



Policy Spotlight on New England

Dual Admissions for Transfer Students

Four in 10 students who begin college at a New England institution transfer from one institution to another at least once in their academic careers¹. Though thousands of students change institutions across the region, this does not imply the transfer process is always smooth or easy. One telling example is that students across the country lose an average of 13 credits when transferring—an entire full-time semester—costing them time, money, and, sometimes, confidence in higher education at large². Transfer student success is often hindered by a number of individual, institutional, sector-, and state-wide factors, including challenges of information and awareness, admissions, and student support.

To support New England states' work facing these challenges, Education Commission of the States and the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) convened higher education leaders to share transfer policy and program updates, best practices, and plans for improvement. Their engaging discussion brought to light the myriad ways policymakers and practitioners seek to serve transfer students in the region. One of the many transfer initiatives discussed was dual admissions. Dual admission policies and programs have the potential to address the complex admission and academic pathway processes that sometimes obstruct seamless student transfer.

What is Dual Admissions?

Dual Admissions—sometimes called conditional admissions or joint admissions—enables a community college student who plans to complete a baccalaureate degree to be simultaneously admitted to a four-year college while earning an associate degree. Admission to the four-year institution is guaranteed as long as certain requirements (e.g. time, credit, grade point average) are met.

Dual admissions *policies* are systemic, addressing whole systems or states, such as Connecticut's Transfer Compact. Dual admissions *programs* are ad-hoc, organized between individual institutions, such as the Guaranteed Admission & Tuition Agreement between the Community College of Rhode Island and Providence College.

However, academic and policy-oriented literature on dual admissions is thin or outdated. Decision-makers increasingly need information on the topic as issues of student transfer rise on state higher education agendas. To that end, this *Policy Spotlight on New England* aims to communicate the most salient information and lessons learned about dual admissions, as shared by enrollment management, academic affairs, and transfer professionals from across the region at the Education Commission of the States and NEBHE convening. **This *Policy Spotlight* summarizes the findings, opinions, and feedback of convening participants.**

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¹ Gretchen Syverud, *New England Fast Facts: Student Transfer*. (Boston, MA: New England Board of Higher Education, 2015), http://www.nebhe.org/info/pdf/policy/New_England_Fast_Facts_Student_Transfer_July_2015_FINAL.pdf

² Sean Anthony Simone, *Transferability of Postsecondary Credit Following Student Transfer or Co-enrollment Statistical Analysis Report* (Washington D.C.: National Center for Education Studies), 23, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014163.pdf>

Spotlight on Connecticut

Connecticut's Transfer Compact guarantees any Connecticut community college student admission to any Connecticut state university as long as s/he completes an associate degree within five years, earns a minimum 2.0 GPA, and pursues a baccalaureate degree within two years of completing an associate degree. Students must apply before earning 16 or more transferable college credits at the community college and choose a receiving state university upon application. Students who meet requirements are guaranteed "junior-level standing" at the receiving institution; though the Compact makes clear that "junior-level standing does not necessarily mean that the baccalaureate program can be completed within the next four semesters at the state university."

Connecticut's Guaranteed Admission Program (GAP) offers similar benefits to Connecticut community college students who wish to continue their studies in the University of Connecticut system upon associate degree completion. Students are eligible if they plan on earning baccalaureate degrees in liberal arts and sciences, agriculture and natural resources, or business, apply before earning 30 transferable credits, and meet certain course and minimum grade requirements.

Benefits of Dual Admissions

Dual admissions policies and programs show unique promise beyond the benefits of successful transfer. When both institutions engage with and invest in students, they may benefit from:

- Co-institutional advising that helps to ensure community college coursework will be accepted for credit toward a degree at the four-year college;
- Course registration and on-campus housing options equivalent to native (non-transfer) university juniors upon transferring; and
- Access to events and facilities at both institutions, including libraries, labs, and recreation centers.

Spotlight on New Hampshire

New Hampshire's new dual admissions policy, Dual NH, enables students to use a **single application for both institutions** when beginning at a NH community college and **guaranteed junior status** when beginning at a NH public university, given they meet certain academic standards.

