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TO: POLICY COMMITTEE

FROM: DAVID A. LONGANECKER *ch*
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON COMMON COURSE NUMBERING

DATE: JANUARY 11, 1988

BACKGROUND

The 1987 Legislature established a task force on common course numbering to study and report on the benefits to students, the cost, and the feasibility of implementing a common course numbering system in Minnesota. The task force was asked to submit its report to the Coordinating Board for review and comment by December 15, 1987, and to the legislature by February 1, 1988. The attached copy of the report was adopted by the task force December 15, 1987.

The task force consisted of system level administrators experienced in the transfer of credit, campus level administrators experienced in curriculum development, faculty, and students. The major issue identified by the task force is how to improve transfer of credit from one post-secondary institution to another. The task force also identified some factors that affect transfer, and procedures that could improve the transfer situation.

The report was discussed by the Higher Education Advisory Council January 7.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE TASK FORCE

The task force concluded that a system of common course numbering would not be in the best interest of Minnesota post-secondary students at this time, and would not improve the transfer situation for students as much as would expanded development and dissemination of transfer guides. A statewide common course numbering system would be costly, cumbersome, and confusing without the benefit of increased transfer opportunities, and would not be worth the cost from the standpoint of improving transfer of credit.

Other states have found that common course numbering systems are of limited benefit, primarily helping registrars and counselors expedite transfer. Students have not used the systems greatly, and are largely unaware of them. If a common course numbering system's greatest value is to communicate which courses are interchangeable

between institutions, then it is necessary first to develop equivalent courses. The key to improving transfer of credits is the identification and verification of equivalent courses between institutions.

The task force recommended that action be taken by the institutions and systems, as well as by the Coordinating Board and Minnesota Legislature.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The task force makes the following recommendations:

To Minnesota Post-Secondary Education Institutions:

1. Each institution receiving transfer students should establish procedures and implement a process for determining which transfer courses are accepted as comparable or equivalent to its own.

RATIONALE: Students need to know not only whether courses will transfer to another institution, but how those courses will be treated. Courses identified as comparable or equivalent to appropriate baccalaureate level courses will be accepted toward fulfilling baccalaureate major requirements. Other courses may be accepted for transfer as fulfilling elective requirements or not accepted at all. By knowing the status of each course and how it will satisfy their needs, students can make a more informed choice of the institution(s) they plan to attend. Institutions need to establish procedures and publish the results of their decisions.

2. All institutions should require current and accurate course syllabi for all courses offered and should make these syllabi available to students and personnel from other institutions upon request.

RATIONALE: Students need to know in advance the content of courses they may take. Institutions need to identify whether courses are liberal arts and sciences, vocational, professional, religious, or remedial, and whether they will satisfy portions of a four-year degree. A course syllabus would provide the goals and objectives so that students know how the course would fit into individual plans.

3. Institutions that have not developed transfer guides for Minnesota community colleges should do so.

RATIONALE: Community colleges provide more transfer students than any other system. Student choice would expand if additional baccalaureate institutions would encourage and expedite transfer by developing documents that show

students which courses will transfer and how they will apply toward major and graduation requirements. As Minnesota technical institutes convert from clock-hour based programs to credit hour-based courses, this situation will also apply to students in that system.

4. Each post-secondary institution in Minnesota should identify personnel as the transfer specialist(s) on that campus. A major responsibility of these personnel would be to facilitate transfer of credit between and among institutions. These personnel should meet as a group on a regular basis.

RATIONALE: The responsibility for facilitating transfer too often receives inadequate attention. Increased communication between institutions and between students and counselors is needed. Personnel specifically responsible for clarifying transfer issues are needed at every institution. These individuals could work with faculty to identify and maintain transfer guides, answer questions from students, and work with their counterparts at other institutions to insure the content and integrity of coursework completed by students.

To Systems:

1. Transfer guides should be developed between institutions in the same system with a high frequency of transfer for lower division liberal education courses, freshman/sophomore pre-major courses, and Associate in Applied Science and Associate in Science degree courses.

RATIONALE: Transfer guides can assure credit transfer. Institutions within each system should develop documents that inform students which courses will be accepted by other institutions within the system.

