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INDEPENDENT COLLEGES

Pathways to Completion:

# Ohio Consortium for Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts

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# Letter from Project Partners

For many students, the path to a bachelor's degree begins at a community college. These two-year institutions teach nearly 40 percent of the nation's undergraduates and 37 percent of all first-time freshmen, offering a variety of affordable learning opportunities that serve the communities in their regions. As well as offering many standalone credentials, community colleges can serve as a gateway to pursuing a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution. Even as the pandemic caused a sharp decline in community college enrollment in Fall 2020, a nationally representative study revealed that over 40 percent of community college students who persisted with their degrees or enrolled for the first time aspired to earn a bachelor's degree or higher, and earlier studies have shown that over 80 percent of surveyed community college students wanted to pursue a bachelor's degree.

However, these students face many barriers in their path to a bachelor's degree. The transfer process can be very complex, and students often struggle to get reliable and up-to-date advice to make important academic and financial decisions. This process can become especially confusing for transfer into independent colleges and universities, many of which have their own distinct requirements for applicants and students. Without clearly articulated transfer pathways from community colleges to baccalaureate institutions, students often navigate this process on their own, leading to delays or a frustrating, negative end to their journey.

The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and the Ohio Foundation of Independent Colleges (OFIC) launched the Ohio Consortium for Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts to change this narrative for community college transfer students in Ohio. The Consortium's goal was to create three new pathways for community college students to follow to earn bachelor's degrees in English, psychology, or biology within two years of transferring to an independent four-year institution in the state. With generous funding from the Teagle Foundation and Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, this project has brought together faculty members and administrators at 14 independent four-year colleges and universities and 11 community colleges to build these pathways and set clear and standardized expectations for general education requirements across all institutions in the Consortium, ensuring that students can transfer into these receiving four-year institutions without losing any of the progress they made at their sending community colleges.

The participants in the Consortium collaborated with great enthusiasm to build the three pathways, set general education requirements, and build stronger frameworks for advising and financial aid to support students on their journey to a bachelor's degree. We are grateful for their hard work and that of the project team, as well as the substantial support of the Ohio Department of Higher Education, which has already made extensive progress in facilitating transfer among public institutions in the state.

We are proud to share the achievements of the Ohio Consortium. Our hope is that this report provides some insight into best practices and potential pitfalls in building transfer pathways for community college students, as well as highlighting the power of collaboration and relationship-building among faculty members and administrators both within and across institutions. Above all, we hope that this work helps new generations of students in Ohio to reach their destination—graduation with a bachelor's degree.



**Marjorie Hass**

President

Council of Independent Colleges (CIC)



**Bill Spiker**

President

Ohio Foundation of Independent Colleges (OFIC)



# Project Summary

As a champion for the transformational power of a liberal arts education, the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) has long aimed to make independent colleges and universities accessible and welcoming for all students, including community college students who wish to transfer to complete a baccalaureate degree. Following the launch of a successful transfer project in North Carolina in 2019, CIC selected Ohio for the second phase of its efforts and earned funding in 2021 to undertake the new transfer initiative from the Teagle Foundation and Arthur Vining Davis Foundations.

The Ohio Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts project was designed to facilitate the transfer of students from community colleges to independent four-year institutions to complete baccalaureate degrees in liberal arts disciplines. CIC, in partnership with the Ohio Foundation of Independent Colleges (OFIC), formed the Ohio Consortium for Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts, a group of 11 community colleges and 14 independent four-year colleges and universities committed to creating transfer-ready institutions and a more seamless transfer experience for community college students. Between 2021 and 2025, the Consortium members drew on well-established individual relationships between independent colleges and community colleges in Ohio, as well as the state's existing infrastructure for transferring into public institutions, to adopt the pathways model for three majors and implement new or revised policies and practices that would prioritize student success, academic consistency, and financial transparency.

Drawing on the existing framework created by the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) for transfer between community colleges and public four-year institutions in Ohio, the Consortium built three discipline-specific pathways in biology, psychology, and English. These new pathways were developed to mirror the Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathways (OGTPs) designed by ODHE, so students who follow the prescribed tracks can enter receiving four-year institutions as juniors and complete their bachelor's degrees in two years. The Consortium also addressed the challenge of uneven transfer acceptance policies around general education requirements, pushing for the adoption of

## Project Goals

The Ohio Consortium for Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts sought to achieve the following goals:

**Strengthen the inter-institutional cooperation** between community colleges and independent four-year colleges and universities in Ohio, moving from individual articulation agreements between institutions to a broader, collaborative culture across the state

**Facilitate the transfer of general education requirements** to decrease students' costs and time-to-degree at independent four-year institutions

**Design discipline-specific transfer pathways** in biology, psychology, and English supported by clear, collaboratively-designed articulation agreements

**Ensure that community college students are well-informed** about their transfer options, that the pathways for their chosen majors are clear, and that advising systems are in place to make sure they take the appropriate courses

**Build stronger connections** between faculty members in biology, psychology, and English at four-year institutions and community colleges

**Increase the number of students who transfer** from community colleges to four-year independent colleges and universities as juniors and successfully complete their bachelor's degrees

the Ohio Transfer 36 (OT36) across all independent colleges and universities in the Consortium. Previously called the Ohio Transfer Module, OT36 is a set of general education requirements across 36 semester hours that was designed by ODHE to transfer among any of Ohio’s public institutions of higher education. By December 2022, all independent four-year institutions in the Consortium had committed to recognizing OT36, ensuring that transfer students entering with OT36 credits could skip redundant lower-level requirements and proceed with upper-division coursework, with several Consortium members stipulating required institution-specific “signature courses.”

To ensure the success of the pathway model they had adopted, Consortium members signed a pledge to take steps that would strengthen the transfer culture on each campus and between institutions. In its later phases, the Consortium expanded its outreach from faculty and senior academic administrators to ensure that all campus offices with staff who interacted with community college transfer students—e.g., the office of the registrar, admissions, financial aid, and student affairs—were well informed about the pathways and understood the imperative for a supportive framework for community college students during and following the transfer process. Individually and collectively, campuses strategized effective ways to publicize the pathways and to keep them up to date, investigated best practices for advising transfer students, and reexamined financial aid options that would facilitate baccalaureate-degree completion for these students. The Consortium also explored the implementation of reverse transfer agreements. Through this approach, community college students who transfer without an associate’s degree could retroactively earn that credential once they completed the necessary coursework at their four-year institution. Although the initiatives undertaken to improve transfer culture have varied widely among the Consortium institutions, the project has heightened understanding of the challenges transfer presents for community college students, created new transfer champions and a better-integrated approach on many of the four-year campuses, and led to some significant success stories at individual institutions.

