, or advisor who spearheaded a partnership left the institution. In addition, investment in maintaining relationships takes time and capacity. State transfer policies, such as the MTMs, can fill this gap by creating statewide agreements. But we found a new set of challenges around the development and implementation of these state transfer pathways.

### **Many case study participants questioned whether MTMs are the right way to address transfer challenges.**

The MTMs were designed to help with credit transfer and, specifically, to address excess credits. However, administrators, faculty, and staff members said that many students still end up taking unnecessary courses due to uncertainty around their major or around which courses they should take at the community college. Across the country, student uncertainty about their major or switching majors is common and is a key reason why transfer students lose credit (Hodara et al., 2017). Therefore, there are questions around whether the MTMs will ever be able to address the issue of credit mobility in a context in which most students experience some uncertainty about their pathway in the first years of college. It should be noted that uncertainty and “swirling” at the community college level could be alleviated through increased advisory capacity.

**“A lot of the state stuff is designed for the student that doesn’t exist, which is the student that starts at the community college day one and knows exactly what they want to do. They’re swirling a lot at the community college. And, if they go down one path and then change and then come here, then that’s going to mess up the transfer. That’s what is happening a lot.”**

University administrator

Oregon transfer students who participated in the focus groups verified this challenge. The most common reason they mentioned for taking community college credits that did not transfer was switching majors while in community college or once after entering the four-year university.

**“You need to know what major you want to do when you’re starting college. Because you can say, ‘OK, I’m going to do business,’ and then transfer and now you want to do medicine. Now you have to reset on year one. That’s what I’m doing.”**

Transfer student

**“If you look at the business MTM versus a direct transfer associate of science business to SOU, you would never want to get the MTM. Because we can work with SOU to exactly match the classes that work for their programs. With the MTM, in order to be generic enough to fit all seven universities, there’s limited alignment.”**

Community college faculty member

### **Developing MTMs can be challenging and require changes to community college and university curriculum.**

A faculty subcommittee of equal representation is tasked with developing MTMs. Community college and university staff emphasized the capacity challenges faculty face in participating in subcommittees to develop the MTMs, particularly at an already resource-stretched time.

**“It’s a tax on our faculty to do this work. These are unfunded mandates from the state, and folks in my office run around nuts trying to shake the trees to get faculty to engage in these things. And I will say that our faculty have stepped up, and I’m really pleased about that. Because they’re doing a tremendous amount of work, and I know that our partners at other institutions who are not as well-resourced as we are, they’re struggling even more mightily to get the faculty engagement.”**

Community college administrator

Administrators, faculty, and advisors also emphasized the challenge of developing a state transfer agreement that aligns with the major requirements of bachelor’s degree programs at diverse universities across the state. As a result, the current MTMs in use, called MTM Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), contain many exceptions and have limited alignment compared to using the Associate of Transfer Degrees. The state is working to address this with new MTMs, called MTM Curriculum Articulation Policies (CAP).

Further, to align degree pathways at institutions across the state, four-year institutions and community colleges must shift their curriculum, which results in a ripple effect of curriculum changes across the state.

**“The tension is that to get rid of the complexity, you end up trying to compel the universities to change their degree requirements. In some ways, the whole system is flipped on its head, because students are transferring into our degrees, but a lot of this conversation is driven by the curriculum at the community colleges. So, it’s kind of backwards.”**

University administrator

While one of the goals of the MTMs is to save student time and money, an unintended consequence is that they shrink the number of credits students complete at the community college, potentially resulting in education being more costly.

**“They have shrunk their lower division general education. So now some of our programs don’t have 90 meaningful credits that you can take at the lower division. So, students really ought to transfer early. And we’re seeing that kind of erosion of the lower division and movement to the upper division courses, which doesn’t allow students the affordability option of being at the community college for longer.”**

Community college administrator



## **MTMs are implemented inconsistently across community colleges as they attempt to align with diverse university requirements**

Across the six case study sites, we heard varying levels of MTM implementation and limited use by students. Additionally, as only seven approved MTMs exist at this time, MTMs only cover a small number of majors and thus have limited use.

