

# FRAMING, NOT BLAMING:

## IMPROVING LATINO COLLEGE TRANSFER IN TEXAS



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## IMPROVING LATINO COLLEGE TRANSFER IN TEXAS

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*The authors are solely responsible for the content and any errors in the publication.*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Stakeholders in Texas are discussing strategies to improve the transfer pathways to college completion. However, too often these discussions focus on segments and stakeholders to blame for breaks in the pathway. The purpose of this brief is twofold: 1) to reframe the options to improve college pathways from blame to shared ownership and action, and, 2) to support discussions translating effective institutional practices into policy strategies that can improve the transfer pathway for Latino and other post-traditional students in Texas.

*Excelencia* in Education worked with institutional practitioners as well as K-12 and public policy stakeholders in Texas to highlight four areas between and within institutions where state policy might improve Latino student transfer and success: 1) transferability of credits, 2) data sharing, 3) access to financial aid, and, 4) faculty involvement. The following is a summary of strategies and tactics.

## TRANSFERABILITY OF CREDITS:

The process for transferring college credits must be transparent, consistent, and limit the accumulation of excessive credit hours that lead to delays in degree completion and increased financial burdens for Latino and other transfer students.

### Tactics:

1. **Sequence and map** degree plans for all transfer students.
2. Require **advising** students of credits transferable to institutions being considered.
3. Implement **joint training** on credit transfer and financial aid for service providers.
4. Implement **common course numbering** consistently across institutions.

## DATA SHARING BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS:

Effective and systemic data sharing should be incentivized to identify potential Latino transfer students, track their persistence across institutions, and document impact of initiatives on students' transfer to completion.

### Tactics:

1. Incentivize institutions to **include data sharing in articulation agreements**.

2. **Publicize persistence and completion rates** as well as graduation rates by institutions.
3. Encourage institutions to **invest in the technical expertise for staff to use data** available of transfer students in their documentation of institutional success.

## ACCESS TO INSTITUTIONAL FINANCIAL

**AID:** Prioritize equal access to institutional financial aid for transfer students with native students by integrating and aligning deadlines, forms, advising, and funding.

### Tactics:

1. Ensure deadlines, and **disbursement timing** for institutional aid are consistent.
2. **Standardize forms** for financial aid and admissions across partner institutions.
3. **Advise** transfer students on funding opportunities, and program limits.
4. Develop **institutional transfer-specific scholarships**.

**FACULTY INVOLVEMENT:** Reinforce the role of faculty to mentor transfer students, engage students in and out of the classroom, and develop degree plans that facilitate the transfer process and ensure credit mobility for students.

### Tactics:

1. **Incentivize institutions** to include transfer student mentoring in the tenure process.
2. Ensure faculty receives **information on the transfer process** to use and share.
3. Incentivize **collaboration between faculty** within partner institutions.

# INTRODUCTION

Increasing college completion has become a priority for students, policymakers, foundation representatives, and institutions nationally and in key states like Texas.

- Today, about 39 percent of adults in both the U.S. and in Texas have earned an associate degree or higher (U.S. Census, 2017). However, projections of the U.S. workforce needs show more than 60 percent of adults will need to have a postsecondary credential to remain competitive.
- There is also a significant attainment gap between Latinos—among the youngest and fastest growing populations in the U.S. and Texas—and other adults. In 2016, only 24 percent of Latino adults had earned a college degree, compared to 39 percent of all adults nationally and in Texas. (U.S. Census, 2016)

Awareness of the diverse pathways students take to attain a college degree as well as the diversity of students themselves has also grown.

- Data show less than 25 percent of college students today fit the traditional student profile or follow traditional education pathways—college ready, enrolling in college directly from high school graduation, living on campus at a university, and completing in four years.
- In 2016, over 40 percent of college students nationally and in Texas were students of color, over 50 percent were female, and almost 40 percent were adults (over 25 years of age).
- Many of these students are also more likely to enroll at community colleges, mix their enrollment between full- and part-time, live at home and/or commute, and take more time to complete a degree than traditional students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).
- Nationally, over 35 percent of students transferred to a different institution at least once in six years, and in Texas over 50 percent transferred (Shapiro, et.al, 2015).



This brief addresses the opportunity to increase Latino college transfer in Texas. The emphasis is to strive for solutions rather than blaming other institutions or entities for the current limits of the transfer pathway to degree completion. Institutional leaders and policymakers can apply a Latino lens and grow their intentional strategies to improve educational pathways in Texas for college completion that can benefit all students while decreasing racial equity gaps in completion rates.