In summary, the Ohio Consortium for Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts elevated collaboration between community colleges and independent four-year colleges and universities in Ohio, and it accomplished its goal of simplifying and strengthening transfer opportunities for Ohio’s community college students seeking a baccalaureate degree in the liberal arts.

## List of Participating Institutions

### Community Colleges

Central Ohio Technical College  
Clark State College  
Columbus State Community College  
Cuyahoga Community College  
Lakeland Community College  
Lorain County Community College  
North Central State College  
Northwest State Community College  
Sinclair Community College  
Stark State College  
Terra State Community College

### Four-Year Institutions

Ashland University  
Baldwin Wallace University  
Bluffton University  
Capital University  
Defiance College  
Denison University  
Hiram College  
Lourdes University\*  
Malone University  
Muskingum University  
Ohio Dominican University  
Ohio Wesleyan University  
Tiffin University  
Ursuline College\*\*

*\*Lourdes University announced in February 2026 that it plans to close at the conclusion of the 2025–26 academic year.*

*\*\*While the institutions remain separate entities, Gannon University (PA) has assumed ownership and financial oversight of Ursuline College. Both institutions will begin implementing shared services while maintaining their separate identities until the full merger in December 2026. Ursuline College will continue operating under its current name through the full merger, when it becomes the Ursuline College Campus of Gannon University. To find out more information on the strategic partnership, visit [Gannon.edu/Ursuline-College](https://www.gannon.edu/Ursuline-College).*

# An Overview of the Landscape in 2021

The Ohio transfer landscape for community colleges made the state an advantageous location for a project focused on increasing access for community college students to complete baccalaureate degrees in three liberal arts disciplines at independent four-year colleges and universities. There were four significant factors that contributed to the success of the Ohio Consortium for Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts.

**1. Strong Community College Network:** Ohio has a robust and well-respected community college system that includes 23 community colleges serving over 160,000 students. A key strength of the network is its success in providing quality education and facilitating transfers to public institutions. Ohio community colleges also have a strong track record of building individual partnerships and articulation agreements with select independent colleges and universities. This foundation made the expansion of transfer opportunities to independent colleges and universities a logical next step.

**2. Supportive State Policies:** Transfer from Ohio community colleges to the state's public universities already has been highly systematized through the Ohio Articulation and Transfer Policy, created by the Ohio Articulation and Transfer Network (OATN), at the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE). The project to expand transfer from community colleges to independent four-year institutions benefited from the work previously done by faculty content experts from community colleges and public four-year institutions across the state, who have worked together for over a decade to determine universally transferrable learning outcomes to ensure statewide course and program equivalencies. The faculty working groups in the Ohio Consortium for Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts were able to use the ODHE Guaranteed Transfer Pathways already established for public institutions to design and approve discipline-specific transfer pathways in biology, English, and psychology. Similarly, the 14 chief academic officers from the independent colleges and universities in the Consortium relied on the previous vetting of the Ohio Transfer 36 (OT36) module by

public four-year institutions for the transfer of general education requirements to facilitate the acceptance of these courses taken at community colleges at their institutions.

**3. Collaborative Efforts:** Prior to launching this project, CIC built a relationship with ODHE representatives who were enthusiastic about independent institutions using the statewide frameworks for the transfer of general education requirements and design of the three pathways. These representatives generously shared their expertise and advice throughout every phase of the project implementation. The OFIC leadership and staff likewise were fully committed partners and provided significant logistical support for project activities, data collection, and publicizing the Consortium's work.

**4. Readiness of Independent Colleges and Universities:** Ohio's independent colleges and universities with their traditional focus on personalized attention—small classes, faculty mentorship, and opportunities for campus involvement and leadership—knew they had much to offer community college transfer students in ways that are not always accessible at large public universities. In fact, many of these four-year institutions already recognized community college transfer as a priority and had successful institution-specific initiatives and one-on-one articulation agreements in place. The 14 independent colleges and universities that signed on to the project saw value in taking a consortium-wide approach to removing obstacles in the transfer processes and practices for community college students, many of whom come from populations underrepresented in higher education.

# Project Activities

The Ohio Consortium for Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts included 25 institutions in Ohio, including 11 community colleges and 14 independent colleges and universities that are members of the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and of the Ohio Foundation of Independent Colleges (OFIC).

## Each participating institution appointed a team with the following members:

- The chief academic officer
- A senior administrator with a focus on transfer admissions and/or advising
- One faculty representative for each of the discipline-specific pathways that the institution would adopt

Each institution pledged to adopt at least one pathway (with most choosing to adopt all three), as well as committing to reviewing general education requirements to facilitate transfer for students who earned an associate's degree from any of the participating community colleges.

Between 2021 and 2025, the Consortium built three pathways in English, biology, and psychology and established a shared definition of general education requirements through the Consortium-wide acceptance of the OT36 module. CIC convened all institutional teams for three in-person events and a variety of virtual workshops featuring nationally recognized experts on transfer enrollment. Throughout the project, CIC purposefully brought together chief academic officers, faculty members, and transfer administrative champions at in-person, day-long events and in numerous virtual meetings to provide opportunities for engagement, relationship building, and common ground understanding of transfer culture. These events focused on strengthening relationships among Consortium members and sharing lessons learned; developing stronger frameworks for transfer advising and financial aid; facilitating reverse transfer between four-year institutions and community colleges; and fostering a richer transfer

culture in Ohio to ensure community college students are supported from their first decision to transfer through to their graduation with a baccalaureate degree. Rich discussions and presentations centered entirely on how to support transfer students, including course transferability and degree mapping, academic advising, affordability perceptions and realities, transfer resources and support services, reverse transfer, and sustainability of pathways and culture.

Through these events, the Consortium connected participants with colleagues at the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) Ohio Transfer and Articulation Network, John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Higher Education, National Student Clearinghouse, Transfer Nation, and Community College Research Center to explore processes and discuss transfer culture. In Ohio's educational landscape where colleges and universities often compete for students, this work has been tremendously collaborative.

