

**Minnesota State Colleges and Universities – Office of Internal Auditing**

**Summary of Student Credit Transfer Testing**

**May 2010**

**Background:**

On February 10, 2010, the Audit Committee met with Legislative Auditor Jim Nobles and his staff to review and discuss their program evaluation report, *MnSCU System Office*. Based on that discussion, the Audit Committee Chair made several recommendations to the Board Chair on how to address the report findings. In his February 17, 2010 letter, Chair Olson assigned the responsibility for studying student credit transfer to the audit committee.

The Office of Internal Auditing tested fiscal year 2009 student records to identify the extent that credits may not have transferred between MnSCU colleges and universities and the reasons for any unsuccessful credit transfers. Part of the testing focused on a stratified random sample of approximately 16,000 students that enrolled in a MnSCU college or university in 2009 that transferred previously earned credits from another MnSCU college or university. An additional test analyzed the transfer experience of students who earned a baccalaureate degree in either Psychology or Accounting in 2009.

**Quantitative Results:**

**Reasons Credits Not Accepted in Transfer**

<b>Reason Credits Not Accepted in Transfer</b>	<b>2009 Enrolling Students</b>	<b>2009 Accounting Graduates</b>	<b>2009 Psychology Graduates</b>
Minnesota Transfer Curriculum courses or goal areas not shown as completed at receiving institution	10	4	1
Similar courses not given equivalencies	8	19	0
D grades not accepted	3	6	12
PSEO courses not recognized or accepted	0	0	4
Old credits	1	10	0
Data entry error or unknown	6	0	0
<b>Total Number of Students with Incidents</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>17</b>
Population	16,309	211	258
Sample Size	281	109	102
<b>Estimated Incident Rate</b>	<b>9.4%<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>26.5%</b>	<b>6.6%</b>

<sup>1</sup> Based on the statistical sampling methodology, we are 95 percent confident that the incident rate would be between 5.9% and 12.9%.

In addition to projecting the incident rates, we estimated the magnitude of credit loss for the 2009 graduates. For the 56 student graduates who experienced a transfer problem, the median number of credits lost was six. Ten of the accounting graduates, however, lost more than 30 credits, pushing the mean number of lost credits for the accounting graduates to 16. The mean credit loss for psychology graduates remained the same as the median, at six credits

From the statistical sample, we also estimated that 20.7 percent<sup>2</sup> of students experienced some type of process problem when transferring credits. These problems did not always result in students losing transfer credits, but included issues such as:

- Transcripts included errors on transfer credits or it was not evident how the number of transferred credits was calculated.
- Developmental credits were included in the number of credits transferred on the transcript, and overstated the number of credits eligible for degree completion.
- Inconsistent methods were used to convert quarter credits to semester credits.
- Transcripts did not conform to the System requirements for flagging developmental or repeated courses.

#### **Policy Considerations:**

- Work to align two and four year programs to reduce the loss of credits. The 2+2 program in Accounting offered in partnership between Rochester Community & Technical College and Winona State University is an example of a successful alignment.
- Consider whether a System-wide policy is needed to establish consistent treatment of D grades for transfer eligibility.
- Consider whether a System-wide policy is needed on the age at which coursework loses its eligibility for transfer.
- Consider creating the role of “Credit Transfer Ombudsman” to provide students with an independent channel for advice on how to resolve credit transfer problems.
- Consider a policy on creating more uniformity on recording transfer credits on MnSCU transcripts. Practices varied widely among MnSCU colleges and universities and make it difficult for students to understand whether their prior coursework counts toward their intended degree.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the statistical sampling methodology, we are 95 percent confident that the incident rate would be between 16.2% and 25.2%.

## **Management Recommendations:**

- **Minnesota Transfer Curriculum:**
  - Colleges and universities need to ensure that staff understand the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum requirements.
  - Colleges and universities should advise students on the importance of completing courses and goal areas within the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.
  - The Office of the Chancellor Academic and Student Affairs and Public Affairs divisions should work with colleges and universities to communicate the value of completing the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum courses and goal areas to students.
  - The Academic and Student Affairs division should develop a common way for students to assess their progress toward completing the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.
  
- **DARS**
  - The Academic and Student Affairs division should develop a standardized degree audit template for colleges and universities to use for degree requirements.
  - Colleges and universities should list in-progress courses on degree audits.
  - Colleges and universities need to ensure that they are using DARS degree audits for verifying that program requirements have been met for graduation.
  
- The Academic and Student Affairs division should develop a standard conversion for quarter hour credit conversion.
  
- The Office of the Chancellor Public Affairs and Academic and Student Affairs divisions should work with colleges and universities to develop a uniform template for accessing transfer information on Web sites and to the extent possible create consistent content for informing students about transfer.