This brief also provides a framework for considering translation from institutional practice to public policy informed by practitioners and policymakers in Texas. The brief begins with the background for the project that informed this brief followed by a summary of what we know of transfer pathways and translations from practice to policy for consideration by stakeholders in Texas.

## BACKGROUND

This brief builds on practice-based findings from a national collaborative project to help select institutional pairs across the country strengthen Latino student engagement, transfer, and college completion. Each institutional pair—a two-year and a four-year—developed concrete action plans for collaborative strategies, practices institutional data on the educational pathway of students. The project, “Engaging Latino Students for Transfer and College Completion,” was conducted in partnership with the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and *Excelencia* in Education (*Excelencia*) with support from the Greater Texas Foundation and the Kresge Foundation.

Core findings from the CCSSE/NSSE/*Excelencia* project included the following:

- Students need additional and effective services and support with and through the transfer process.
- There must be alignment between student goals and institutional objectives.
- Transferability of credits is a major concern for students and institutional staff.
- The “cost” of taking classes that do not apply to degree plans increases the financial burden and time to completion for students.
- Early college high school students face similar transfer challenges and issues. (CCSSE, 2015)

To apply these insights to the experiences of Latino students in Texas, the Greater Texas Foundation supported *Excelencia* to examine the

transfer experience at eight Texas institutions working in the emerging policy framework in Texas. This project yielded a set of institutional strategies to improve the Latino college transfer experience that could be translated into policy strategies to improve the transfer and completion of more Latino and other students in Texas. The Texas institutional pairs included:

- Alamo Colleges and The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA)
- Austin Community College and Texas State University (TSU)
- El Paso Community College and The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)
- Houston Community College and the University of Houston (UH)



# WHAT WE KNOW OF TRANSFER PATHWAYS: NATIONALLY AND IN TEXAS

Community colleges are key to the postsecondary educational pathways of many students, especially Latino students nationally and in Texas. Data show the majority of students today are “swirling” in and out of community colleges, including those whose goal is a baccalaureate degree. Large numbers of students begin their postsecondary education at community colleges with the intent to transfer to a university; however, few do so and even fewer complete the requirements for a bachelor’s degree. Strengthening the transfer pathways between two-year and four-year institutions is key to increase the educational attainment goals of Latino and other students in Texas and nationally.

Consider the following information on what we know of Latinos in college, transfer pathways, and college completion nationally and in Texas.

## LATINOS IN COLLEGE

Community colleges serve as the entry point for many Latino students as well as others in higher education because they offer accessible and affordable educational opportunities in the communities where students live.

### **Latino students are more likely than their peers to begin at a community college.**

- Half of Latino students began college at a 2-year public institution (51%). This is higher than their Black (48%), Asian (38%), and White (36%) counterparts.
- However, only one in every ten Latino students who started at a 2-year institution completed a 4-year degree within six years (11%). This is lower than their White (19%) and Asian (23%) counterparts.

### **Most Latino students attend college with a mix of full-time and part-time enrollment.**

- Of all Latinos students enrolled for up to six years, 63% were mixed enrollment, 28% were exclusively full-time, and 9% were exclusively part-time.

- The rate of mixed enrollment intensity among Latino students (63%) is higher than their Black (60%), Asian (57%), and White (50%) counterparts.

### **Latino students are more likely than their peers to be enrolled in college after six years.**

- One in every five Latino students were still “in progress” of earning a degree after six years (19%). This is higher than their Black (17%), Asian (17%), and White (11%) counterparts.
- The majority of Latino students who were still “in progress” had pursued their degree with mixed enrollment intensity (89%).

### **Latino students demonstrate persistence and rigor toward degree completion.**

- Half of all Latino students who transferred and completed a 4-year degree had also completed a 2-year degree (48%). This is higher than their Asian (43%), Black (40%), and White (39%) counterparts.
- Four in every five Latino students who started at a 4-year institution and earned a 4-year degree did so from the institution at which they started (80%).

## TRANSFER NATIONALLY AND IN TEXAS

Analysis using data from the National Student Clearinghouse for the Fall 2008 cohort (Shapiro, et.al, 2015) shows the following:

### Students in Texas are more likely to transfer to a different institution than students nationally.

- Nationally, over 35 percent of students transferred to a different institution at least once in six years and 45 percent transferred more than once.
- In Texas, 50 percent of students transferred at least once. Of these students, 25 percent transferred twice, and 28 percent transferred three times or more. [Table 1]

**TABLE 1. Total Transfer and Mobility of Students Who Transferred 2008–2014 (Fall 2008 Cohort)**

	Entering Cohort #	Transfers <sup>1</sup>	
		#	%
<b>U.S.</b>	3,629,429	1,350,971	37%
<b>TX</b>	270,587	136,423	50%

<sup>1</sup> Includes post degree transfers only for students who started in 2-year public institutions. Source: Shapiro, D., et.al, 2015

### Community college students in Texas are much more likely to transfer to a different institution than community college students nationally.