## September 2021 Opening Meeting

The opening meeting for the Ohio Consortium for Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts took place on September 29, 2021, at Ohio Dominican University in Columbus. This meeting brought together the chief academic officers from all 14 independent four-year institutions and universities and 11 community colleges to discuss the need for stronger transfer relationships

**In Ohio's educational landscape, this work has been tremendously collaborative.**

and clearer, more consistent transfer practices that would support students transferring from community colleges to independent four-year colleges and universities in Ohio. Participants heard about collaborative successes and lessons learned in CIC's Transfer Pathways project in North Carolina from Constance Rogers-Lowery, then senior vice president and provost at Catawba College (NC), and a panel of Ohio academic leaders from two- and four-year institutions in the Consortium shared their perspectives on the importance of building a strong campus culture to encourage and support transfer student success. Finally, the group heard from several of the Ohio Department of Higher Education's lead transfer administrators on the Ohio Transfer 36 curriculum (OT36) and Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathways (OGTPs). This day set the stage for chief academic officers to gain a common understanding and commitment to the work ahead that would expand and streamline pathways between community colleges and independent four-year institutions, building on established transfer curricula approved by Ohio's public institutions.

### **Building Discipline-Specific Pathways in Biology, English, and Psychology through Faculty-Led Pathway Working Groups**

After the Consortium was launched, the CIC project team worked with academic leaders at the 25 institutions to select which of the three pathways they would participate in, and to name a faculty representative for each of these disciplines. All participating institutions chose at least one pathway, with most opting to join all three, and 81 faculty members were selected to serve as liaisons for these pathways with their institutions. All faculty liaisons were invited to participate in periodic virtual meetings for the Consortium, as well as the in-person gathering focused on advising.

To build the three transfer pathways in biology, English, and psychology, CIC drew on the successful model used by the Ohio Department of Higher Education to create the Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathways (OGTPs). First developed in 2015, these Pathways were

designed to give community college students in Ohio a clear and efficient path, first to an associate's degree and then to a bachelor's degree in a specific major, with no loss of credits during the transfer process. The OGTPs were created through faculty-led panels representing public two- and four-year institutions across the state. In the same way, CIC convened three working groups, one for each discipline, drawing from the community of faculty liaisons in the Consortium. These working groups each comprised ten faculty members with curriculum or program authority for the major, five from community colleges and five from four-year institutions. The goal was to identify faculty members who had leadership experience in several ways: perhaps they had served as department chairs, or they were recognized as people who were good at working across departments, or they had experience working with transfer students and/or evaluating transfer credit. Based on recommendations from chief academic officers at the participating institutions, the CIC project team was able to organize which faculty members would hold different roles and levels of responsibility for the work that lay ahead in building and approving the pathway for their major.

The project team identified a structure and timeline for organizing these three working groups to maximize their impact. While the project director worked closely with the faculty teams and developed the timeline and process they would follow, it was important that faculty members from these institutions take leadership of the meetings and communications. For this reason, two co-chairs were selected for each working group, one from a community college and one from an independent four-year college or university. These co-chairs guided their groups, planned meetings, and provided leadership to faculty members working on the pathways. The faculty working groups designed the three pathways, and once pathways were carefully refined, the remaining faculty members, called faculty liaisons, were brought on board to learn what had been discussed, weigh in on whether the pathways could work at their institutions, and offer additional suggestions.

Between the fall of 2021 and the spring of 2022,

faculty co-chairs for biology, English, and psychology each met with their pathway work groups to review the Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathway for their major and to evaluate optimal courses for smooth transfer from a community college to an independent four-year college or university, preparing students to transfer at junior standing with maximum credit so they would be on track to graduate with the bachelor's degree. The goal was for faculty members to determine whether the state-approved OGTPs followed by the public two-year and four-year institutions could work for community college students transferring to these independent four-year colleges and universities as well. Community college faculty members provided valuable insights and understanding of the OGTPs, as they were familiar with how these pathways had been vetted and approved by the public four-year universities. In these working groups, faculty members identified common ground in teaching experience and expectations, as they shared their programs and explored transferability of credit. They focused on learning outcomes rather than course syllabi to approve entry-level major courses taken as part of an associate's degree, and they completed exercises where two faculty members paired off to take a close look at how the pathway would work between those two institutions and then reported back to the group.

By April 2022, faculty work groups had drafted pathway templates that confirmed alignment of major-related coursework with the statewide OGTPs. At that point, the working groups brought the rest of the faculty liaisons back into discussions to review the evaluation of courses, challenges, and ultimate endorsement of the transfer pathway curricula. Faculty liaisons were asked to weigh in, looking closely at their own institution's coursework and identifying if the proposed pathway could work for their institutions as well.

Once the pathways were finalized, it was vital that they be shared widely on the participating campuses so they could be understood and embraced by offices and peer instructors across the institution. In the fall semester of 2022, faculty members from each of the Consortium institutions shared pathway progress institutionally,

meeting with key stakeholders across campus: department chairs, transfer administrators, chief academic officers and others (including representatives from offices of the registrar, admissions, advising, and other stakeholders who work with transfer students).

### **Ensuring Smooth Transfer of General Education Requirements through the Ohio Transfer 36 Module**

For the three discipline-based pathways to be successful, community college students had to be able to transfer general education credits to their receiving four-year institutions so they could enter as juniors and earn a baccalaureate degree within two years. The independent colleges and universities in Ohio all had slight differences in their general education requirements and had different policies for what community college courses could be accepted for credit, so CIC once again turned to the model provided by ODHE. The Ohio Transfer 36 module (OT36), previously called the Ohio Transfer Module, was designed by ODHE to facilitate the transfer of general education requirements between public two- and four-year colleges and universities in Ohio, providing guaranteed transfer credit for a complete set of lower-level general education requirements earned across 36 semester hours.