**"I know major transfer maps exist, but we don't really have them for a lot of our majors."**

Community college advisor

Further, as noted, the MTM MOUs that have been developed contain many exceptions, making them confusing for advisors and students. As a result, community college staff members need to understand the university's program to accurately advise students.

**"With the major transfer maps, at the community colleges, we thought the universities were going to align more on their degree requirements. And they didn't. And so, it was difficult to implement it. It felt like our advisors had to become experts not only in our curriculum but also in the curriculum of various degree programs and transfer schools."**

Community college administrator

Due to the inconsistency in implementation of MTMs across the state and confusion around their value, there is mistrust around whether community colleges will award MTMs to transfer to the university and whether universities will accept the MTMs if awarded. Due to the confusion, most community colleges are not advertising the MTMs with students, and many have yet to award an MTM.

**"I get really frustrated with 'This is supposed to help our students,' and I'm not sure how. At this stage, we are not advertising the MTMs. We are not talking about the MTMs, because why would we confuse folks? They're not coming here to get an MTM. They're coming here to get something else, and they pick up an MTM."**

Community college administrator

**"We can't find any evidence that a single community college has ever awarded a major transfer map. As we understand it, they don't have a mechanism to advertise the major transfer maps and so the degree isn't completed. That's a disconnect I'm seeing with the major transfer map. The community colleges aren't using them for advising, or they don't advise at all, which is a bandwidth problem, not because they don't want to. And then the four-year [plan of the MTM] doesn't take into consideration the impact of students changing their major. So, nobody's using it as far as I can tell, which is frustrating."**

University administrator



## Data use

We found that institutions continue to use a variety of metrics to understand transfer students' needs and experiences, set goals around transfer student success, and assess outcomes. Institutions report limitations to tracking transfer students from community college to university, however, which leads to challenges evaluating the success of various transfer initiatives.

## Promising practices

**Including enrollment data and transfer-related metrics in strategic plans help institutions prioritize transfer.**

At community colleges, participants had a clear understanding of their current transfer rates and how they connect to goals around graduation and transfer. Many of the community colleges prioritize transfer by including key transfer metrics in their strategic plans. For example, Rogue Community College has key performance indicators in the strategic plan around the number and percentage of students who transfer to a four-year college or university, which is tied to a goal around fostering educational partnerships.

Universities are tracking transfer enrollment numbers and noted that large transfer populations help keep transfer at the center of the conversation. One administrator from Western Oregon University reflected, "Transfer is a large part of our student population. It's at 30 to 40 percent. I am of the belief that our transfer student population should be growing. That's a population we need to invest in as a technical regional university."

Universities were also working to develop metrics to meaningfully track and assess student outcomes. Some mentioned tracking the number of transfer students who graduate within three years of transfer. Others are prioritizing transfer students by integrating metrics associated with transfer success in their strategic plans.

**"We are in the process of developing a university strategic plan ... There's been a clarity of interest on transfer students' success and recognizing that if we're going to continue to build this culture and do well it has to be a stated priority. And there are a few elements that are embedded into that top-level strategic plan that are tied to transfer student success, which I think is a really good step in the right direction."**

University administrator

**New data collection efforts have allowed colleges to better understand and assess transfer student outcomes.**

Some colleges highlighted new efforts to evaluate programs or track progress toward goals that included key metrics for transfer students. Highlights include:

- Oregon State University has increased efforts to include transfer students in student data collection efforts including onboarding evaluation, student experience surveys, and longitudinal data collection efforts. Participants noted that many of these tools historically focused on first-time full-time students, so they intentionally oversampled transfer students in order to track them from the time they transferred through completion. Oregon State University is also linking student experience data to student outcome data. Administrators, faculty members, and student support services personnel are using this information to make decision about programming that better supports transfer students.
- Linn-Benton Community College partnered with the Aspen Foundation to study student outcomes, with a focus on wages. This has helped them understand which programs and majors are leading to successful transfer outcomes and eventual high wages.

- Rogue Community College partners with their closest four-year institution to support data sharing at the program level. Individuals in each program meet to discuss articulation agreements and student outcomes at the individual and aggregate levels to identify additional support needs. They noted that this relationship-based model works very well but could be challenging to implement with multiple institutions.