- Nationally, 39 percent of those starting at community college transferred to a different institution, compared to 37 percent of those starting at a four-year public and 34 percent of those at a four-year private non-profit institution.
- In Texas, over 50 percent of students who start at a community college transfer to a different institution, compared to just under 50 percent of those starting at a four-year public and 47 percent of those at a four-year private non-profit institution. [Table 2]

**TABLE 2. Transfer and Mobility of Students Who Transferred 2008–2014 by Sector and Control of Starting Institution, Fall 2008 Cohort**

	Two-Year Public			Four-Year Public			Four-Year Private Non-Profit		
	Entering Cohort #	Transfers <sup>1</sup>		Entering Cohort #	Transfers		Entering Cohort #	Transfers	
		#	%		#	%		#	%
<b>U.S.</b>	1,731,541	683,120	39%	1,154,517	421,654	37%	511,652	175,704	34%
<b>TX</b>	182,800	94,021	51%	68,157	33,259	49%	19,629	9,143	47%

<sup>1</sup> Includes post degree transfers only for students who started in 2-year public institutions. Source: Shapiro, D., et.al, 2015



**Students in Texas are much more likely to transfer to a different institution regardless of enrollment intensity than students nationally.**

- Nationally, 23 percent of those who enrolled exclusively full-time in college transferred to a different institution, compared to 12 percent of those enrolled exclusively part-time and 54 percent of those enrolled with mixed enrollment (combine full-time and part-time enrollment over time).
- In Texas, 34 percent of those who enrolled exclusively full-time in college transferred to a different institution, compared to 16 percent of those enrolled exclusively part-time and 64 percent of those enrolled with mixed enrollment. [Table 3]

**TABLE 3. Transfer and Mobility 2008–2014 by Enrollment Intensity, Fall 2008 Cohort**

	Exclusively Full-Time			Exclusively Part-Time			Mixed Enrollment		
	Entering Cohort #	Transfers <sup>1</sup>		Entering Cohort #	Transfers		Entering Cohort #	Transfers	
		#	%		#	%		#	%
<b>U.S.</b>	1,124,239	257,406	23%	603,488	71,941	12%	1,901,282	1,021,620	54%
<b>TX</b>	49,032	16,493	34%	46,542	7,371	16%	175,004	112,559	64%

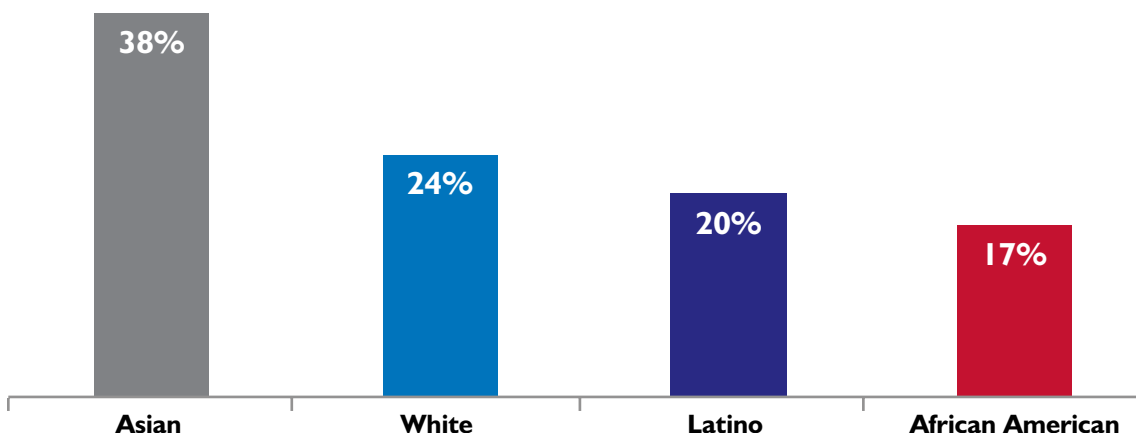
<sup>1</sup> Includes post degree transfers only for students who started in 2-year public institutions. Source: Shapiro, D., et.al, 2015