OT36 was already adopted by the 11 community colleges in the Consortium, and the project team made it a priority for all 14 participating four-year institutions to commit to accepting OT36 at their institutions as well. CIC held two meetings in the fall of 2021, shortly after the launch of the project, to educate chief academic officers at the Consortium's four-year institutions about OT36 and to begin the process for guaranteeing transfer credit for these general education requirements at their institutions. In October 2021, these chief academic officers were invited to join a virtual presentation on OT36 led by representatives from ODHE, and in November 2021, they were invited to a meeting at CIC's Institute for Chief Academic Officers during which they were encouraged to consider how they could align their institutions' individual general education requirements



Presidents and other academic leaders at the 25 Consortium institutions prepare to sign the Transfer Pledge at the Signing Ceremony and Celebration.

with those in OT36. These academic leaders then shared their progress on adopting OT36 at a virtual town hall in Spring 2022, with a focus on creating a smoother transfer experience for students who had earned an associate’s degree at a community college in Ohio. Many independent institutions accepted OT36 without condition for transfer students with an associate’s degree, while others agreed that OT36 would meet their general education requirements with advising on which courses to take at the community college. In all cases, OT36 was identified as a strong base for transfer at junior standing, without adding time or significant coursework toward graduation requirements.

### Signing Ceremony and Celebration

By the fall of 2022, faculty working groups had finalized curricula for the transfer pathways with degree mapping completed at each of the four-year institutions. Faculty members from the 14 independent colleges and universities mapped out degree plans that ensured students who completed a pathway and an Associate of Arts (AA) or Associate of Science (AS) from any of

these 11 community colleges would be able to finish their bachelor’s degree in four semesters full-time.

In December 2022, presidents and chief academic officers of all 25 colleges and universities, along with faculty members, transfer staff, OFIC and ODHE leaders, gathered at the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus to celebrate the approval of the three transfer pathways in biology, English, and psychology and to sign the Ohio Consortium Transfer Pledge. Signing the Ohio Consortium Transfer Pledge was a commitment by these colleges and universities to understand and honor their connected roles in enhancing and providing access for students across Ohio with an assurance to students that each Consortium institution offers a common and proven path to increase student success. Randy Gardner, then chancellor for the Ohio Department of Higher Education, provided opening remarks and Jonnie Guerra, senior advisor for the Consortium, shared a letter from CIC President Marjorie Hass, saying, “I am so proud of the work that faculty members and administrators at the 25 institutions have done together to smooth the way for future students to follow these pathways, as well as building a more



Winnie Gerhardt, project director for the Ohio Consortium, presents at Fulfilling the Consortium Pledge: A Workshop on Transfer Student Success.

welcoming transfer culture to help these students achieve their dreams. To sign these pathways after one year of collaboration is a major achievement.”

### **Fulfilling the Consortium Pledge: A Workshop on Transfer Student Success**

After the adoption of OT36 and the three transfer pathways at the Signing Ceremony, Consortium institutions focused on how to best advise students at every stage of the transfer process. On February 16, 2023, the institutional teams gathered for a day-long workshop at Capital University called *Fulfilling the Consortium Pledge: A Workshop in Transfer Student Success*. Led by the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Higher Education, this event was attended by approximately 100 academic leaders, faculty members, and transfer advisors. Experts from the Gardner Institute led presentations on reframing the transfer experience as a social justice imperative, best practices in advising transfer students,

and creating conditions of excellence for transfer students. This event was rich in conversation and engagement, with participants working in small breakout groups to learn from one another and develop stronger connections with peers at both two-year and four-year institutions.

### **Virtual Workshops**

Between 2021 and 2025, the Consortium also held virtual workshops focused on facilitating transfer between the 11 community colleges and 14 independent colleges and universities and enriching transfer culture for students at every stage of the process.

### **Affordability Considerations and Opportunities for Transfer Student Enrollment (April 2023)**

Faculty members, transfer advisors, financial aid directors, and admission counselors, as well as some chief academic officers at Consortium institutions, joined this workshop to discuss issues of affordability for community college transfer students. The focus was on the kinds of messaging and resources that best resonate with transfer students and communicate how transferring to an independent college is not only a great academic choice but also a financially achievable one. Financial aid directors from two-year and four-year campuses shared perspectives and information to help key transfer stakeholders become better informed. The project director also shared comparative transfer scholarships from each of the four-year partners, so that all could see the financial investment colleges and universities were making to support transfer students.

### **Raising Awareness and Opportunity for Reverse Transfer (October 2023)**

Chief academic officers, registrars, and key transfer stakeholders met virtually to discuss reverse transfer as a means to further strengthen the transfer culture on Consortium campuses, to solidify relationships between two-year and four-year institutions, and to support students in degree credentialing. While transfer pathways are designed primarily for students transferring with an associate’s degree that includes key courses on the

pathway curriculum, the project team recognized that many students transfer to four-year institutions before earning this degree. While transferring early may support an individual's educational journey, it also takes away an earned credential en route to the bachelor's degree and lowers the number of students statewide who earn an associate's degree, impacting state funding tied to degree achievement for two-year institutions. Through reverse transfer and the coordinated efforts of two-year and four-year institutions, students may use credits earned at the four-year college or university to complete their AA or AS degree, all while continuing their enrollment toward a bachelor's degree at the four-year institution. This workshop outlined the process and benefits of reverse transfer, emphasizing that increasing the number of students who have earned credit and qualify for associate's degrees provides a benefit to students, enhances Ohio's workforce, and supports our community college partners in receiving state funding for degree achievement.

As a follow-up to this workshop, administrators at Consortium colleges and universities also met with the National Student Clearinghouse to explore their Reverse Transfer platform to facilitate student data exchange between institutions.

### Next Steps in Sustaining Transfer Pathways (February 2024)

A sustaining goal of the Ohio Consortium for Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts project has been to establish best practices that support an enhanced transfer culture at all OFIC institutions in the future. With this goal in mind, the project team hosted a virtual meeting for key transfer champions from the 25 Consortium institutions to discuss progress with the pathways, changes in pathway curricula, and how colleges and universities may be working individually and as partners in promoting pathways to students and institutional stakeholders. Colleagues from the Ohio Department of Higher Education led a discussion on changes to biology and English OGTPs, particularly courses that would need to be updated to keep the pathways current. The project director shared a summary of milestones and achievements the Consortium had tackled

together, along with a list of best practices for strengthening and sustaining transfer culture in the years ahead.

### Final Convening: Shifting the Campus Mindset from Transactional to "Transfer-mational"

In September 2024, speakers from Transfer Nation and the Community College Research Center led a workshop with Consortium members at the OFIC offices in Westerville, OH, to discuss strategies for sustaining the three pathways and continuing a commitment to building a strong transfer culture on each campus and between institutions. *Shifting the Campus Mindset from Transactional to "Transfer-mational"* was an event designed to re-energize those working in the transfer community, raising up pathways as a key component of a sustainable transfer culture that strengthens opportunities for enrollment and transfer student success.