2. Faculty in the same discipline should take advantage of opportunities to meet and discuss the content of courses and their applicability toward major and graduation requirements.

RATIONALE: The only way course equivalency can be assured is if faculty across systems develop the criteria, goals and objectives. Faculty seldom have an opportunity to meet and discuss courses. Annual conferences and other professional meetings might be used to develop working relationships, determine course equivalency, and assure integrity of the process.

To the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board:

1. The Coordinating Board should publish the names of the transfer specialists throughout the state.

RATIONALE: A central clearinghouse could provide information to all post-secondary institutions regarding transfer. The Board's Transfer brochure could include the name and phone number of each institution's transfer specialist.

2. The Coordinating Board should annually collect information on the number of students who transfer into and out of Minnesota post-secondary institutions.

RATIONALE: The Board could annually collect, publish and distribute information regarding students who transfer. This information would clarify statewide trends in transfer activity and movement between specific institutions.

3. The Coordinating Board should continue the standing advisory committee on transfer established in 1985.

RATIONALE: The seven-person advisory committee includes representatives from the state's public and private post-secondary systems and a student member. It provides a court of last resort for students who are dissatisfied with their credit transfer treatment, and provides an opportunity for a discussion of transfer issues.

To the Minnesota Legislature:

The Minnesota Legislature can best promote ease of student transfer by encouraging and supporting the development and dissemination of transfer guides through appropriations to support release time for faculty and other personnel charged with developing and distributing these guides. The legislature should reaffirm its mandate to the public institutions and its encouragement to the private colleges to complete transfer guides no later than September 1, 1990 and appropriate special funding to help public and private institutions defray some of the personnel, computer and publication costs entailed in producing and maintaining these documents.

RATIONALE: Transfer tables can be developed and maintained at a relatively low cost in comparison to a statewide common course numbering system. Improving transfer through the development of transfer guides that identify comparable or equivalent courses, however, would require additional resources. Faculty and other personnel need to be reimbursed for the time required to develop and compare courses, the essential first step in the process of improving transfer. Personnel would need to be compensated for their time, travel, and communication expense. Institutions would need additional funds for transfer specialists, for documents that would be widely available to students, high school and post-secondary counselors, and for computer resources to maintain current information.

HECB COMMENT

The Coordinating Board could take one of two approaches to the issue of a statewide common course numbering system. One approach would insist that Minnesota post-secondary institutions develop and implement a statewide common course numbering system that would assure transfer of credit between institutions. The other would encourage institutions to continue their efforts to develop and publish guidelines for students that inform them which courses taken at one institution are accepted by other institutions for program and graduation requirements.

Experience indicates that the key to successful transfer is planning by students and relationships between institutions that assure acceptance of courses. These relationships may involve joint registration, transfer guides, or formal arrangements. Students often receive more credits through negotiation than might be possible with a more structured, stratified common course numbering system.

Moving toward a statewide common course system would not be cost effective nor a good use of limited resources. It would be difficult to justify the resources required to develop and maintain a statewide inventory of comparable courses. Rather, individual institutions and public systems should identify comparable courses within a given institution and system and determine whether those courses are equivalent to those offered by other institutions.

HECB STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

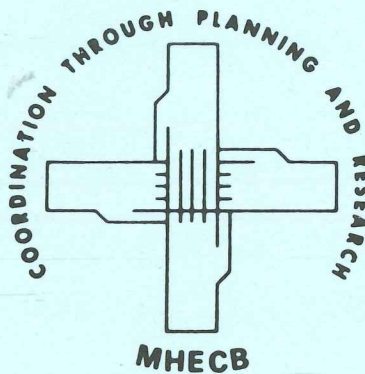
Based on the review of the report and the task force recommendations, I RECOMMEND THAT:

1. The Board commend the task force for the quality of the report and recommendations, and completing the study within the narrow time constraints provided by the legislative mandate and with available resources.
2. The Board recommend to the legislature the adoption of the report and implementation of its recommendations.
3. The Board and post-secondary education systems assess the cost implications of the task force recommendations when developing their 1989-91 budget requests.

RATIONALE: To advise the Governor and legislature appropriately, the Board, in developing its next biennial budget request, must examine these recommendations, and their associated costs, in the context of the full array of state post-secondary funding needs and resources.