Counseling and support services, if provided collaboratively by both institutions, may help keep students engaged and on track from the beginning of community college through the transition to a four-year school. Convening participants have found that the coordination required of faculty and staff between the two institutions in order to provide this support has the added benefit of strengthening communication channels and relationships overall.

Aligning Transfer Policies & Programs

Dual admissions policies and programs can complement several other initiatives that serve transfer students. For example, combining dual admissions with tuition discounting at the four-year institution, academic pathways designed for transfer, transfer-specific student services and programs, or a standardized transcript system across institutions can further incent students and lessen the burden on institutions. **When aligned, these transfer policies and programs are much more effective together than independently: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.**

Indeed, some states incorporate programmatic aspects of dual admissions into more comprehensive transfer policies, such as MassTransfer in Massachusetts. Students enrolled in linked MassTransfer programs can benefit from guaranteed admission to a four-year program (given a minimum GPA) as well as a host of other advantages the transfer system provides (e.g. no application fee or essay, partial tuition waiver).

Spotlight on Rhode Island

The Community College of Rhode Island and Providence College's Guaranteed Admission & Tuition Agreement (GATA) provides conditionally admitted students an additional incentive to participate: a **33% reduction in tuition** at Providence's School of Continuing Education (SCE). Partnering with SCE specifically has the additional benefit of a more flexible transfer credit policy. SCE also has **flexible class times**, which are designed for working adults who often make up a large share of community college students.

Challenges of Dual Admissions

Meanwhile, even with the sharpest design and implementation, transfer policies and programs face challenges; dual admissions is no exception. Practitioners at New England institutions noted that dual admissions policies and programs may bring unique difficulties, such as reallocating or securing sustainable funding for additional advising resources in tight budget times. Further, dual admissions fails to address or may reinforce many broad challenges states face with respect to transfer students. For example, convening participants mentioned:

- Unpredictability of if and when conditionally admitted students will enroll at four-year colleges, which complicates enrollment management;
- Unclear information on or changes to degree requirements, which complicates course-taking and advising; and
- Disincentives for institutions that receive transfer students, such as their degree completions not counted in federal calculations of graduation rates.

Spotlight on Rhode Island

Rhode Island's public institutions take the burden off dually admitted students who are being co-advised by **bringing advisors from four-year colleges onto the community college's campus** for specific advising days.

Perhaps the most significant limitation of dual admissions policies and programs is also true of all transfer initiatives: It cannot be the single solution to address the issues transfer students encounter. **Transfer students take diverse pathways and have multiple needs, which will not easily be served by one policy or program.** Rather, dual admissions may be one way to facilitate a specific transfer pathway, embedded within a portfolio of varied transfer policies and programs.

Promising Practices

Advised by the insights and experiences of their colleagues across the region, policymakers and practitioners can work to mitigate these challenges—or at least minimize unintended consequences—while building on the lessons learned at other institutions and states. Some of the best practices transfer professionals shared include:

1. Inform high school students of dual admissions programs early in the college application process. High school counselors can aid in these efforts.
2. Identify and train institutional personnel whose specific purpose is to support transfer students. Encourage participation in a network of transfer professionals within and across two and four-year institutions.
3. Establish and maintain open faculty and staff communication across two and four-year institutions.
4. Establish and maintain open communication between transfer professionals at both institutions and dually admitted students starting from the day students set foot on campus at the community college.

In the short time since NEBHE last mapped dual admissions policies in New England states, interest and movement in dual admissions has grown—see, for instance, New Hampshire's expansion of a dual admissions pilot to a system-wide policy. As transfer professionals explore or continue this work, they can look to the lessons learned in dual admissions across the region. Leveraging this insight can help establish or enhance existing dual admissions policies and programs to ultimately improve student success. **To further bolster this success, higher education leaders can align dual admissions policies and programs with other strong transfer policies and programs, and—as Education Commission of the States and NEBHE have seen firsthand—continue to engage in robust, open discussions about how to best serve transfer students.**

About the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE)

Established in 1955 by six visionary New England governors, NEBHE is a regional compact that works across New England to: help leaders assess, develop and implement education practices and policies of regional significance; promote regional cooperation that encourages efficient sharing of education resources; and strengthen the relationship between higher education and the regional economy.



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