

By Alisha Hyslop

Ensure Portability and Transferability of Credits and Skills Attained

THIS ARTICLE IS PART OF A YEARLONG SERIES THAT WILL MORE CLOSELY EXAMINE THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN ACTE'S POSTSECONDARY REFORM POSITION STATEMENT AND HIGHLIGHT BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTING EACH OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS. TO ACCESS THE COMPLETE POSITION STATEMENT, VISIT WWW.ACTEONLINE.ORG/POLICY/LEGISLATIVE_ISSUES/POSTSECONDARY.CFM.



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THE FOURTH RECOMMENDATION IN ACTE'S POST-SECONDARY REFORM

POSITION STATEMENT is to ensure portability and transferability of credits and skills attained. All postsecondary learning has value that should be recognized. Students' progress toward completion of postsecondary credentials can be improved with clear, consistent policies that ensure full transfer and articulation of postsecondary learning.

Successful strategies include common course-numbering systems, articulation agreements, and the transcription of credit for postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) certificate programs that are currently non-credit. Postsecondary education, including CTE, would benefit tremendously if states adopted systems to assess, measure and document the educational progress of learners in ways that are clear and meaningful to students as well as to their employers. Transferability of credits and skills attained through postsecondary education calls for a re-examination of the ways that learning at the postsecondary level is measured and transcribed. Measuring competencies rather than seat time, or offering postsecondary credit for prior work experience, would enable documentation for what students can do and the skills they have attained.

Some states, such as Florida, have had sophisticated transfer policies in place for many years. But in many other places around the country, these issues are just beginning to come to the forefront of policy discussions.

Simplifying CTE Credit Transfer in Ohio

In 2005, the Ohio state legislature passed H.B. 66 to more closely align high school and adult workforce CTE programs to Ohio's public two- and four-year colleges. The initiative, led by the Board of Regents in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Education, is known as "Career-Technical Credit Transfer (CT²)."

Through the program, Ohio policymakers hope that more high school and adult CTE program graduates will go on to further postsecondary education, that these students will save time and money, and that Ohio business and industry will benefit from more employees with higher education.

The CT² initiative is designed to lead to policies and procedures that ensure students at secondary or adult CTE institutions can transfer technical courses to any state institution of higher education "without unnecessary duplication or institutional barriers." The courses will have to adhere to recognized industry standards and represent equivalent coursework common to the secondary career pathway, or adult CTE system and the state institutions of higher education.

An advisory committee is charged with directing the initiative. Members of the committee include secondary, adult and postsecondary CTE educators, as well as representatives from state agencies. These members provide the unique perspective of their institutions to the process, helping to identify potential challenges and opportunities.

In the past, students, particularly in



adult CTE programs, had no guarantee that the skills and credentials they gained would be accepted by degree-granting institutions. “CT² is a way for Ohio to move forward and recognize the achievement of adults who have not entered the traditional system, and to put these students on a pathway to associate and bachelor’s degrees,” said Michael McDaniel, advisory committee member and superintendent of Ashland County-West Holmes Career Center in Ashland, Ohio.

The premise of the initiative is based on the belief by many educators that the content offered at CTE career centers has a strong relationship to postsecondary goals, and that the venue where skills are attained should not impact a student’s ability to earn credit—especially when those skills are validated by business and industry. For example, if a student earns an A+ certification through an adult education program, he or she should be able to earn the same credit that a student who achieves the certification at a community college earns. McDaniel adds, “If students have achieved the agreed-upon end goal, they should have also achieved the proper level of credit.”

This was a big step for the state—with

the CT² initiative representing the first time that all the participating institutions were at the table. To begin, five subject areas were chosen in the pilot phase of the project: information technology-networking, medical assisting, automotive technology, nursing, and mechanical/electrical engineering technology. These programs were selected because they were active and had large enrollments; already had structures and credentials in place that would ease the identification of common learning outcomes; and represented areas where there was a clear need in Ohio’s economic system.

A faculty panel was appointed in each area from the participating educational levels. Each panel was tasked with identifying learning outcomes and associated credit transfer recommendations. The process included defining learning outcomes based on industry standards; soliciting feedback and agreement among education partners on learning outcomes through Web-based electronic surveys; 29 participating institutions matching outcomes to specific courses or programs through a beta-testing process; institutions submitting course and program materials; and the panel reviewing final submissions for equivalency. The

state had plans to complete the beta test period in December 2007 and move on to the final step.

As this process is completed, students from the institutions participating in the initial pilot testing for the project will begin to be eligible for the transferable credit. Eventually, secondary and adult CTE students enrolled in courses or programs that have been determined to provide the equivalent learning outcomes will be eligible to receive college credit for the identified content. Students must still meet admissions requirements and enroll in the college or be admitted to the specific program offering the equivalent courses; but they will be recognized for their specific skill attainment. The agreed upon learning outcomes are minimum guarantees, and many institutions may offer even more credit to students for prior learning and experiences.

In 2008, the state will continue to expand the number of programs that are covered and the number of institutions prepared to participate in the CT² initiative. One important component of future efforts is the ability of institutions to issue electronic transcripts and to send these transcripts to other institutions. This will

make it even easier for students to take advantage of transfer benefits.

Statewide Focus on a Transparent System

The CT² initiative is just a part of the effort under way in Ohio to ensure that students can move seamlessly through the P-16 education system there. The state is undertaking a variety of efforts, all part of building a credible transfer system that each party can trust. Jonathan Tafel, vice chancellor of educational linkages and access with the Ohio Board of Regents, emphasizes this goal, “We are trying to develop transparent pathways for students, regardless of their background or where they enter the education pipeline, that allow them to go to the highest level of educational attainment.”

CT² is designed to build upon the state’s existing course equivalency system and uses the system as a model. This system, composed of Transfer Assurance Guides, identifies courses and learning outcomes by discipline, and describes the knowledge and skills that students need to gain for

guaranteed transfer between two- and four-year institutions. The work already completed on the Transfer Assurance Guides (TAG) project has allowed CT² to move forward and will allow for more successful agreements systemwide.

A system of “stackable certificates” is also being developed to align industry training and pre-college coursework with for-credit offerings through a system of standardized certificates. Certificates will be available in areas such as basic literacy, core knowledge, and workforce skills. The focus of this program is to make workforce education transparent to everyone.

The system will take students from the eighth grade through pre-college level, and will be linked closely to the Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) program. Students can progress through these certificate programs at no charge. Students in the ABLE program who finish the GED will be able to enroll in a transition course, and then enter the postsecondary system immediately.

Once in the postsecondary system, there

will be another system of small certificates that allows students to work at their own pace and to clearly see their accomplishments through measurable steps—with each certificate equating to postsecondary credit. CT² will serve as a model for expanding this initiative by providing students with college-level stackable certificates that are already in place. Throughout the states, regions can add to this system by developing their own stackable certificates.

All of these efforts are being tied together to ensure a more educated population in Ohio. The education system that emerges will be more user-friendly and transparent for all the state’s citizens, allowing for students to move through seamless pathways to postsecondary credentials and careers. **I**

ACTE is very interested to learn about other CTE-related initiatives that work toward achieving the remainder of ACTE’s postsecondary reform recommendations. If you are involved in such a program, please send information to Alisha Hyslop at ahyslop@acteonline.org.

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