More than 50 colleagues from the Consortium attended this day-long, in-person event to engage with nationally recognized speakers presenting on the nuances of transfer through both a local and national lens, with action steps to continue building transfer community and culture at each respective campus.



Final Convening: Heather Adams, founder and CEO of Transfer Nation, and Aurely Garcia Tulloch, senior research assistant at the Community College Research Center at Columbia University (NY), lead a session at the final convening on "Shifting the Campus Mindset from Transactional to 'Transfer-mational!'"

# Project Outcomes

The Ohio Consortium for Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts united 11 community colleges and 14 independent four-year institutions to facilitate the transfer of community college students to independent four-year institutions to complete baccalaureate degrees in biology, psychology, and English; the overarching goal of the project was to increase the number of Ohio community college students transferring to and subsequently completing bachelor's degrees in the three liberal arts disciplines at the 14 independent Consortium institutions. The project set out to achieve this goal by building transfer pathways in English, biology, and psychology; fostering stronger relationships between Ohio community colleges and independent colleges and universities in the Consortium; and improving transfer culture within the institutions.

**“Providing [community college transfer students] with an equitable and beneficial experience is a social justice imperative.”**

**—Faculty Member at Consortium Four-Year Institution**

Project outcomes were determined using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Outcomes regarding the number of students transferring, the credits accepted, and student retention and completion were drawn from data submitted annually by the independent colleges and universities on the template developed by Ithaka S+R for project reporting. These results are summarized in Figure A. Three approaches were used to gather qualitative information. First, anonymous surveys were sent to meeting participants after key gatherings and to all project participants, which included faculty, transfer administrators, advisors, enrollment managers, institutional researchers, and registrars at the conclusion of the project. Second, email questionnaires were sent to

the provosts and presidents of the Consortium four-year colleges and universities at the conclusion of the project. Finally, phone interviews were conducted with a select set of project participants who represented faculty members, transfer administrators, advisors, enrollment managers, institutional researchers, and registrars. Insights gained from the surveys, questionnaires, and interviews were used to support the project outcomes described below.

## **Adoption of Transfer Pathways in English, Biology, and Psychology and Standardized General Education Requirements**

Drawing on the existing framework created by the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) for transfer between community colleges and public four-year institutions in Ohio, the Consortium built three discipline-specific pathways in biology, psychology, and English, which mirrored ODHE's Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathways (OGTPs) and included the adoption of Ohio's standardized set of general education requirements, the Ohio Transfer 36 (OT36). The pathways are designed so students who follow the prescribed tracks in their community colleges can enter receiving four-year institutions as juniors and complete their bachelor's degrees in two years. The adoption of the pathways was formally acknowledged by each Consortium institution's president signing the Ohio Consortium Transfer Pledge in a signing ceremony at the Ohio Statehouse on December 7, 2022.

While the Consortium's focus was on developing these three pathways, the adoption of Ohio's standardized set of general education requirements has extended beyond the specific pathways to benefit transfer students more generally. In the questionnaire sent at the conclusion of the project, the presidents who responded unanimously agreed that there is value in aligning with the Ohio Transfer 36 (OT36) requirements for the transfer of general education credits followed by public institutions in the state. Continued institutional support for acceptance of the OT36 requirements was also confirmed by the

chief academic officers who responded to the final questionnaire; each of them stated that their institution would continue to recognize the OT36 as part of the transfer pathways in biology, psychology, and English, with five of six chief academic officers indicating that would accept OT36 credits for students transferring across all disciplines.

### **Stronger Relationships Fostered between Community Colleges and Independent Colleges and Universities in the Consortium**

One of the principal outcomes of the project was the enhancement of relationships among faculty members, staff, and administrators at Consortium independent colleges and universities and community colleges. The project manager played a key role in fostering these relationships by regularly convening chief academic officers, faculty members, and transfer administrators. These gatherings took the form of both in-person day-long events and numerous virtual meetings. Each session was carefully designed to promote engagement, encourage relationship-building among participants in similar

### **Eighty-five percent of team members feel the project generated new connections.**

roles, and establish a shared foundation for the development of transfer pathways and the improvement of transfer culture.

Some of the strongest professional relationships were formed among faculty members. The project design intentionally created faculty work groups with

equal representation from both community colleges and independent colleges. Each group was co-chaired by a faculty member from a community college and one from an independent four-year institution to ensure balanced leadership and perspective.

Members of each faculty workgroup collaborated closely to develop transfer pathways within English, biology, and psychology. Notably, many community college faculty members had prior experience working on pathway development with colleagues at public four-year institutions. As a result, they were often viewed as

**“When I was first approached about this project, I could see what a large, unwieldy project we were dealing with. ... [After] conversation with our pathway faculty group, [common ground] became clear very quickly: access and affordability. ... As we worked on these pathways, we’ve come to know each other in ways that we didn’t know each other before. We’ve created something that works for students and that is enduring.”**

**—Jim McCargar, Professor of Chemistry and Founding Dean Emeritus of the School of Science and Engineering, Baldwin Wallace University**

the “experts” in pathway development, which sometimes shifted the perception of independent colleges and universities as more elite and fostered mutual respect and learning across institutions.

Qualitative data gathered from surveys, targeted questionnaires, and interviews with participating faculty and staff members at the end of the project indicated that this initiative facilitated stronger connections between Consortium independent four-year institutions and community colleges. A concluding survey showed that 85 percent of faculty members, staff, and administrators at Consortium institutions believed the project generated new opportunities for building connections between community colleges and independent four-year colleges and universities in Ohio. This perspective was affirmed by senior leadership; all responding presidents concurred that the Consortium’s initiatives contributed to the strengthening of relationships with community colleges within the state.

### **Improved Transfer Culture and Institutional Transfer Policies and Practices**

To enhance the success of transfer students,

**“One of the most important things we can do is make higher education not only accessible and affordable, but flexible, clear, and transparent.”**

**—Randy Gardner, Former Chancellor,  
Ohio Department of Higher Education**

this project aimed to strengthen transfer culture and institutional policies and practices. Faculty members, advisors, enrollment managers, registrars, and other transfer professionals were encouraged to participate in Consortium events, which focused on topics including collaboration, best practices for engaging transfer students, developing effective advising frameworks, reverse transfer options, and understanding financial aid options. These initiatives were intended to bolster Ohio’s transfer environment and align institutional policies to better support community college students from their initial interest in transferring through to earning a bachelor’s degree.