DELL:dw

REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON COMMON COURSE NUMBERING



December 1987

MINNESOTA HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON COMMON COURSE NUMBERING

December 1987

PREFACE

The Task Force on Common Course Numbering was convened by the Higher Education Coordinating Board to recommend credit transfer methods that would improve student opportunities to complete undergraduate studies.

Throughout this report, the following definitions will be used:

Course syllabus provides a generic description of a specific course. It usually includes the catalog description (number of credits, classroom and laboratory hours/week), as well as goals and objectives, topical outline of the course, text(s) and laboratory manual(s) used, and prerequisites/corequisites. Methods of student evaluation and the latest revision date may be included if these two items are not included in a separate course handout.

Comparable courses are those courses which are similar and may be accepted by one college unit or institution in lieu of courses offered by that institution. These courses may or may not carry an equal number of credits, either within or between institutions.

Equivalent courses are those which are nearly identical to one another in goals, content, and objectives. These courses may or may not carry an equal number of credits, either within or between institutions.

Course transfer tables list courses offered at one institution and how they can be used at another institution. These documents are often referred to as transfer matrices, and may be part of a transfer guide.

Transfer guides or manuals are documents that provide general information regarding the transfer process, such as admission requirements, transfer credit policies, costs, availability of financial aid, and graduation requirements. Guides also may include course transfer tables and specific information on items such as grading policies.

Common course numbering convention is a method of distinguishing between remedial, lower division undergraduate, upper division undergraduate, and graduate level courses through the use of the first digit of the course number.

Common course numbering system is a method of assigning the same number to equivalent courses. Courses with the same number are interchangeable between institutions that offer those courses.

TASK FORCE ON COMMON COURSE NUMBERING

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In view of expressed student concerns, the Minnesota Legislature has passed several laws to improve transfer from one institution to another. Most recently the 1987 Legislature established a task force to study the benefits to students, the cost, and the feasibility of implementing a common course numbering system.¹ Specifically, the task force was instructed to "...study and make recommendations on the expected outcomes and benefits of expanded course equivalency, a common course numbering system for higher education, more accessible transfer information, and students' opportunities for completion of their undergraduate educations." (Appendix A)

The legislation specified a 25-member task force. Each of the public post-secondary systems and the Private College Council was to nominate one system level administrator experienced in transfer of credit issues, one campus level administrator experienced in curriculum development issues and two faculty members. One student representative from each post-secondary system was to be appointed by the Student Advisory Council.

The task force was charged with developing a report and recommendations to be submitted to the Higher Education Coordinating Board by December 15, 1987, and by February 1, 1988 to the higher education policy, appropriations, and finance divisions or committees of the legislature.

1. Laws of Minnesota for 1987, Chapter 401, Section 34.

BACKGROUND

The Higher Education Coordinating Board has studied the issue of student transfer several times during the past 18 years. The 1985 Legislature acted on four recommendations made by the Coordinating Board in 1984. The recommendations followed an extensive review of system transfer practices, policies, and problems. These four recommendations were:

1. The Community College System continue to (a) work toward a systemwide standard of distributed general education requirements for the Associate in Arts degree; and (b) work with baccalaureate degree granting public systems and private institutions to insure that the Associate in Arts degree will fulfill the entire general education requirement for the baccalaureate degree when the intent of the degree program is that the general education component be completed in the first two years of study.
2. The State Board of Vocational Technical Education work with public collegiate systems and private institutions to establish standards for accepting vocational study in meeting the requirements of associate and baccalaureate degree programs.
3. The development of course equivalency guides between institutions with a high frequency of transfer be encouraged.
4. The Coordinating Board, in cooperation with the post-secondary systems, study the feasibility of a common numbering convention for remedial, lower division, upper division, and graduate level coursework.²

As a result of the 1984 study, the Board established a Special Advisory Committee on Transfer of Credit. Membership included representatives from each of Minnesota's six post-secondary systems and one student. This committee was established to assist students who experienced difficulty with inter-system transfer of credit after they had exhausted existing appeals procedures. The

2. Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, Credit Transfer: A Review of Policies, Practices, and Problems (May 9, 1984).

committee was to provide an objective forum for students who believed their transfer was not treated properly or fairly. It was created to test whether such a committee could help resolve student transfer problems, and to allow the Board and the post-secondary systems to ascertain better the nature of transfer problems.