## Challenges

Although the institutions shared successes with data use, particularly around smaller targeted efforts, they faced a variety of challenges. First, participants highlighted the diversity of pathways taken by transfer students and noted that this complexity is difficult to capture in current data systems, particularly for students in degree partnership programs. Further, community colleges also faced some specific challenges with accessing and analyzing data that could be used to inform programming and supports due to a lack of cross-institution coordination.

### **Transfer students often have non-linear pathways between colleges and universities, which can be difficult to capture in existing data systems.**

Participants highlighted the diversity of transfer student pathways and experiences and shared that these could be difficult to capture in their data systems. This was particularly challenging for tracking outcomes for students in degree partnership programs and measuring on-time graduation.

While the supports and programming put in place to meet these goals are aligned with best practices for transfer students (e.g., early warning systems, advising), the lack of clear goals for transfer students made it difficult to track improvements or understand the impact of specific programming on transfer students as a unique population. One administrator described their university's efforts to ensure they are tracking transfer student outcomes even though that student population is not specifically identified in the strategic plan.

**"We do have some data as it relates to transfer students, but we don't have a really good definition of what a transfer student is, nor do we have great targets on that. So, we have a lot of students who are what we refer to as un-cohorted. And it's really challenging to figure out how to best serve those students if we really don't understand where the gaps are ... Transfer students are the biggest challenge for us right now from a data standpoint."**

University administrator

While degree partnership programs were popular with students, community college participants, and university participants, they did pose challenges for data use. For example, both community college and university participants found it difficult to track student participation in these programs, particularly if they went back and forth between the community college and the university or took classes at both institutions at the same time. As a result, it was challenging to assess outcomes for those student groups or to understand and meet their unique needs.

**"[How do we measure the] dosage of DPP? It could be one class, it could be most classes, but they live in a dorm at OSU, and we don't really have a way to control for that. How much DPP have they been involved in? And if they aren't succeeding, why? Was it our handing them off? It's not really a one-time thing because they go back and forth. Our students go back and forth a lot, so it's harder to figure out if there are batons being dropped."**

Community college administrator



Another challenge is related to measuring on-time graduation. Participants at universities mentioned that it can be difficult to assign transfer students to a cohort, which is part of the process for tracking time to graduation. Moreover, it's not clear what "on-time graduation" means for students who are coming in at a variety of points on their pathway and with a wide range of existing credits.

**"The on-time piece is so challenging, because you would almost need the student's intended graduation date, rather than the four-year rate. We've got a lot of students who might go part-time or they're working quite a bit or they're working toward residency, and they're not really aiming to graduate in four years, for good reason. So, it's like [we need to measure] intention versus reality."**

University faculty member

Some participants shared similar challenges with tracking participation or the success of statewide initiatives. Most participants did not have a way to track how many students used the core or major transfer maps because they were not marked in the system. In addition, very few colleges have developed strategies to track student outcomes associated with the use of common course numbering.

### **Coordination across institutions can create challenges with data use for community colleges.**

Community colleges shared specific challenges they face in tracking student outcomes after transfer. Participants noted that it could be difficult to get any data, which makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of specific programs or practices. Some mentioned that when they do get access to data, it is already old, which makes it difficult to address emergent needs or know if adjustments are working. These issues are present whether they are working with individual universities, accessing IPEDS data, or reviewing state-level data (e.g., the HECC dashboards). They also shared that there is a gap in data around students who intended to transfer but did not enroll, and they are unable to identify those students in the system to understand how to better support their needs. The community colleges also faced capacity challenges with small institutional resource offices who had limited time to coordinate with universities to access data or do a deep dive into evaluating specific programs for transfer students.

**"It's hard to know how people are doing because we don't have a shared data system, and our data is really lagging. What we do have access to is way after the fact. Like, 'Oh, now we know three years ago we did something good.' ... Even the number of students going into majors at other universities across the state—it takes so long to get that information. They say they're going to go to Oregon State. Did they actually go to Oregon State? Did they enroll? Were they successful? Did they drop out the first term? Where are they now? That is not easy information to get."**

Community college administrator





## Recommendations

Oregon higher education institutions are invested in transfer and seek to build and maintain student-centered systems that support transfer student outcomes. But the key tensions with new state policies - mainly the MTM's - that have had unintended consequences, combined with the pandemic impacts, has created persistent challenges. This report provides similar recommendations as the 2019 report with updates based on new findings.