Many participating institutions improved collaboration across campus to support their transfer students. Participants from Ohio Wesleyan University indicated that their work with the Consortium led to the development of a “Transfer Super Team,” made up of members of several offices across campus. This team, with the support of the president and chief academic officer, has put initiatives and programs in place to better support transfer students, including scholarships and guaranteed admission. Ohio Wesleyan also strengthened their partnership with Columbus State Community College, offering a tuition match for up to 25 students each year who transfer from Columbus State to Ohio Wesleyan after completing an associate’s degree with a GPA of 3.5 or better. Students can enroll at Ohio Wesleyan for up to four consecutive semesters by paying the same tuition that they paid during their final semester at Columbus State.

Surveys, questionnaires to presidents and chief academic officers at Consortium four-year colleges and

universities, and interviews conducted with key project participants indicated improved perceptions of transfer culture at Consortium institutions. Sixty-nine (69) percent said the project deepened their understanding of transfer student experiences; 75 percent were motivated to find new ways of supporting these students, such as better advising, tailored services and financial aid; and 81 percent gained clarity on how to support these students in their roles. Among senior leaders, five out of six presidents agreed that consortium participation enhanced campus transfer culture.

Open-ended comments reinforced these results, noting increased awareness and emphasis on equitable support for transfer students. One faculty member at a four-year institution commented, “Working on this project was a great experience and opened my eyes to transfer students in a new way.” Another faculty member at a four-year institution commented that the project “allowed me the opportunity to stop and think about the experience of transfer students and how and why providing them with an equitable and beneficial experience is a social justice imperative.” Yet another community college administrator stated, “I think the biggest accomplishment was that the independent schools finally understood that they needed to be more flexible when looking at course transfer, especially with general education courses. With the established state learning outcomes, it’s hard to argue that these courses would not align. Students should not have to retake courses in which they have already earned credit.”

There were also concrete changes in institutional policies and practices during the project. Chief academic officers at independent institutions noted several changes, including reorganized transfer offices and staffing, new financial aid programs, greater emphasis on transfer enrollment, and specialized services for transfer students. Despite these developments, only 28 percent of faculty and staff members who completed the final survey believed the project led to meaningful policy and practice changes at their institution, suggesting that most college personnel may be unaware of the extent and impact of these modifications.

**Figure A**  
**Transfer Enrollments and Outcomes**

Figure A summarizes the data collected and aggregated by the 14 independent colleges and universities using the data template created for the project by Ithaca S+R for transfer cohorts from 2022 to 2025. Key positive impacts that can be seen in the quantitative data are outlined below.

**Enrollment**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>All Transfer Students</b>	<b>OH CC Transfer Students</b>
2022	875	302
2023	896	326
2024	959	325
2025	858	326

**Average Credits Accepted and Applied to Degree**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>All Transfer Students</b>	<b>OH CC Transfer Students</b>
2022	47.5	48.6
2023	51.0	53.6
2024	48.2	56.6
2025	49.0	54.3

**Average Credits Accepted and Applied to Major**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>All Transfer Students</b>	<b>OH CC Transfer Students</b>
2022	21.1	21.3
2023	29.6	22.0
2024	20.2	27.1
2025	24.5	30.2

**Number and Percentage of Transfer Students Retained**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>All Transfer Students</b>	<b>OH CC Transfer Students</b>
2022	600/69%	210/70%
2023	569/64%	219/67%
2024	613/64%	241/74%
2025	-	-

**Number and Percentage of Transfer Students who Finish Bachelor's within 2 years**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>All Transfer Students</b>	<b>OH CC Transfer Students</b>
2022	230/26%	91/30%
2023	236/26%	98/30%
2024	-	-
2025	-	-

## Increases in Ohio Community College Transfer Enrollment

Transfer enrollment from Ohio community colleges increased from 302 in 2022 to 326 in 2023, with enrollment remaining stable in 2024 and 2025—despite decreases in first-time, full-time community college enrollment in the state. The general transfer student population (“All Transfer Students”) remained relatively stable, ranging from 875 in 2022 to 858 in 2025, with a temporary rise in 2024 likely due to students transferring to Hiram College after another nearby independent institution, Notre Dame College, closed. It is worth noting that the work done with Consortium partners on a broader acceptance of general education coursework likely helped position them as a favorable destination for these transfer students.

Some Consortium four-year institutions saw significant increases in community college transfer enrollment, such as Defiance College. Participants from Defiance credit this increase to the intentional work they have done to build relationships with colleagues at Ohio community colleges. They also credit the work done internally to expand understanding of the Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathways (OGTPs) and acceptance of the OT36, which has supported transfer students across all disciplines.

Similarly, participants from Tiffin University noted that the growth of their transfer student population has been intentional and correlates with the federal Title III grant that they received, which includes increasing the number of transfer/pathway students as one of its annual objectives and metrics.