The committee served 18 months. In January 1987, the Board established a standing advisory committee to replace the original special committee. After a student has exhausted all existing grievance procedures provided by the institutions involved in the transfer, Coordinating Board staff are to be contacted and convene the committee. The committee will consider the situation and recommend a solution to the problem. However, it has no statutory authority to change an institution's decision. Neither the original committee nor the present committee has been asked to handle a case.

The 1985 legislation directed the state's four public governing boards to take actions that would improve the transferability of courses completed at Minnesota institutions.³ Private colleges and vocational schools were invited to join in these developments. The Coordinating Board reported the results of these activities to legislative committees in February 1987.⁴

The Board commended the public systems for establishing course equivalency guides between institutions that experience a high frequency of transfer students, and for agreeing to use a common course numbering convention that distinguishes among remedial, lower division, upper division, and graduate coursework. The State University System and Community College System were

3. Laws of Minnesota for 1985, First Special Session, Chapter 11, Section 79.

4. Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, A Review and Comment on Credit Transfer Activities by Minnesota Post-Secondary Institutions (Feb. 9, 1987).

commended for establishing an agreement whereby students who complete an Associate in Arts (A.A.) degree at any of Minnesota's community colleges satisfy the general education requirements of the state universities. The State Board of Vocational Technical Education was commended for its thoughtful, planned process regarding program to course conversion.

The Board encouraged further activities to improve student transfer. The University of Minnesota was asked to examine its policies regarding the satisfying of general education requirements by the Associate in Arts degree. The University of Minnesota, state universities, and community colleges were urged to examine their policies regarding credit for students who complete a program at technical institutes or private vocational schools. The Board reiterated that students who enroll in general education courses should receive equivalent coursework and course credit regardless of their degree objective.

The Coordinating Board published 60,000 copies of the third edition of its transfer brochure in fall 1987 and distributed them to 110 post-secondary institutions.⁵ This brochure describes the transfer process, and provides a contact for students at each of Minnesota's public post-secondary and private collegiate institutions.

Despite these activities, the Minnesota State Student Coalition insisted that more needed to be done to improve credit transfer. The Coalition's initiatives resulted in the 1987 legislation and formation of the task force.

5. Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, Transfer (1987).

WORK PLAN AND OVERVIEW

The Coordinating Board was charged with coordinating the task force and providing staff assistance. In June, the Board's executive director invited the Higher Education Advisory Council and the Student Advisory Council to nominate members. The task force met six times to discuss the issues involved in common course numbering, and to determine recommendations.

Chapter II addresses the issue of credit transfer in Minnesota and other states. Chapter III addresses the issues discussed by the task force. Chapter IV provides the conclusions and recommendations of the task force.

CHAPTER II. IMPROVING CREDIT TRANSFER

The task force was charged with studying the expected outcomes, benefits, and costs involved in expanded course equivalency, common course numbering, and providing more accessible transfer information. The task force examined the issue of credit transfer in Minnesota and other states.

CURRENT SITUATION IN MINNESOTA

There are two major types of transfer students. Some students plan to complete an associate degree at one institution as the first half of a baccalaureate degree program. For other students, completing courses that will count toward a baccalaureate degree is more important than completing the requirements for an associate degree. Both groups of students choose courses according to how they apply toward a baccalaureate degree.

Several developments have occurred during the past five years resulting in an improved transfer process. Leadership for these activities was provided primarily by personnel in the community colleges and state universities.

Most post-secondary institutions have developed course transfer tables for use by students, faculty, and counselors. These tables usually take the form of a one or two page sheet that lists the courses offered by one institution and accepted by another, often within a specific baccalaureate major. They have been developed by faculty or counselors so that transfer students will be able to plan their study for a baccalaureate degree.

All the community colleges have developed course transfer tables for students. Five of the state universities have extensive guides for students attending Minnesota community colleges. The University of Minnesota, Twin Cities Campus, has developed manuals that include information on graduation

requirements, transfer of credit policies, and course transfer tables between the 18 community colleges and the nine larger undergraduate admitting colleges on that campus. Similar manuals for the nine smaller admitting colleges are being developed.