### Investing in credit transfer and degree audit technology tools

**Recommendation:** Invest in and continue to refine credit transfer and degree-audit technology tools at the institution and state levels, as well as student-friendly resources available through a transfer portal.

While colleges and universities developed new transfer technology to navigate credit transfer and online self-guides for students, there are still persistent challenges. First, advisors and students continue to face challenges staying up to date on university curriculum to support advising, and students do not always have access to easy-to-use, up-to-date course equivalency tools to help them select courses at their community college that will transfer to a university. Second, there are no cross-institutional degree audit tools to help staff members and students understand which credits will transfer from one institution to another prior to transfer. Often, students must wait until after they are enrolled at the university to know what credits will transfer.

We repeat our recommendation from the 2019 report with the addition of investing in resources that can be made available on a transfer portal. As in 2019, current case study participants recommend the availability of technological tools to help with course planning for prospective transfer students. In particular, this information could help these students understand which courses map to program pathways and help them audit a course transcript to understand which credits will transfer before entering the university.

**“Degree Works does have what we call a what-if tool, where if you’re in a civil engineering major, for example, but you want to see what if I switched to forest engineering? How would my credits work in that other major and how much time would I have left? That exists now for major-specific considerations. We would love to have an option where students can also compare their catalog year as it relates to general education.”**

Community college advisor

Online tools that can provide accurate and current information on course articulation should be easy to use and available to all community college students. Meanwhile, transfer guides and materials should be student-friendly, online, and easily accessible to students, such as through a transfer portal.

**“The transfer portal could be amazing if it’s done well, but it could be very hard to do well. We went to some of the sessions talking about the transfer portal and all the things it would need to be able to do. It was pretty daunting. But it just highlights how much time we all spend scrambling to keep up with what everybody else is changing in their curricula.”**

Community college administrator

### Investing in supports and resources for transfer students

**Recommendation:** Invest in more advising supports for transfer students, as well as more transfer-specific financial aid and programming, and collect student feedback to ensure these supports meet transfer students’ needs.

The pandemic, and ensuing budget constraints, staffing changes, and lower enrollment, have impacted colleges’ capacity to support students. A lack of advisor capacity to adequately serve transfer students continues to be a critical challenge,

including manageable student advising loads and training for faculty advisors. Colleges also need additional resources to support transfer students' basic needs, such as housing resources, financial aid, and scholarships. Meaningful student input could help design programming in a way that meets their needs. We suggest a similar recommendation as 2019, with a new emphasis on supporting advisor capacity and collecting student voice to inform transfer-specific supports for students.

Academic advisors play a critical role in supporting transfer students as they navigate the pathway from community college to university. The number of advisors should be sufficient to allow advisors to proactively follow up with students and provide more intensive advising for those who need extra support. As one advisor advocated, "More intensive advising, more advisors. Our advisors have 200-plus students."

University staff members and transfer students expressed a need for more transfer-specific programming, financial aid, and supports. Transfer students often use Oregon Promise funding to finance their time at community college. However, financial aid can be limited once they have transferred and, as one university advisor put it, the "lack of funding can be a shock to [transfer] students sometimes." The institutions need to prioritize the needs of transfer students by allocating financial resources, "We want these students in our program, and so we're going to put money toward that."

Students who have matriculated to a university reflected on the need for more programming and services to support their transition and to build a sense of belonging. Gathering student input on the types of transfer events, orientation, and programming that are most effective at meeting their needs is critical.

**"In addition to an academic advisor, it would be great to have a transfer advisor to guide you through the adventure on campus. My first week here, I was literally lost ... I feel like it would be really helpful if there was already a system in place where transfer students were able to get that guidance."**

Transfer student

## Developing and maintaining transfer agreements and partnerships

**Recommendation:** Strengthen existing transfer partnerships, such as DPP, articulation retreats, and annual meetings.

Community colleges and universities reflected on increased tensions around enrollment. Further, developing and maintaining degree partnerships and articulation agreements is dependent on relationships and long-standing connections between universities and community colleges, mostly between neighboring institutions. The process is time consuming, and sustainability is often threatened when there is staff turnover.

