



State Universities Are Generally Following the Statewide Course Numbering System in Awarding Appropriate Transfer Credit

at a glance

In general, the Statewide Course Numbering System is effective in enabling students to transfer course credit between Florida's public postsecondary institutions. The system produces savings for the state and students who do not have to retake courses they have already completed. Our review of a sample of students who transferred from community colleges to state universities found that

- most (75%) of the courses taken by community college students were eligible to transfer to the university they attended; courses not eligible to transfer were typically associated with upper division coursework and special programs; and
- state universities generally awarded appropriate credit for these courses in accordance with the Statewide Course Numbering System.

Scope

As directed by the Legislature, this report examines credit transfer policies for community colleges and state universities based on the Statewide Course Numbering System. Specifically, we reviewed the transcripts of 1,529 students who transferred from a community college to a state university during 2006-07 to address two questions.

- Are courses typically taken by community college students eligible to transfer to state universities according to the Statewide Course Numbering System?
- Do state universities appropriately award credit for eligible transfer courses?

This report is the third in a series of OPPAGA reports on Statewide Course Numbering System.¹

Background

The Florida Legislature has established several policies to facilitate articulation (the ability of students to transfer course credits between institutions) within the

¹ Prior reports, *Institutions Do Not Have to Accept Transfer Credit for Many of the Courses in the Statewide Course Numbering System*, OPPAGA Report No. [07-22](#), March 2007; and *Students Encounter Barriers When Transferring Credit from Non-Public Institutions to Community College*, OPPAGA Report No. [07-49](#), December 2007; examined the transfer of credit for non-public institutions in the Statewide Course Numbering System.

state’s public postsecondary system.² State articulation policies include but are not limited to general education requirements, the statewide 2+2 articulation agreement, common program prerequisites, and the Statewide Course Numbering System.

The Statewide Course Numbering System provides the framework for allowing students to transfer credits between institutions. The Legislature established the Statewide Course Numbering System in 1971 to facilitate the transfer of academic courses between the state’s public community colleges and universities. Public institutions are required by law to accept transfer credit for courses listed in the Statewide Course Numbering System if they offer equivalent courses.³ Currently, all 28 community colleges, 10 of the 11 state universities, 40 area technical education centers, and 24 non-public post-secondary institutions are included in the system.⁴

Courses in the statewide system are identified by a three-letter prefix and four-digit number. The three-letter prefix provides the general subject area of the course, such as biological sciences or history, while the four-digit number denotes the course level and content. Transferable equivalent courses have the same prefix and last three digits.⁵

Many courses in the Statewide Course Numbering System are not guaranteed to transfer. As the Statewide Course Numbering System includes both lower division and upper division classes, the majority of courses listed in the system are not guaranteed to transfer between institutions. During the 2008-09 academic year, state community colleges and universities listed 23,811 undergraduate courses in the course numbering system.

As shown in Exhibit 1, most of these courses (64%) were only offered by one institution and thus were not guaranteed to transfer to any other public institution.⁶ The remaining 8,540 courses (36%) were guaranteed to transfer to at least one other institution, although relatively few courses (25, or less than 1%) were offered by all of the 38 state’s colleges and universities and therefore automatically transferable across all public institutions.

Lower division courses typically taken by community college students were more likely to be offered by multiple institutions and were more likely to be eligible for transfer—45% of the total lower division courses in the course numbering system were eligible to transfer. These courses typically included general education and common program prerequisites. In contrast, upper division coursework courses were less likely to be offered by multiple institutions—only 30% of the upper division courses in the system were eligible transfer courses.

**Exhibit 1
A Majority of Courses in the Course Numbering System Are Not Guaranteed to Transfer**

	Lower Division	Upper Division	Total Courses
Not Guaranteed to Transfer	5,190 (55%)	10,081 (70%)	15,271 (64%)
Guaranteed to Transfer	4,248 (45%)	4,292 (30%)	8,540 (36%)
Total	9,438	14,373	23,811

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data.

² Florida’s public postsecondary system includes state universities, state colleges, and community colleges.

³ Section 1007.24(7), *F.S.*

⁴ New College of Florida does not participate in the Statewide Course Numbering System because it is not a credit-based institution.