A major development occurred in 1986 when the chancellors of the State University System and Community College System signed an agreement which states that community college students with an Associate in Arts degree have satisfied the general education requirements of the state universities. This action assures students that they will not have to worry whether general education courses will be examined individually when they transfer to a state university to work toward a baccalaureate degree. The University of Minnesota, Duluth, has an Associate in Arts degree waiver policy, but it includes some scrutiny of liberal education coursework.

The University of Minnesota, Twin Cities Campus, has developed joint admission agreements with Minnesota community colleges that guarantee admission to the university at a later date. Another agreement guarantees that University of Minnesota students can transfer and complete their Associate in Arts degree at a community college.

Minnesota's Technical Institute System has begun to convert all its one and two-year programs from a clock hour basis to a course basis. This process may require five years and special funding will be needed. The procedure will assure the content of similarly titled courses within its system will be comparable.

Several private colleges and universities have developed course transfer tables to assist students coming from other institutions, although many course transfer decisions are made individually.

Minnesota's public collegiate institutions have achieved a common course numbering convention that distinguishes remedial, lower division, upper division and graduate level coursework that assists students to identify courses that are likely to transfer. Minnesota systems and institutions are not, however, close to having a common course numbering system. Few states have developed and maintained this type of system.

COMMON COURSE NUMBERING IN OTHER STATES

Transfer concerns are common nationally throughout post-secondary education. The California Postsecondary Education Commission conducted a nationwide survey in 1984 regarding the activities, plans, and expectations regarding common course numbering systems to improve articulation between two and four-year institutions. Florida and Puerto Rico were the only two respondents with a common course numbering system in place in 1984, and only Florida's involved more than one system of post-secondary institutions. Officials in 21 states responded with an unqualified "no" to the question of any special efforts to articulate courses, while 24 described some alternative to common course numbering.

Four alternatives to statewide common course numbering were identified through the survey: 1) common course prefixes used by all institutions, 2) common course numbers used by all community colleges and other public two-year institutions, 3) course transfer tables or matrices, and 4) institution-to-institution or regional agreements.⁶

6. California Postsecondary Education Commission, Common Course Numbering Systems (December 10, 1984).

Three states have made extensive efforts to establish common course numbering systems. The 1973 Florida Legislature authorized implementation of a common course numbering system for its nine state universities and 28 community colleges; 125 vocational schools were added in 1982. The Statewide Course Numbering System (SCNS) was developed during 1974 and 1975 and became operational in 1976. Vocational school courses still are being added to the system, which now includes over 70,000 courses in 157 subject-matter areas. Less than ten percent of the courses are equivalent. A staff of six administers the SCNS from a central office in Tallahassee. Data are maintained in an on-line computer file, with information disseminated via courier mail, postal service, and telephone. The Fiscal Year 1988 budget allocated to the system is \$340,000.

Concern over the complexities facing transfer students led to legislative action in California in 1983. As a result, the California Postsecondary Education Commission developed the California Articulation Number (CAN) system. The CAN system is not a common numbering system, in that each campus retains its own numbering procedure, but it provides structure and consistency between institutions. CAN uses a cross-reference identification number for 108 semester and 53 quarter courses commonly taught on two and four-year campuses. CAN is based on faculty-approved articulation agreements. This system is administered through a central office with an annual budget of approximately \$200,000.

In Arizona, the Maricopa Community College District assumed the leadership in 1979 to establish the Arizona Higher Education Course Equivalency Guide to facilitate transfer of credit among Arizona's public post-secondary institutions. Six common descriptors are used to obtain a more exact equivalency of courses across the seven community colleges in the district, i.e., a three letter prefix indicating the discipline, a three digit number

indicating the level of the course, a title that is appropriate to the course content, the number of credits, a course description, and prerequisites/corequisites for the course. The process for maintenance of the system involves local campus instructional councils and administrators and a district curriculum committee.