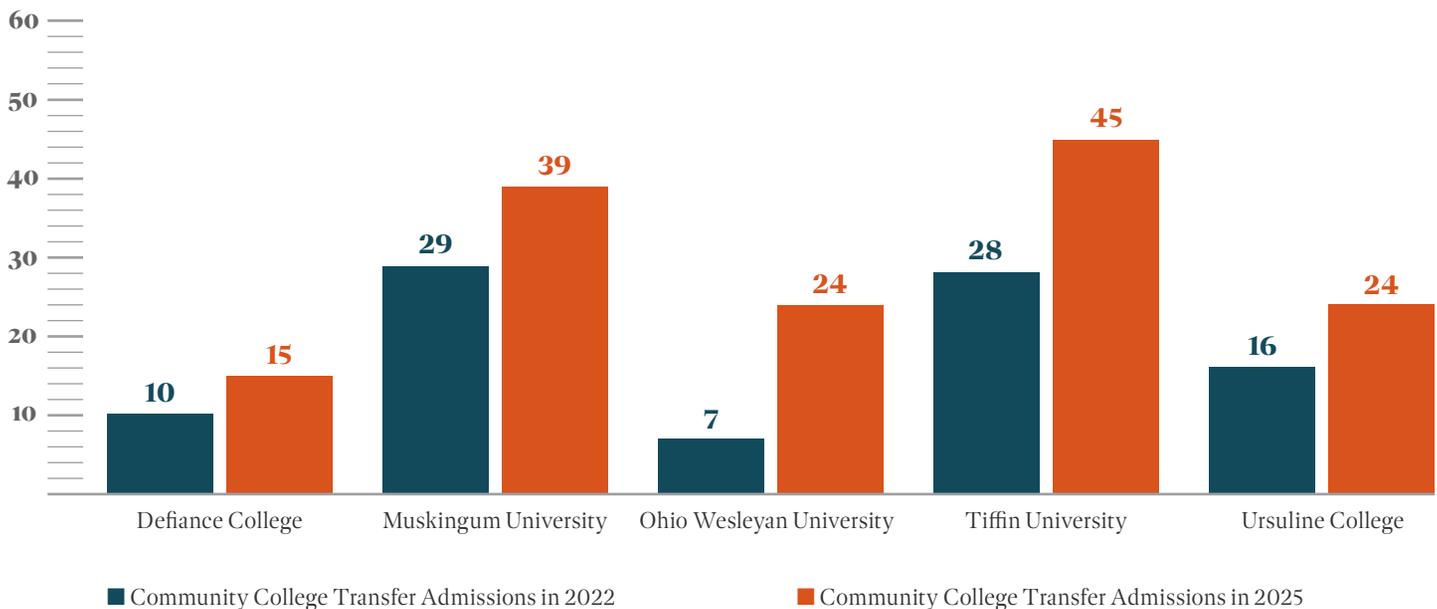
While the outcomes of the Ohio Transfer project may take several more years from implementation to become truly significant, it’s noteworthy that five of the four-year institutions that established transfer pathways already have seen substantial increases in their number of transfer students (see Figure B).

## Growth in Credits Accepted and Applied to Degrees and to Majors for Ohio Community College Transfer Students

A major goal for building the three transfer pathways was to lower the time and cost for transfer students to earn their baccalaureate degrees, and efficient credit transfer between community colleges and independent four-year institutions is vital for achieving this goal and helping students to graduate within two years of transfer. Across the four-year institutions in the Consortium, there were increases in the number of credits accepted and applied

**Figure B**  
**Community College Transfer Admissions between 2022 and 2025**

Figure B shows the growth in community college transfer admissions at five independent four-year Consortium institutions between 2022 and 2025.



toward degrees and majors for students transferring from Ohio community colleges. The average number of credits accepted and applied toward degrees rose from 48.6 credits to 54.3 credits between the 2022 and 2025 cohorts. Part of this increase could be due to the increase in acceptance of general education credits thanks to the adoption of OT36, but there was an even larger change for the average number of credits applied to the major; for Ohio community college students, the average number of credits applied to the major steadily increased from 21.3 credits to 30.2 credits between the 2022 and 2025 cohorts. The general transfer population saw smaller gains, with credits applied to degrees rising from 47.5 to 49, and credits applied to majors rising from 21.1 to 24.5.

### Advantages in Retention and Completion for Ohio Community College Transfer Students

Retention rates for Ohio community college transfer students held steady at about 70–75 percent between 2022 and 2025, slightly above the general transfer student rate of about 65–70 percent. A similar advantage in two-year completion rates was noted for Ohio community college students; 30 percent of Ohio community college transfers completed a bachelor’s degree within two years, compared to 26 percent for the general transfer student population, for both the 2022 and 2023 cohorts.

The slightly better performance for Ohio community

college students in retention and completion may be attributable to the success of the project but is also an indication that recruiting community college students can benefit independent colleges and universities in Ohio, as these students have better retention and completion rates than the general transfer population in the state.

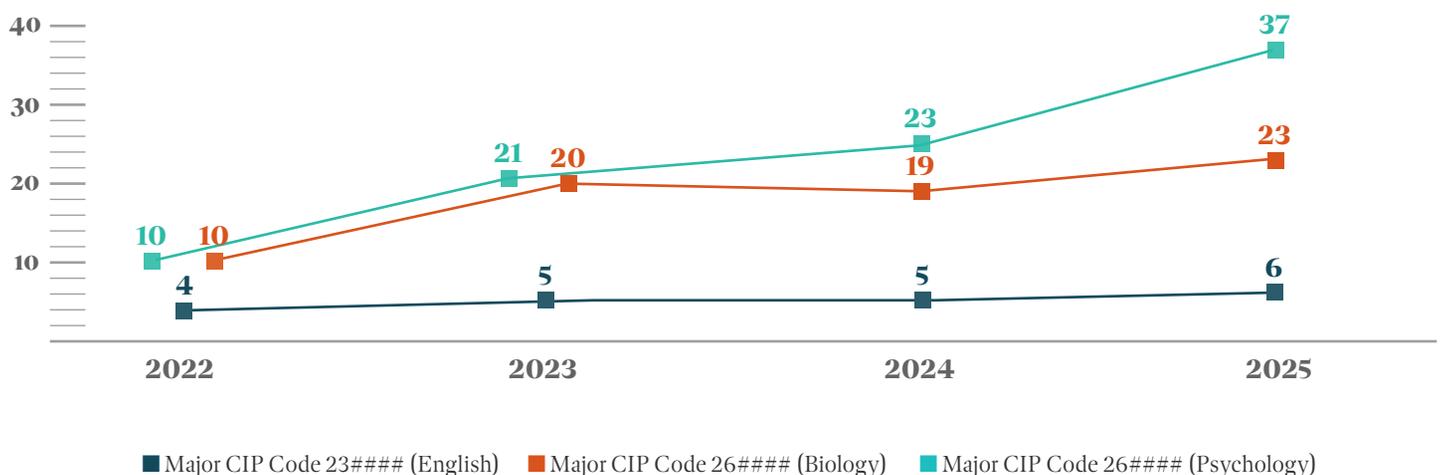
### Enrollment Growth Noted in the English, Biology, and Psychology Pathways

A key goal of the project was to increase the number of Ohio community college students choosing to enroll in bachelor’s degree programs at Consortium colleges and universities in three liberal arts pathways—English, biology, and psychology. Steady growth is seen in the number of Ohio community college students enrolling in these three pathways. The English pathway grew modestly, with enrollment rising from four students in 2022 to six in 2025. Biology saw a significant jump, as numbers more than doubled from 10 students in 2022 to 23 in 2025. Psychology showed the most dramatic change, with enrollment more than tripling from 10 students in 2022 to 37 students in 2025 (see Figure C).