**LATINO TRANSFERS IN TEXAS**

In Texas, over half of public postsecondary students are enrolled in community colleges and more than 70 percent of those in community college are enrolled in an academic program designed to lead to transfer. However, only 35 percent of these students actually transfer (Greater Texas Foundation, 2017). Among students in Texas, Latino students are less likely

to transfer than other groups. For the Fall 2009 cohort, Latino community college students in Texas were less likely to transfer to another institution within six years (20%) compared to Asians (38%) and Whites (24%), but more likely to have transferred than African Americans (17%) (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2016). [Figure 1]

**FIGURE 1. Percentage of Texas Community College Students Who Transferred within Six Years, by Race/Ethnicity (Fall 2009 Cohort)**



SOURCE: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2016). 2016 Texas Public Higher Education Almanac: A Profile of State and Institutional Performance and Characteristics.

# CURRENT POLICY TO IMPROVE TRANSFER IN TEXAS

Texas has several state policies intended to improve transfer pathways for students focused on core curriculum, field of study curriculum, and reverse transfer. The state also has policies that provide guidance but are voluntary, such as transfer compacts, a common course numbering system and a multidisciplinary studies associate degree designed to help maximize the number of credits that transfer.

More recently, the 85th Texas Legislature considered the following state policies to address transfer:

- Senate Bill 802 requiring the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to conduct a study and issue a report that identifies best practices in ensuring that credits transferred between public institutions of higher education, including courses offered for dual credit, apply toward a degree program at an institution of higher education. Specifically, the study must evaluate existing articulation agreements and identify institutions that are implementing the best practices.
- Senate Bill 1091 limits the dual credit courses taken by high school students to the core curriculum, career technology education, and foreign language courses.
- House Bill 1638 requires Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to jointly develop statewide goals for dual credit programs, including early high school programs, to provide uniform standards for evaluating the programs. The bill also delineates what must be included in memorandums of understanding (MOUs) or articulation agreements between a school district and public institution of higher education to provide a dual credit program.

In addition to these policies, the THECB received funding for FY 2018-2019 to revise existing Fields of Study curriculums and to create new ones.



The Fields of Study curriculums are intended to improve transferability of credits by facilitating the applicability of courses transferred from community colleges to universities by establishing a set of lower-division courses within a discipline that must be applied to a bachelor's degree in that discipline. THECB is focusing on decreasing the excess semester credit hours (SCH) that students attempt when completing an associate or a bachelor's degree.

# TRANSLATING FROM PRACTICE TO POLICY

*Excelencia* analyzed and synthesized feedback from institutions, early college high school leaders, and other higher education stakeholders, into four goals, strategies, and tactics to inform public policy.

1. **Transferability of credits between institutions**
2. **Data sharing between institutions**
3. **Access to institutional financial aid**
4. **Faculty involvement in transfer process**

The following section provides more details on the issues, strategies, and tactics developed from the engagement as well as examples of institutional practices and practitioner perspectives that informed the identification of these key issues and tactics.

## TRANSFERABILITY OF CREDITS

Transferability of credits assumes a course taken at one institution will transfer to another institution and that the course will be applied toward the student's major, ultimately counting towards a bachelor's degree.

**Blaming vs. framing:** Students, staff, faculty, and institutions, find blame in transferring credits. Students and staff cite limits to credit transfer as problematic and frustrating to the transfer process. As a result, students who persist end up taking extra courses, increasing the cost of their education, and, delaying the completion of a degree. For example, one study found Texas community college students graduate with nearly 40 credit hours more for an associate degree than the 60 credit hours generally required (Complete College America, 2014). Some stakeholders blame institutions for complicated and seemingly subjective processes for accepting credits from other institutions. Others blame faculty for not wanting to accept credits for disciplines for students to advance in majors. And yet others blame students for not being better informed about their transfer credit options.

**Framing a shared goal:** College credits earned in one institution should transfer with the student and count towards requirements for degree completion at the transfer institution.



**Strategy:** The process for transferring college credits must be transparent, consistent, and limit the accumulation of excessive credit hours that leads to delays in degree completion and increased financial burdens for transfer students.

*Excelencia* found stakeholders at every engagement quickly zeroed in on the issue of transferability of credits. A great deal of concern was expressed about the excessive student credit hours (SCH) that transfer students accumulate. The other concern that garnered much discussion was the high number of classes that are transferrable but are not applied by the receiving institution towards a bachelor's degree.

## TACTICS

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### I. Sequence and map courses in degree plans for all transfer students by major for timely degree completion.