CHAPTER III. ISSUES ADDRESSED

The task force identified and addressed general issues and specific items related to the legislative charge:

- How to expedite the movement of students from one institution to another to achieve a baccalaureate degree.
 - o Determining which courses are comparable between institutions.
 - o Using transfer guides and determining their value, limits, and availability.
 - o Communicating information between students, faculty and counselors.
 - o Encouraging students to develop a planning process. Providing transfer guides and other materials that illustrate opportunities for students.
- How to assure high quality education through Minnesota post-secondary institutions while achieving the most efficient use of public resources.
- How to protect the academic freedom of faculty responsible for developing and delivering high quality education.
 - o Interaction of faculty in determining course content and graduation requirements.

EXPANDED COURSE EQUIVALENCY

Most of the Minnesota state universities, the University of Minnesota, Duluth, and some private colleges have provided Minnesota community colleges with course transfer guides and/or tables which show how each course from the community college transfers and, where appropriate, the comparable or equivalent course at the baccalaureate degree granting institution. Some of these guides give specific additional recommendations for preparation for specific majors. Guides were first developed between institutions with a high frequency of transfer activity. Some institutions have expanded this activity to include all Minnesota community colleges.

The University of Minnesota, Twin Cities Campus, has developed transfer of credit manuals for the nine larger undergraduate admitting colleges. These manuals include course transfer tables, transfer of credit policies, and degree requirements. Some of the colleges have indicated course equivalence or comparability for required lower division pre-major courses. Within the next year, the University plans to complete similar manuals for its nine smaller undergraduate admitting units.

Minnesota's private four-year colleges have been less involved in developing transfer guides, but some have provided information for nearby community colleges. There is expected to be more involvement in providing transfer information in the future as more students begin their post-secondary experience at other institutions before transferring to the private institutions.

Additional transfer activity by technical institute students is expected as that system converts from clock hour-based programs to an arrangement involving approximately 8,000 courses in 200 programs. Interest by technical institute students has increased also because of recent agreements with collegiate institutions that allow technical institute students to pursue Associate in Applied Science degrees in some fields of study. As the technical institutes convert to a course system, there will be increased interest in examining the comparability of their courses and those offered by colleges and universities.

Activities regarding course transfer guides will continue. Although guides between Minnesota community colleges and most public baccalaureate institutions are fairly complete, there are several areas where additional efforts appear warranted.

The public institutions which have not developed transfer guides for all Minnesota community colleges should be encouraged to do so. The University of Minnesota should be encouraged to develop and provide more course equivalency (or comparability) information for lower division coursework so better pre-major advising can be accomplished.

There is need for course transfer guides for institutions within the same system. This would, for example, permit community college students to determine which courses were comparable and how they would be used at another community college. The same would hold true for transfer from one state university to another. Transfer guides between the state universities and University of Minnesota would be appropriate, given their efforts to increase access and delineate missions. Private baccalaureate degree granting institutions should provide transfer information for community colleges. These activities also should benefit four-year institutions by increasing the number of transfer students. When the Technical Institute System conversion is complete, comparability/equivalency and transfer information should be developed and communicated to help students know which courses are accepted by other post-secondary institutions.

STUDENT INFORMATION NEEDS FOR CREDIT TRANSFER AND GRADUATION

Students are interested in accomplishing their educational objectives in the most efficient and economical manner. They want to spend the least time possible in completing their coursework without repeating comparable or equivalent courses. Legislators and taxpayers are interested in providing educational opportunities to students in the most cost effective manner, without the costs associated with unnecessary repetition of coursework.

The key to achieving these goals is careful planning by students. Students with clearly defined objectives and a plan for achieving these objectives generally are able to move through the educational system with little loss of time or effort.

Educators have a major responsibility in helping students move through the system. Teachers and counselors in the state's K-12 system have a responsibility to prepare students for their post-secondary experience and to inform them of the requirements of post-secondary institutions for entrance and completion of specific programs of interest.

Post-secondary institution personnel have a responsibility to communicate the requirements of the institution and specific program area to secondary school personnel, to students who enroll in their institution, and to other post-secondary institutions. Institutions can use several methods to assure that accurate information is transmitted. All catalogs, bulletins and other official publications need to clearly state what students must do to complete program and institution requirements.