⁵ The first digit of a course number denotes the level of the course. Courses beginning with 1 or 2 are lower division courses while those with 3 or 4 are upper division courses.

⁶ Section 1007.24(7), *F.S.*, guarantees the transfer of a course using Statewide Course Numbering System if the institution offers the equivalent course. Institutions are not precluded from transferring courses they do not offer, this is at the discretion of each individual institution.

Methodology

To evaluate adherence to the Statewide Course Numbering System, we reviewed transcripts of a random sample of 1,529 students who transferred from a state community college to a state university during the 2006-07 academic year. We reviewed these students' community college and university transcripts to determine whether the university they transferred to awarded appropriate credit hours and the correct course number for the transferred courses. The students in our sample completed and attempted to transfer 6,496 courses from community colleges. These students typically completed 3 courses at their community college. Appendix A provides additional information on our sample and research methodology.

Findings

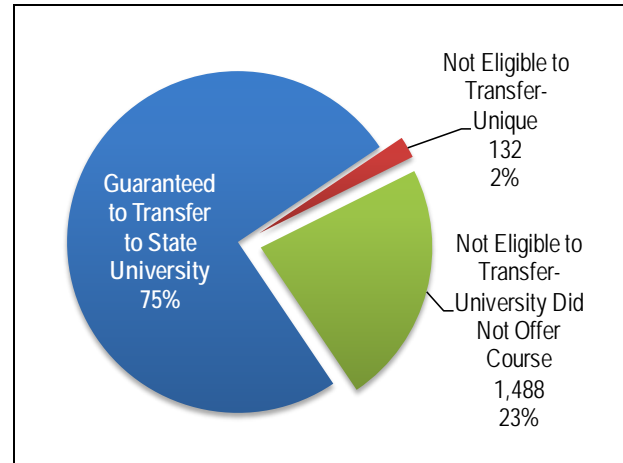
Most (75%) of the courses taken by community college students in our sample were eligible to transfer to the university the students eventually attended. Courses not eligible to transfer were typically associated with upper division coursework and special programs, as opposed to general education courses and program prerequisites. State universities generally awarded appropriate credit for the eligible courses in accordance with the Statewide Course Numbering System.

Most courses completed by community college students were eligible to transfer to state universities

Most (75%) of the 6,496 community college courses taken by students in our sample were eligible to transfer into the student's chosen university, as shown in Exhibit 2. Of the courses not eligible to transfer, most were ineligible because the university they attended did not offer the equivalent course.

This was consistent with the Statewide Course Numbering System provision that courses are not eligible to transfer if they are offered by only one institution, or if the university that a student transferred to did not offer the equivalent course.

Exhibit 2 Most Courses Completed by Students in Our Sample Were Eligible to Transfer

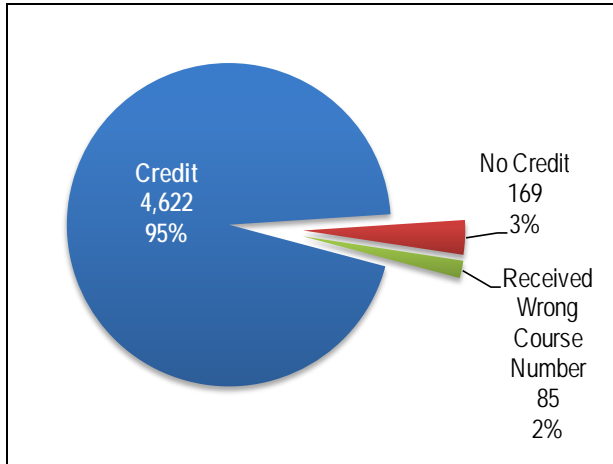


Source: OPPAGA analysis of State University and Community College electronic students records.

State universities awarded appropriate credit for almost all eligible transfer courses

State universities generally awarded appropriate credit for eligible transfer courses completed by community college students. As shown in Exhibit 3, universities awarded appropriate credit for 95% (4,622 of 4,876) of the eligible transfer courses. In the remaining cases, universities either failed to award any credit for the eligible course, or awarded the wrong course number.

Exhibit 3
Universities Awarded Appropriate Credit for Most Eligible Transfer Courses



Source: OPPAGA analysis of State University and Community College electronic students records.