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Degree plans help students navigate their path to completing a degree and help institutions coordinate course offerings to students. The majority of institutions engaged in this process were implementing elements of degree plans for their students. Participants at transfer discussions noted that the goal needs to focus on seamless transition because “transferability of credits is a mapping and sequence issue.” Consider the following examples:

- Alamo Colleges has implemented “institutes” based on meta-majors that have been mapped to K-12 high school curriculum, as well as to UTSA and other regional institutions’ programs of study.
- Austin Community Colleges offers transfer students guided pathways based on meta-majors, which academic advisors use to sequence and map courses for upcoming semesters.

Essential to resolving the lack of transferability of credits, as repeatedly voiced by all the institutions, is the enforcement of articulation agreements upon which degree plans are based. Both two-year and four-year institutions acknowledge that there is still too much inconsistency and unreliability in degree plans that result in the loss of transfer credit for their students due to changes made by university departments that are not communicated to community colleges. While all community college participants reported successful collaborations with specific universities, or at least individual departments within a university, there was a unanimous consensus that these collaborations must be systemic and across all disciplines.

Further, the community college representatives and practitioners engaged in discussions acknowledged that the course offerings under their dual credit and early college high school initiatives are not aligned to bachelor degree programs in their areas. Instead, the approach has been to offer the courses that lead to the completion of the associate’s degree. They recognize the need to ensure the courses have transfer mobility beyond the sponsoring community college.

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### 2. Require articulation agreements or memorandums of understanding (MOUs) include advising students of credits transferable to institutions considered for admissions.

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In the transfer discussions hosted by *Excelencia*, requiring articulation agreements or MOUs include specific advising support on the transferability of credits was rated quite high, especially by K-12 counselors. For example, some university representatives expressed concern that early college high school (ECHS) students arrive with excessive credit hours but lacking in meeting prerequisites for upper division classes. Institutional representatives and discussion participants agreed that a better understanding of core curriculum is needed by the K-12 community and ECHS policymakers. Furthermore, they expressed the need to have universities involved in ECHS agreements between K-12 and community colleges to ensure effective pathways for ECHS students.

Exemplary practices of proactive partnerships with its ECHS community were evident in El Paso. UTEP offers an ECHS academic center on its campus as well as a webpage specific to ECHS students with degree plans and financial aid information. In addition, El Paso Community College offers advisors to assist ECHS students with the transferability of their credits.

Further, all the community colleges in the project offer their students transfer centers on their campuses, allowing their students opportunities to meet one-on-one with university academic representatives to discuss transferability of courses. However, most indicated that challenges exist with academic transfer advisors being unable to assist with admission and/or financial aid, no uniformity of services provided by the various universities and/or academic departments, and a lack of accountability and evidence of effectiveness.

The community colleges also indicated that they are enhancing their advising services, which directly impact their transfer students. For example, Alamo Colleges' new advising model impacts transfer efforts by establishing advising plans and guides, requiring students to choose pre-majors that map to degrees at their intended four-year universities, and mandates intentional advising sessions throughout students' enrollment at Alamo Colleges.

A few of the external stakeholders that were interviewed recommend that transfer advising occur every semester and include: credit accumulation that measures progress to a degree; mapping and sequencing of classes; and mapping out of financial aid per semester based on financial aid estimates. Only Austin Community College (ACC) indicated that financial aid was part of their transfer advising.

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### **3. Implement joint training on credit transfer and financial aid for advisors, mentors, and counselors from high schools as well as colleges and partnering service providers.**

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Most of the institutional pairs in this project indicated they collaborate on some type of information sharing and/or joint training for service providers in select areas. Consider the following examples:

- Alamo Colleges and UTSA are leading partners in the Alamo Area College Access & Completion Consortium comprised of school districts, higher education institutions, community-based programs,

and other stakeholders. While not solely focused on transfer, the Consortium does allow joint training and information sharing with multiple partners.

- At Austin Community College, advisor-to-advisor forums are offered between ACC and their university partners to discuss articulation issues and transfer processes.
- El Paso Community College, in collaboration with UTEP, convenes key leaders and practitioners from admissions, financial aid, testing, and marketing for an enrollment summit once per semester.

However, institutional representatives expressed a need for more systemic, intentional, and timely sharing of information. A consensus among practitioners was that a "common language" needs to be developed for transfer in Texas, ensuring that communication between practitioners and students is constant across the state. Further, practitioners at multiple engagements on transfer offered by *Excelencia* expressed the need and interest in a statewide training on transfer.