One Consortium institution that substantially contributed to the growth in psychology was Tiffin University, enrolling 12 students in psychology in 2025. Tiffin has increased its transfer enrollment, due in large part to students transferring from Ohio community colleges.

**Figure C**  
**Enrollment Growth in Three Pathways**

Figure C illustrates enrollment growth in the three Consortium pathways—English, biology, and psychology—for Ohio community college transfer students between 2022 and 2025.



# Best Practices and Considerations for Building and Sustaining Transfer Pathways

The Ohio Consortium for Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts learned some lessons through the project that are applicable to other organizations leading statewide initiatives to strengthen community college transfer into independent four-year colleges and universities.

## Build on Existing Transfer Frameworks for Public Institutions

Four-year independent colleges and universities in the Consortium were encouraged to use the statewide Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathways (OGTPs) as the foundation for their curriculum templates. OGTPs have been developed across more than 40 majors and have undergone rigorous review by public two-year and four-year institutions in the state. Their purpose is to ensure a clear and consistent course mapping from associate's to bachelor's degrees.

OGTPs require students to complete a minimum of 60 credits of college-transferable coursework, guaranteeing junior standing upon transfer to a bachelor's program. Remedial or non-transferable courses completed at a community college are excluded from OGTP coursework. The pathways emphasize a strong general education core, specifically the Ohio Transfer 36 (OT36), alongside pre-major and foundational major courses, often recognized as Transfer Assurance Guide (TAG) courses.

Many chief academic officers and faculty members at Ohio's independent four-year institutions were not familiar with the specifics of OGTPs prior to the Ohio Transfer Pathways project, and after reviewing the OGTP curriculum found that they were very strong matches for course transferability, both for major courses and general education requirements. They realized that there was no need to "reinvent the wheel" when public four-year colleges and universities already accepted these courses. Ohio public two-year and four-year

institutions use common codes to identify courses called the Transfer Assurance Guide (TAG). TAG courses were developed by the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) to provide a reliable guide for course content across public institutions. These courses have established learning outcomes, guaranteeing transfer equivalency. By accepting TAG courses, four-year colleges and universities can be confident that community colleges consistently meet academic standards, even if the administrators have not previously worked with a particular community college, as TAG courses all undergo the same rigorous review.

## Align General Education Requirements and Identify Signature Courses

By committing to the acceptance of state-approved general education requirements (in Ohio referred to as OT36), independent four-year institutions can welcome students who transfer with an AA or AS and promise that they have completed most, if not all, of their general education requirements. Students entering with an AA or AS should be able to transition to their bachelor's degree focusing primarily on major and other upper-level courses, and they should be able to enter as juniors to ensure the timely completion of their academic journey.

Most independent four-year colleges and universities have institutional signature courses that are part of their general education or degree requirements, and these do not need to be waived. Institutions should regularly assess how their general education courses align with state-approved requirements and identify any signature courses required in the first two years that cannot be transferred. It is essential to ensure these signature courses can be completed in junior or senior years without interfering with major requirements or prolonging time to degree completion.

### **Build Collaborative Faculty Teams**

Collaboration among faculty teams from both two-year and four-year colleges is critical for successful transfer pathways. Regular engagement among these faculty members fosters shared understanding, smooths curricular transitions, and supports student success.

### **Maintain and Sustain Transfer Pathways**

To sustain effective transfer pathways, institutions should designate responsible individuals to monitor and update pathway curricula in response to changes in OGTP, OT36, or internal major requirements. Communication across departments such as admissions, registrar, advising, and transfer centers is crucial for maintaining up-to-date and easily accessible transfer information.

Websites should reflect current transfer pathway details, with clearly identified contacts at partner schools to support students directly. Regularly updating platforms like Transferology ensures all transferable courses are visible and that the institution is recognized for its robust transfer offerings.

### **Create and Promote a Shared Pledge for Institutions to Support Transfer Student Success**

As well as building the pathways, projects should also create opportunities for institutions to promote their commitment to this work, highlighting project achievements and showcasing participating institutions' support for transfer student success. In Ohio, institutions showed this commitment through the Ohio Consortium Transfer Pledge, which was endorsed by all consortium presidents in 2022. This pledge assured institutional partners and students that these institutions were dedicated to valuing and supporting transfer student success, as well as highlighting the new pathways that could be followed by community college transfer students.

### **Strengthen Institutional Relationships**

Fostering strong relationships between partner colleges is essential. Organizing faculty and staff meetings, joint curriculum reviews, and visits between institutions—such as faculty visiting community colleges or bringing community

college students to independent colleges—promotes greater understanding and seamless transitions for students.

Additionally, sharing outcomes and testimonials, such as videos from faculty and former transfer students, helps inform and inspire both community colleges and prospective transfer students.

### **Establish Robust Support Systems and Provide Clear Guidance**

It is vital to establish robust support systems for transfer students once on campus. Consistent messaging among admissions, registrar, transfer evaluation, advising, faculty, and other stakeholders ensures students receive accurate, supportive guidance.

Transparency regarding signature courses and their role in bolstering students' life and career skills should be a priority. All faculty members within relevant departments must be informed and involved in the pathway process.

Policies and practices should be adjusted to best serve community college transfer students, including the provision of strong financial aid packages.

### **Expand Pathways for Additional Majors**

Following the project model, colleges and universities should address the transfer and application of general education and pre-major courses toward bachelor's degree requirements.

Faculty teams must ensure that pre-major and major courses completed in the associate's degree program are aligned for successful transfer into independent four-year colleges and universities as credits toward the student's desired major. Consideration should also be given to elective and supporting courses—such as foreign languages—that facilitate a smooth transition and support the major.

Degree completion maps at the independent colleges and universities should clearly illustrate how transferred credits allow students to finish their bachelor's degree within four full-time semesters, accounting for scheduling variations and individual choices. These visual aids will demonstrate to students that they will be able to enter a four-year institution with junior standing and efficiently complete their degree requirements after transfer.

# Acknowledgments

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