In light of growing tensions between colleges across the state, case study participants expressed a need for continued opportunities to come together, build relationships, and center the transfer student experience. Community colleges and universities value the collaboration that the state initiatives afford and need regular and ongoing opportunities to come together to maintain pathways, even with budget constraints. Institutional leadership that prioritizes transfer and makes it visible is critical. Presidents must ensure senior-level staff-members are supporting transfer initiatives and collaboration and allocating the necessary time, personnel, and resources to transfer partnerships (LaViolet et al., 2025). To bolster capacity, institutional leaders can partner with external facilitators to support aligning curriculum and building consensus around course requirements across administrators, faculty members, and staff (Student-Ready Strategies, 2025).

Further, community colleges and universities should continue to prioritize and strengthen transfer partnerships and pathways that are working for students. Students reflected on the importance of DPP in community colleges and universities to support seamless transfer. Several case study sites also mentioned the need for additional policy around dual enrollment.



**“We need to continue to develop policy around dual enrollment. There is so much promise with that. We have to recognize the budget realities of institutions throughout the state. We are all fighting in some ways for enrollment, and it de-incentivizes us to form these partnerships.”**

University administrator

**“Students aren’t well served when there are agreements that then have 10 asterisks underneath them. That’s just a way to rule by exception, and it doesn’t serve students. I think there’s enough legislation. We don’t need more laws. We don’t need to take up more hearing time on this, especially in a long-session budget year. We should enforce what’s on the books and wipe away the asterisks and just say, ‘These are the rules. You need to play by them, period.’”**

Community college administrator

**Recommendation: Strengthen and fund policy implementation that addresses the limitations of the MTMs.**

While the primary goal of the MTMs is to streamline credit transfer, the MTM MOUs contain many exceptions depending on the degree requirements at each university and are not easy for community college advisors or students to use. To address this lack of alignment and confusion, MTM Curriculum Articulation Policies (CAP) updated the four existing MTMs to remove most exceptions and newer MTMs are following this new format. The Computer Science MTM CAP was rolled out in fall 2024, and the Biology, Business, English, Human Development and Family Services, and Sociology MTM CAPs will be rolled out in fall 2025. Elementary Education does not have a CAP yet. The new MTM CAPs begin to address these challenges by removing many of the exceptions and addressing the lack of alignment in lower-division major requirements across university degree programs.

The state should continue to implement approaches that support stronger curricular alignment and fewer exceptions to state transfer pathways. Stronger curricular alignment that allows students to take more of their lower division credits at community college could afford transfer students the opportunity to explore their interests at a lower cost before deciding on a major and transferring to a four-year university.

Institutions should also consider providing stipends and other resources to make it easier for faculty to participate on MTM faculty subcommittees. All community college and university staff members voiced challenges with developing the MTMs due to the lack of funding accompanying the mandate and the already existing capacity constraints.

Finally, more collaboration between HECC, the Transfer Council, and institutions could support developing initiatives that are responsive to institutions’ needs and context. When developing institutional or state transfer policies, participants advocated for the inclusion of frontline personnel, such as advisors, who intimately understand the transfer process.

**Recommendation: Develop clear messaging about statewide transfer degrees and the major transfer maps and build trust between public institutions to support the development, use, and acceptance of major transfer maps.**

Study participants noted that the state has continued to introduce new transfer degree options for transfer students without removing anything or clarifying the distinct purpose or advantages of different transfer pathways. As a result, there is confusion around what option students should take and how they differ, which falls on academic advisors to navigate. Oregon needs clearer messaging and information about transfer options.