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### **4. Implement common course numbering consistently across community colleges and universities.**

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Participants in both transfer discussion engagements affirmed this tactic as highly significant. They recommended using Texas Common Course Numbering (TCCN) across the board even at universities and make it mandatory, not voluntary. They believe that TCCN will help demystify the sequencing of classes across the state. Other participants expressed issues with TCCN citing one of the state's flagship institutions only accepting a foundations math class from three community colleges in the state, even when following TCCN. While affirming that TCCN will help improve the alignment of transfer programs, they recognize that TCCN will not address all issues related to the varying degree plans among Texas universities.

## DATA SHARING BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS

Data sharing across regional institutions or throughout Texas would be most challenging considering the diverse data systems employed by the institutions. It would, however, benefit students and institutions by facilitating the analysis and impact of transfer phenomena, policies, and practices regionally and statewide.

**Blaming vs. framing:** Many institutions in Texas have limited ability to track students between institutions and follow their progress through college. Some may blame the complex data collection required that limit tracking students once they are no longer enrolled while others have had data use for punitive purposes by institutional funders or policymakers and are hesitant to use data to track students when they no longer are directly serving the students.

**Framing a shared goal:** Data that tracks student progress to degree completion should be accessible to institutions transferring students in and out.

**Strategy:** Encourage effective and systemic data sharing to identify potential Latino transfer students, track Latino transfer students' persistence, and document impact of transfer initiatives on Latino transfer rates and credentials.

This strategy customarily received the least amount of feedback from the practitioners engaged in the various discussions. While recognizing that this was a strategy important to transfer in Texas, practitioners indicated this was the area in which they had the least experience and expertise.

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## TACTICS

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### 1. Incentivize institutions to include data sharing in articulation agreements with partner institutions to better track transfer students shared.

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Transfer discussion participants stressed that data sharing is a challenge as well as the mining of transfer data. They indicated that training for data collection and interpretation is needed.

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### 2. Publicize Latino students' persistence and completion rates, as well as graduation rates by institutions, for a more detailed understanding of student success.

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One way to bring attention to the success of Latino students at institutions is to bring attention

to the transfer in and out rates of students disaggregated to track their progress along their postsecondary pathway to degree completion.

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### 3. Encourage institutions to invest in the technical expertise for staff to use data available of transfer students in their documentation of institutional success.

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Two participating institutions, UTEP and EPCC, were the only institutional pair to have continued to institutionalize the sharing of data per the NSSE/CCSSE effort. However, both acknowledge more can be done to inform their transfer strategies using data. UTSA and Alamo Colleges expressed their intent to prioritize their efforts in data sharing.

## ACCESS TO INSTITUTIONAL FINANCIAL AID

Lack of financial aid is a major impediment for transfer students to a four-year university. One study on transfer students found transfer students were 1) awarded less in grants of any kind at both public and private four-year institutions, and, 2) in their final year of studies borrowed more than native students. Of Hispanic students, 1) transfer students received smaller awards compared to native students; 2) transfer students borrowed more than native students. (TG Research Report, 2012)

Texas transfer students are not faring any better. One report identifies lack of financial aid as “the third most frequently ranked barrier” for transfer students and indicates “a discrepancy in the level of funding for scholarships offered to first-time-in-college students versus those offered to transfer students” at Texas public universities (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2015).

**Blaming vs. framing:** Increased tuition and fees costs at the university can be a shock to and challenging for students, and some students often max out their federal financial aid eligibility due to community college classes not counting toward their bachelor degrees. Some fault the institutions and faculty for not being willing to accept credits already earned and paid for by students. Others fault the complexity of financial aid processes at institutions that are difficult to navigate between the community college and university while others fault the use of federal systems and forms.

**Framing a shared goal:** The process for receiving financial support for transfer students should be consistent with that of native students.

**Strategy:** Prioritize equal access to institutional financial aid for transfer students with native students by integrating and aligning deadlines, forms, advising, and funding.

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## TACTICS

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### 1. Ensure deadlines and forms for institutional aid and disbursement timing are consistent between transfer students and native students.

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Transfer discussion participants overwhelmingly affirmed this tactic as highly significant. There is a sense that when financial aid calendars and systems are programmed to award aid to first-time-in-college (FTIC) students first, that grant and scholarship funds are diminished such that transfer students are at a serious disadvantage when they are subsequently awarded aid. Therefore, discussion participants call for the awarding of financial aid to be better aligned to the needs and timelines of transfer students. One stakeholder, Educate Texas, believes that financial aid priority deadlines for transfer students should be aligned with those of FTICs.