Conclusions ---

The Statewide Course Numbering System is generally effective in enabling students to transfer credit between Florida’s public postsecondary institutions. Community college transfer students typically complete courses that are eligible to transfer to the universities they subsequently attend, and the universities generally are awarding students the appropriate credit for their eligible courses.

Agency Response ---

In accordance with the provisions of s. 11.51(5), *Florida Statutes*, a draft of our report was submitted to the Department of Education to review and respond. The Commissioner’s written response has been reprinted herein in Appendix B.

Appendix A

Methodology

To evaluate adherence to the Statewide Course Numbering System, we reviewed transcripts of a random sample of students who transferred from a community college to a state university during the 2006-07 academic year. We focused our review of students who had completed at least three credit hours at a community college, but had not yet completed an associate's degree. We requested electronic student records from both the state universities and community colleges. We received complete electronic records for 1,529 students who completed 6,496 community college courses.

Data analysis

Our data analysis had two phases: reviewing community college records and university records. First, we reviewed community college transcripts to see which courses were completed and eligible to transfer to a state university. We determined if courses were eligible to transfer using the following guidelines:

- the course was approved in the system;
- the student earned college credit (passed the course); and
- the university they transferred to offered the equivalent course.

We identified 4,876 of the total 6,496 courses as eligible to transfer to a state university. Of the 1,529 students reviewed, 1,373 students completed a course eligible to transfer to a state university.

Second, we matched these eligible courses to the student's university record to determine if the university transferred the eligible courses. We used both the university electronic record and requested the universities verify all courses transferred from the community college. Universities successfully transferred 4,622 of the 4,876 eligible courses. Universities either did not award any credit or awarded a different course number than approved by the Statewide Course Numbering System for 254 courses.

Appendix B

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Dr. Eric J. Smith
Commissioner of Education

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March 16, 2009

Gary R. VanLandingham, Ph.D., Director
Office of Program Policy Analysis and
Government Accountability (OPPAGA)
111 West Madison Street, Room 312
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1475

RE: Report 09-xx State Universities are Generally Following the Statewide Course Numbering
System in Awarding Appropriate Transfer Credit

Dear Dr. VanLandingham:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to OPPAGA draft report 09-xx: State
Universities are Generally Following the Statewide Course Numbering System in Awarding
Appropriate Transfer Credit. We are pleased to find that students transferring from state and
community colleges are generally awarded the appropriate credit upon entrance to the university.
While we have no issues with the methodology of the review, we would like to comment on portions
of the report.

OPPAGA found that most (55%) lower-level courses on the Statewide Course Numbering System
(SCNS) are not equivalent to other courses on the system, and therefore are not guaranteed to
transfer. Many of these may include courses offered for occupational degrees or for degrees at few
institutions, and not general education or common prerequisites, as noted in the report. In fact, when
reviewing the 3,695 lower-level courses offered for general education at public institutions, we find
that 3,048 (83%) are guaranteed to transfer to at least one other institution.

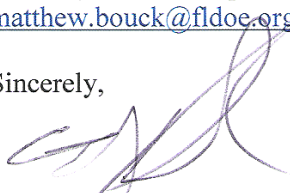
OPPAGA defined "eligible" transfer courses as those that have equivalent numbers and are
guaranteed for transfer. But it is important to note that even courses that do not have an equivalent
number may still transfer. While not under the statutory guarantee, institutions often accept for

Gary R. VanLandingham, Ph.D.
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degree or elective credit courses that do not have the same course number. This was noted in report 07-49, in which community colleges accepted 796 reviewed courses that were not deemed “eligible” for transfer from nonpublic institutions.

We appreciate OPPAGA’s work with a wide variety of articulation issues, and are pleased to find that the 2+2 articulation of courses via the Statewide Course Numbering System is effective. Should you have any additional questions about the SCNS please contact me or Mr. Matthew Bouck at matthew.bouck@fldoe.org. Thank you again for your efforts.

Sincerely,



Dr. Eric J. Smith

ES/mb

c: Dr. Willis Holcombe, Chancellor, Division of Community Colleges

The Florida Legislature
Office of Program Policy Analysis
and Government Accountability



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- [Florida Government Accountability Report \(FGAR\)](#), an Internet encyclopedia, <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/government>, provides descriptive, evaluative, and performance information on more than 200 Florida state government programs.
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