



Michigan Transfer Network and Degree Pathways Enhancement Proposal

With a modest appropriation, Michigan can support its 43 public universities and community colleges, as well as their independent partner colleges, in creating a best-in-class online information center to improve the transfer of college credit in Michigan. The updated website will not only provide better information to students and families, but the work that goes into building it will also vastly improve the transfer of degrees and programs, ultimately saving families valuable time and money and increasing the educational attainment of Michigan residents.

Background

In the 2010-2011 academic year, 42% of bachelor's degree completers in Michigan attended community college.¹ When the [Michigan Transfer Network \(MTN\)](#) was created in 2006-07, it was an award-winning site that shared statewide course equivalency information with students. In the last decade, new technologies have emerged and websites have evolved as student mobility between colleges and universities has become more commonplace and students need a more robust network to find information about transfer. In addition, several current issues include:

- The Michigan Transfer Network is built on old technology that can no longer be supported;
- Students need more detailed information about transfer courses and programs;
- Students and families need more information about the Michigan Transfer Agreement (MTA) to plan for transfer;
- Participation in the Michigan Transfer Network is required for performance funding, so community colleges and universities cannot risk having the current obsolete site fail;
- Michigan colleges and universities, working collaboratively across the state, can further enhance the transfer process for students.

Michigan colleges and universities have been working on multiple transfer-related initiatives in recent years and continue to work collaboratively on several projects to improve transfer student outcomes. The *Michigan Transfer Agreement* was signed in Fall 2014 and allows students to earn a block of 30 credit hours in general education requirements. Students can earn the MTA at any community college in Michigan and be guaranteed that those credits will transfer and apply to their bachelor's degree at all 15 public universities and many private colleges in Michigan. Michigan colleges and universities have also collaborated on other

¹ <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SnapshotReport6-TwoYearContributions.pdf>

important transfer initiatives. Michigan was selected by the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin to align math requirements across community colleges and universities. In addition, Michigan colleges and universities are leveraging financial support from The Kresge Foundation and the Midwestern Higher Education Compact's Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit to award academic credit for military experiences. These efforts have and will continue to improve transfer for students.

In addition, a study committee on the block transfer of the associate degree recommended the creation a collaborative foundation for prioritization, dialogue, and planning. The MCCA and MASU, in partnership with the Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (MACRAO) and the Michigan Independent Colleges and Universities (MICU), convened the Transfer Steering Committee on October 27th to kick-off a statewide effort to coordinate existing transfer initiatives and focus on new opportunities to improve transfer.

Appropriation Request

With the significant need for a robust Michigan Transfer Network and building upon ongoing initiatives, the MCCA and MASU are jointly requesting a one-time appropriation to support statewide transfer initiatives. As recommended in the March 2016 report submitted to the legislature by the study committee on the block transfer of the associate degree, Michigan needs a high quality, comprehensive website to communicate information about course equivalencies, the Michigan Transfer Agreement, articulation agreements, and future agreements that allow students to simply and predictably transfer an associate degree to a bachelor's degree program. This project will deliver a new Michigan Transfer Network website, specifically a new course equivalency database, information about the Michigan Transfer Agreement, and associate to bachelor's degree transfer pathways that allow a student to maximize coursework at community colleges and universities. The project will focus on three main areas as described below.

Phase 1: Statewide Course Equivalency Database

The current MTN is hosted by Michigan State University (MSU) and is financially supported by an in-kind contribution of MSU. The MTN uses old technology which is challenging to maintain and difficult to upgrade or add new features. The first phase of this project will migrate the current MTN database to a new database on a new website. The new database will be hosted on a secure platform with 24/7 access and will be mobile-friendly with the ability to use the site from a mobile device. College and universities will continue to report their transfer course data to the MTN in a format that is compatible with the new database. The new site will include a modern user-interface with a more student-friendly "look and feel." Students will continue to be able to search for course equivalencies between colleges and universities in Michigan, but results will be presented in a clear and consistent format. The entire focus of this phase of the new Michigan Transfer Network is to create a stable database on a new platform and to build a new user-interface.