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### 2. Standardize forms for financial aid and admissions across partner institutions.

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Participants don't understand why students applying for financial aid at more than one college have to deal with institution-specific forms for a process that is generic and meant to be uniform. Except for applications that may be required for students to be considered for institutional funding, participants felt that all other forms dealing with state and federal funding should be identical to minimize confusion and the work involved in procuring different sets of forms from each college, then completing them and returning them. EPCC is the only instance *Excelencia* found of an institution that is intentional about minimizing confusion and complexity by ensuring that its financial aid forms look like and are consistent with UTEP's.

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### **3. Advise transfer students and parents on funding availability, opportunities, and program limits to pay for their education.**

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While participants recognized that transfer students still need support with the financial aid process, their feedback concentrated on the difficulties students encounter as they near attainment of their bachelor's degree, resulting from semester or credit hour limitations on financial aid programs. For example, Austin Community College (ACC) indicates that universities report that students are maxing out their financial aid, and University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) acknowledges that financial aid advising is needed for transfer students as many of their transfer students exceed the 150 percent hour limit (financial aid satisfactory academic progress policy limits aid eligibility of students to 150 percent times the average number of hours required to complete a bachelor's degree.) Since students do not understand the limits of financial aid programs, participants indicated that students must receive advising on how much aid they have used, how much aid they need, and how much aid they have left. To that end, some partners recommend transfer advising include a mapping out of future financial aid students could receive per semester based on financial aid estimates.

Given the persistent need to provide transfer students with financial aid information and advising, the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) believes that such advising should begin at the community college level. In addition, Houston Community College (HCC), while in agreement with UTSA, also believes students should receive this information tailored to their technical and specialized needs, particularly for undocumented and Deferred Action For Childhood Arrivals

(DACA) students. However, improving financial aid advising for transfer students may not be so simple. Meeting this need will require campus financial aid professionals to become actively involved in transfer student advising, space they have been reluctant to occupy. The general consensus among those interviewed was that financial aid professionals would be the most difficult to engage in addressing this need.

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### **4. Develop institutional transfer-specific scholarships and promote actively to transfer students.**

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A major obstacle to students being able to transfer to and graduate from a four-year university is the lack of financial aid resources available to transfer students. Some scholarship funding is available to transfer students. UTEP and UTSA indicated that they make scholarships available to transfer students. Further, UTSA indicated that it offers transfer-specific scholarships for which students are automatically identified. Nonetheless, there was a clear consensus among discussion engagement participants that there simply are not enough scholarships and grants available to encourage and support the pursuit of a bachelor's degree by transfer students. The feedback captured below illustrates the unanimous support among participants for the increase of transfer-specific scholarships:

- Educate Texas recommends universities set aside a percent of institutional aid proportional to the percent of transfer student population.
- El Paso Community College believes that transfer scholarships should be created for students that complete the associate's degree and transfer to the university.



## FACULTY INVOLVEMENT

Faculty have key roles in improving transfer effectiveness. They interact with students more than others on campus and are vested in students' success. They are also positioned to positively impact student transfer as transfer agents through their consistent interactions and building of relationships with students in and out of class.

**Blaming vs. framing:** While faculty's primary role is educating students, some administrators and policymakers blame faculty for the limited preparation of students to transfer and complete a degree. Others blame faculty for the challenges faced in getting approval for articulation agreements, degree plans, and course development.

**Framing a shared goal:** Faculty should play a supportive role in student's transfer success since they have the most frequent interaction with students.

**Strategy:** Reinforce the role of faculty to mentor transfer students, engage students in and out of the classroom, and develop degree plans that facilitate the transfer process and ensure credit mobility for students.

Practitioners, including faculty that participated in the various engagements felt that faculty involvement in the transfer experience of students was crucial due to their constant interactions with students. However, the difficulty of engaging faculty consistently and intentionally in transfer efforts and initiatives appeared to be the biggest obstacle.

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## TACTICS

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### 1. Incentivize institutions to include mentoring of transfer students in the faculty tenure process.

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While the community colleges recognize that faculty should be engaged in the guiding and supporting of transfer students, most acknowledge that their faculty have expressed opposition to mentoring initiatives, preferring that this effort be the responsibility of advisors. Alamo Colleges and Austin Community Colleges indicated that they had begun discussions on creating faculty mentoring programs for students.

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### 2. Ensure faculty are provided professional development on the transfer process and given access to information they can share in the classroom of transfer opportunities and resources.

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To build the knowledge of the transfer process, practitioners recommend training for faculty that covers content and practices. However, there is a recognition that this professional development would be most welcomed and effective if faculty themselves would lead the training for their peers.