**“Streamlining and improving alignment so students understand the opportunities and choices in front of them. And systematizing some of Oregon’s policies so that it’s really, really clear to students what to take when and how to maximize their time and financial resources. We just haven’t gotten there yet because of the anti-system ethos.”**

University administrator

Further the major transfer maps are challenging for staff members and students to navigate and use. A consideration from the Transfer Playbook is that transfer agreements have four-year maps or planners for students outlining the sequence of courses (or options) a community college student needs to take to transfer and complete a bachelor’s degree in a specific major within four years of full-time study or an equivalent number of credits (see page 29 of the Transfer Playbook; LaViolet et al., 2025).

Our findings also support the recommendation from Student-Ready Strategies (2025) to “conduct a comprehensive review of transfer-related communications, centering feedback from students and advisors, and implement the recommended improvements.” Overall, there is a need to make transfer more student-friendly and equitable by developing clear messaging, providing resources for implementation, and streamlining the transfer process for students and advisors.

## Leveraging data for continuous improvement

**Recommendation:** Build institutional data capacity to support transfer student tracking at an institutional-level and develop cross-institutional data systems to support continuous improvement of transfer-specific supports and an evaluation of state transfer policies, including the MTMs.

All six participating institutions said they experienced challenges around data use. Given the diversity and complexity of transfer student pathways, it can be difficult to define who is a transfer student and track their outcomes over time.

Data tracking is especially difficult for students in a degree partnership program. In addition, longitudinal data about transfer students and their outcomes is still not readily available for community colleges and universities, and institutions face challenges sharing data with each other to better understand transfer student pathways. As a result, institutions do not have access to the data they need to evaluate their programs.

We recommend the following. First, data capacity at the institutional level needs to be developed so that community colleges and universities can define and track progress and outcomes for their transfer student population. Institutions should be able to implement continuous improvement cycles that evaluate the communication and support around transfer, including advising protocols, policies, and processes, and should be able to measure transfer student outcomes (Student-Ready Strategies, 2025).

Next, Oregon needs systems and resources to support cross-institutional data sharing to understand the long-term success of transfer students. Participants recommended better access to longitudinal data across institutions. This information would help identify transfer student outcomes and support the statewide implementation of effective strategies. In addition, longitudinal data can help institutions make the case for investing in transfer student services. Further, key metrics need to be developed across the state to determine student progress through the higher education system. Developing key metrics across the state can support their integration into university strategic plans.

Finally, at the state-level, we recommend an evaluation focused on the implementation of MTMs, their effectiveness, and challenges. Participants repeatedly mentioned inconsistencies in the development and implementation of MTMs across the state. However, there is no marker to track students using the MTMs, which makes it difficult to know how they are being used and the outcomes for students who use them. A clearer tag in the system that is consistent across colleges and universities would support evaluation and tracking.







## Conclusion and next steps

In the face of lasting impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing capacity constraints, enrollment dips, and a challenging policy landscape, Oregon community colleges and universities are still managing to sustain, adapt, and implement new promising practices to support their transfer student populations. Administrators, faculty members, and advisors across the state shared the innovative ways they are weaving together resources, forming partnerships and relationships, and leveraging new technology to provide transfer-specific supports, develop clear transfer pathways, and use data to evaluate and improve their programs. Case study participants valued the unique opportunities for faculty-led interaction and collaboration across community colleges and universities afforded by the Transfer Council faculty subcommittees.

We also heard about persistent challenges and the need for better system- and state-level coordination. The recommendations highlighted in this report build on the recommendations from 2019 and point to areas of persistent need over the past five years, including investing in credit transfer and degree audit technology tools, investing in supports and resources for transfer students, developing and maintaining transfer agreements and partnerships, and leveraging data for continuous improvement. We hope that the Oregon higher education community uses this report to learn about promising practices that are being sustained and nurtured over time to strengthen transfer outcomes and to begin to take action to address the system-related barriers in the Oregon transfer landscape.







