

STUDENT-CENTERED ALTERNATIVES TO ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS

Articulation agreements have long been used by community colleges and their four-year partners to establish rules about the transfer of credits when students move from one institution to the other. But while they contain important information, the widespread use of articulation agreements has not led to strong or equitable transfer student outcomes. Recent National Student Clearinghouse data show that only 14 percent of entering community college students complete a bachelor's degree within six years—while surveys reveal that up to 80 percent aimed to earn one. Outcomes are worse for students who are Black or Latinx or come from low-income backgrounds.

If transfer students are to succeed at higher and more equitable levels, colleges must stop prioritizing

articulation agreements as the central way to advance student success. Articulation agreements promote credit transfer, but they don't address other critical aims: facilitating program and degree completion, simplifying complex choices about programs and institutions students face, and fostering the kind of long-term collaboration between transfer partners that is the hallmark of strong transfer partnerships.

In a new brief, *Beyond Articulation Agreements*, the Tackling Transfer partners shed light on how community colleges and four-year institutions can move beyond articulation agreements to achieve highly effective transfer outcomes. Specifically, the brief offers five principles for establishing partnerships focused on transfer student success:

1.	UNDERSTAND TRANSFER STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES Collect and use quantitative and qualitative data on student trends and engage with current, prospective, and former transfer students to understand barriers to success.
2.	DEFINE A VISION AND GOALS FOR EQUITABLE TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS Find common ground between community colleges and four-year institutions on student access, success, and equity that meets both institution's goals and lays the foundation for continued collaboration.
3.	CREATE CLEAR PATHS TO A FOUR-YEAR DEGREE Create time and space for faculty from community colleges and four-year institutions to collectively build maps that detail the courses and learning necessary for students to complete entire programs (not just isolated courses).
4.	PROVIDE CLEAR AND CONSISTENT TRANSFER INFORMATION AND ADVISING Create a system of advising that guides every student to make decisions about transfer early and complete their bachelor's degree with minimal excess credits. These efforts hinge on the engagement of knowledgeable advisors and on student-friendly communication, tools, and policies.
5.	COMMIT TO ROUTINES OF COLLABORATION WITH THE GOAL OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT Assume that transfer outcomes can always be improved, and put processes in place for faculty, advisors, deans, provosts, and presidents to celebrate successes, evaluate progress to goals, and commit to specific improvements to advance student success and close equity gaps.

The brief concludes with summaries of three effective transfer partnerships that achieved strong transfer outcomes without relying on articulation agreements: Arizona State University and Maricopa Community Colleges (and other state partners), the University of Central Florida and six community colleges, and Mount Holyoke College and multiple New England community colleges. We hope the principles and exemplars contained in this brief are helpful to other higher education institutions aiming to move beyond articulation agreements to improve transfer student success.