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### 3. Incentivize collaboration between faculty within academic disciplines at partner institutions to ensure transferability of courses for students.

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This strategy was a recurrent idea offered by participants at transfer discussion engagements who indicated that collaborations and relationships across K-12, community colleges, and universities were instrumental in student transfer. Practitioners indicated that collaboration between faculty within disciplines must occur across the K-12 and higher education spectrum.

Most of the community college representatives indicated that it is challenging to keep current on changes to degree plans as that is done by departments at the universities. The community colleges and the universities acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure that degree plans are mutually aligned.

Another recommendation calls for partnering institutions to conduct reverse degree audits to identify articulation agreement challenges mapping the hours accepted by the universities towards a bachelor's degree versus the number of hours accepted as electives can lead to a closer inspection of disciplines that are in need of alignment. Furthermore, institutions can be incentivized to conduct such analysis.

## CONFIRMING STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE ACTION

*Excelencia* in Education sought practitioner feedback throughout the project. The project team returned to the practitioners engaged during the formulation of the strategies and tactics to verify their support for the proposed strategies to improve the transfer pathway and success.

To accomplish this, *Excelencia* conducted a series of interviews with institutional administrators, program directors, transfer specialists, advisors, and faculty from each of the institutional pairs from May through July of 2016 as well as with key external stakeholders from around the state. The purpose of these was to follow-up on the strategies implemented, focus group findings, and lessons learned from the first effort, as well as to identify persistent challenges, existing programming efforts, potential opportunities and priorities.

Interviews were conducted with Educate Texas, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Texas Association of Community Colleges, and the Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation. These external stakeholders informed the project and analysis with emerging solutions, promising institutional practices, and potential legislative recommendation to improve the transfer process in Texas.

In recent years the number of early college high schools in Texas has greatly expanded. To include feedback from that sector, *Excelencia* also met with early college high school leaders to gather information on the transfer challenges of their students to address the focus group finding that early college high school students encounter the same challenges as traditional college transfer students.

*Excelencia* also organized listening sessions and presentations at selected annual conferences and summits with leaders and practitioners to gather additional feedback about the project findings and discuss the proposed strategies and

corresponding tactics. *Excelencia* presented the strategies to Latino-focused professionals and advocates such as the following:

- Texas Higher Education Symposium – August 5, 2016
- *Excelencia* convening on Transfer with institutional stakeholders – September 12, 2016
- Alamo Area College Access and Completion Summit – October 14, 2016
- Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education – February 28, 2017
- Texas Association for College Admission Counseling – April 23-25, 2017

This furthered the goal of ensuring the strategies and tactics lead to actionable agendas and initiatives in Texas to promote and support transparent pathways for Latino student success. Stakeholders also expressed a high level of interest in a statewide transfer engagement where transfer research and best practices would be shared.

Towards the end of the project, and after the 85th Texas Legislative session, *Excelencia* held a convening in Austin, Texas in cooperation with the Greater Texas Foundation and at the Texas Association of Community Colleges offices to discuss Latino student transfer throughout the state. Representatives from the participating institutions and key educational stakeholders focused on the emerging strategies and tactics identified through this analysis as high impact on Latino student transfer success and their potential use in the current Texas policy environment within the state and across institutions.

## SUMMARY

Among community college students in Texas, Latino students are less likely to transfer than other groups, except African Americans. Given the youth, growth, and current educational attainment of the Latino population in Texas, improving transfer pathways is a priority. Further, knowing that half of all students in Texas will transfer between colleges at least once—and over one-third of community college students will do so—stakeholders should prioritize policies to ease and facilitate the transfer process and ensure students will not lose credit or time as they continue on their educational path.

Too much time and effort is spent finding stakeholders to blame for the challenges in the transfer pathway to a baccalaureate degree. The approach behind this brief is to help frame the interests and concerns of the state, institutions, administrators, faculty, students, and other stakeholders for a more transparent and supportive transfer process for Latino and other students in Texas.

The four areas highlighted by stakeholders in the postsecondary pathway in Texas to improve Latino student transfer and success—1) transferability of

credits, 2) access to institutional financial aid, 3) faculty involvement, and, 4) data sharing between institutions—all require further discussions translating effective institutional practices into broader strategies that can improve the transfer pathway for Latino and other post-traditional students in Texas and considers shared ownership and action. Establishing strong transfer policies can benefit both two- and four-year colleges, can improve college affordability for Latino and other students, and can help Texas reach its college degree attainment goals.



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