Phase 2: Michigan Transfer Agreement (MTA) Integration and Expansion of the Course Equivalency Database

All 43 public colleges and universities in Michigan signed the Michigan Transfer Agreement in Fall 2014. Students have been awarded the MTA “stamp” on their transcript for two years, however, too few students know about how to use the MTA to efficiently transfer between community colleges and universities. The Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (MACRAO) has generously maintained information for students about the MTA on their website, but the MACRAO website is not an intuitive place for students to navigate to find information about the MTA. The new Michigan Transfer Network will eliminate the need for students to read through a central repository of policy documents by flagging any course in the MTN that is eligible to be used for the MTA. Students would have the ability to plan out their schedule of courses knowing in advance that each course has been MTA approved. The MTN site will also include information about the MTA, how to use the MTA to transfer across institutions in Michigan, and additional links to MTA-specific information at colleges and universities in Michigan. As with the course equivalency database, this information will be presented in a student-friendly format. The data will be housed in the same secure database as the course equivalency database and institutions will be expected to report their MTA information to the MTN.

The expanded course equivalency database would build upon the new MTN described above, but add several features that will improve the search experience for students. Beyond the new MTA-eligible identifier, course attributes will be added to the current database along with more course details, effective dates, and increased functionality to add comments to courses. The expanded course equivalency database would also provide several advanced search options such as searching for courses in a particular region of the state or by searching based on the course department or title, and keywords. This expanded course equivalency database will continue to be hosted in the same database as the course equivalency database described above. This phase of the MTN will specifically focus on expanding the functionality of the course equivalency database so that students have more robust search options which will make it easier to locate course equivalencies.

Phase 3: Degree Transfer Pathways

The course equivalency database and the MTA are two important aspects of improving the transfer process. A third focus is on developing degree transfer pathways through which students can earn an associate degree at a community college and transfer all courses and the degree to a university to complete a bachelor’s degree. These “2+2” programs, known as articulation agreements, have been developed between individual community colleges and universities for decades. These articulation agreements are used by students, but there is a great opportunity to expand the scope of articulation agreements to include multiple community colleges and multiple universities. This requires statewide engagement and this phase of the work would convene discipline-specific faculty and administrative committees to align course requirements so that students can complete up to 60 credits and an associate degree at a community college, then transfer and complete the remaining bachelor’s degree requirements. Some of this work is already complete due to course equivalencies, the Michigan Transfer Agreement which includes 30 credit hours, and many colleges and universities have already signed articulation agreements and created transfer guides in specific disciplines.

Developing degree transfer pathways requires statewide coordination to begin to braid together this patchwork of transfer options. Other states including South Carolina², Tennessee³, Indiana⁴, Ohio⁵, Connecticut⁶, and Massachusetts⁷ have developed statewide transfer portals with several staff members devoted to the task. The new Michigan Transfer Network portal can develop a similar portal and develop degree transfer pathways with adequate resources.

Measuring Success

In the short term, we expect to see increased traffic to the Michigan Transfer Network website, which has already increased from 40,000 hits in 2007 to 828,000 hits in 2014. Students and academic advisors will use the best-in-class site to plan efficient transfer pathways and we expect that an enhanced user experience along with better information will lead to increased site traffic. We also expect that the project will lead to more direct equivalencies between courses at colleges and universities. Through faculty engagement and increased opportunities to communicate across colleges, we expect that more courses will directly transfer and apply to the degree program instead of as general credit. These outcomes will be available from the new MTN site and database.

In the medium and long term, we expect increased use of the Michigan Transfer Agreement (as measured by students receiving the transcript designation); increased associate degree completers; increased bachelor's degree completers (especially among transfer students); and fewer credits earned at degree completion. These metrics will be requested from the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI).

Budget

The budget for this project is estimated below with resources dedicated for purchasing the technology necessary to create the new Michigan Transfer Network website, convenings for content development, contracting to build the database & the website, and coordinating the development of associates to bachelor's degree transfer pathways.

	In-kind funds (MCCA)	In-kind funds (MASU)	Requested Appropriation
Course Equivalency Database Michigan Transfer	\$ 40,000	\$ 40,000	\$ 450,000
Agreement & Expanded CED	\$ 40,000	\$40,000	\$ 225,000
Degree Transfer Pathways	\$ 40,000	\$40,000	\$ 350,000
Total	\$ 120,000	\$120,000	\$ 1,025,000

² <https://www.sctrac.org/>

³ <http://www.tnreconnect.gov/>

⁴ <http://www.transferin.net/index.aspx>

⁵ <https://transfercredit.ohio.gov/ap/1>

⁶ <http://www.ct.edu/transfer>

⁷ <http://www.mass.edu/masstransfer/>