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## Appendix A. Case study data collection and methods

### Case study approach

Education Northwest developed the case study research questions and approach using findings from the 2019 Oregon Transfer Study and essential practices for transfer outlined in the first Transfer Playbook (Wyner et al., 2016). The current case study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the six institutions featured in the 2019 report continue to make transfer an institutional priority? How do they measure the success of transfer efforts?
2. How did the pandemic impact their transfer work? What other factors (e.g., enrollment declines) have impacted the institutions and transfer student outcomes? How have the institutions addressed these challenges?
3. What are these institutions' most promising transfer pathways, policies, and practices, and why? How have the promising transfer pathways, policies, and practices identified in the last report changed? Are any of the promising transfer pathways, policies, and practices new since the last report?
4. What are student experiences with the core and major transfer maps, common course numbering, and other new state initiatives? How have student transfer experiences changed with the implementation of these new transfer pathways and supports? What are transfer experiences of rural students, male students, and BIPOC students, specifically?
5. What is the biggest challenge for institutions and students related to transfer? What is the most important area of support needed for strong transfer outcomes in Oregon?

Based on the research questions, Education Northwest researchers developed an interview protocol for administrators, faculty members, advisors, and financial aid staff members with probes depending on the participant's role. Protocols for staff members focused on 1) promising practices still in place since 2019; 2) changes since 2019; 3) new promising transfer supports, policies, and pathways; and 4) perspectives on state initiatives.

Researchers developed an interactive student focus group protocol. Student focus group protocols engaged students in an interactive activity to identify what helped them along their transfer pathway from high school to community college to university, key challenges encountered, and experiences with the state initiatives. For copies of the full protocols, please contact Emi Fujita-Conrads.

### Data collection

To answer the research questions, Education Northwest conducted case studies of the six institutions that participated in the 2019 report, which included interviews with key stakeholders, university transfer student focus groups, and an analysis of the institutions' websites for transfer specific information.

### Institutional review board

Education Northwest maintains an independent, institutional review board (IRB) that reviews all research activities that involve human subjects. All research activities must be cleared through the IRB before data analysis begins. IRB procedures determined that this project was low risk to participants and was therefore exempt from review. Federal regulations (45 CFR 46.101(b)) specify that certain types of research projects pose low risk to participants and therefore may qualify for exemption under federal regulations for protection of human participants. This project falls under the following exemption category: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices. This project also does not involve disclosure of any individually identified data and therefore does not put subjects at risk.

## Participant recruitment

To recruit participants, the project team did the following: The Foundation reached out to each of the presidents at the six colleges and universities who participated in the 2019 study and invited them to participate. Once they agreed, researchers at Education Northwest asked the presidents to connect them to a key contact at the college to plan the site visit. The Education Northwest researchers then worked with the individual to identify people who were familiar with and involved in transfer systems and supports. Individuals across the following roles participated in interviews: college president, provost or vice provost, financial aid director or financial aid advisor, advisors who work with transfer students, faculty members who were preferably involved in one of the state transfer groups (MTM or OTAC). To protect the identity of participants, we do not provide specific details about their roles and titles. Instead, we use generic terms such as administrator, faculty member, and advisor.

At universities, Education Northwest researchers also worked with the contact to recruit transfer students for the focus groups. We provided university staff members with language to share with the transfer student about the study purpose and focus group logistics. Students were told they would receive a \$40 gift card for participation.

In total, Education Northwest researchers spoke with 88 staff members and students across 33 interviews and focus groups (table A1).

## Data analysis

To analyze the data, Education Northwest researchers first developed a set of codes based on our research questions and interview and focus group protocols. Our codes covered topics of institutional transfer culture, transfer-specific supports, clear transfer pathways, and data use. We tested these codes on several interview transcripts and revised them to ensure they could be applied to the data consistently and reliably, were clear to the researchers coding the data, and paralleled the themes from the research questions and protocols.

All interviews were transcribed and entered into the [ATLAS.ti](#) software. Transcript quotes were labeled with the codes. Researchers coded transcript excerpts inductively for emerging patterns over multiple rounds of coding. After the first round of coding, researchers reviewed all coded data to understand themes by institution and then cross-cutting themes. Researchers then returned to the transcripts to identify any contradictory evidence and ensure that we did not miss any themes. Cross-cutting themes from each case study site are reflected in this report.

Table A1. **Site visit participants**

| Participants                  | Number |
|-------------------------------|--------|
| Administrators                | 33     |
| Faculty members               | 21     |
| Advisors and counselors       | 17     |
| Transfer student participants | 17     |