Students planning for transfer need the following types of information regarding the receiving institution to make educational decisions: 1) a description of the curriculum and the course sequence for the baccalaureate major of interest; 2) specific information on whether courses transfer, partially or fully satisfy general education, major, or elective requirements, and are accepted as comparable or equivalent to the institution's course offerings; and 3) information on additional graduation requirements such as residency and upper division coursework.

Students also need to be fully aware that some courses offered by an institution are not intended for transfer. Many post-secondary courses and

programs are intended to prepare students for specific vocations or careers, or for one's self-fulfillment or satisfaction.

Institutions' transfer tables or guides are usually available through student service offices. Students may be able to use master lists on a limited basis, but they usually obtain information regarding one particular major in the form of a list of courses and how they are treated by the receiving institution. The use of this type of information might be enhanced if students and potential students could easily access a data base containing the information through a computer or other mode of interaction.

COMMON COURSE NUMBERING

A common course numbering system implies that courses with identical numbers and titles are interchangeable between institutions. Students who complete courses at one institution are assured of being granted credit at the next institution for courses with common numbers. However, not all courses are equivalent to those offered by another institution. The system used in Florida, for example, indicates that of over 70,000 courses available through the state's institutions, less than ten percent are equivalent. Of the thousands of courses offered by California post-secondary institutions, only 108 semester credit courses and 53 quarter credit courses have been determined to be equivalent and are included in the California Articulation Number system.

Considerations for Development of a System

Common course numbering systems are complex and costly to develop and maintain. Developing a common course numbering system would require a determination of which courses are equivalent. This would involve five procedures. First, each institution would need to inventory the courses available to students. Second, syllabi would be reviewed and perhaps revised by the faculty responsible for teaching the course. Third, all apparently similar courses would be reviewed by an inter-systems statewide faculty committee for each discipline to determine which courses were equivalent, and thereby interchangeable. Fourth, an appeals process would have to be devised to provide further review for faculty who disagree with a decision. Fifth, one central statewide data base would have to be developed and maintained.

Multiple courses within a given discipline present a problem for common course numbering. For example, there is not one single freshman chemistry course that all students complete to satisfy their graduation requirement. One introductory chemistry course may have been developed to meet the needs of pre-nursing students while another may have been developed for pre-medicine students. Two or more courses may be acceptable toward degree requirements based on the baccalaureate program pursued.

Common course numbering efforts in Florida, California, and Arizona have concentrated on lower division, liberal arts, core curriculum courses. Vocational courses, upper division, and graduate level courses have either not been addressed or rejected when trying to match course content.

Costs to Implement a Statewide Common Course Numbering System

Implementation of a common course numbering system in Minnesota would be costly. It would be necessary to involve faculty from all systems over an

extended period. Task force members estimated some of the costs involved with various aspects of developing and implementing a common course numbering system.

Personnel from the University of Minnesota estimated the costs that would be involved in determining course equivalencies for other Minnesota collegiate institutions and the University of Minnesota. Based on the approximately 40,000 courses available through 18 community colleges, six state universities (excluding Metropolitan State), and 18 private colleges, the University estimates it would cost \$2,800,000 to identify equivalent courses between these 42 institutions and each undergraduate degree granting program on the five campuses of the University of Minnesota. Primary costs would be for faculty release time. This would not include the cost of placing this information on a computer, the costs associated with the proposed 8,000 courses offered by the technical institutes, or the cost of developing course equivalencies among the individual colleges of the University of Minnesota.

Community college personnel estimated the cost of various changes for that system. First, to renumber and reprogram for the computer all the courses offered by the 18 community colleges would cost the Community College System approximately \$24,000. This would convert the present numbering system used by the 18 community colleges to one similar to that used by the University of Minnesota. Second, to include the historical course numbers in the data base would cost an additional \$13,000. Third, to develop and place on a computer data base a system with common course numbers for all 18 institutions would cost an estimated \$140,000 to \$190,000. The costs incurred for assigning numbers would be relatively minor compared to the cost for convening faculty curriculum committees and other personnel responsible for determining which courses are equivalent and for updating this information.

It would require approximately one full-time person one year to renumber the courses offered by Metropolitan State University, not including costs incurred for faculty efforts to examine course curriculum. No other cost estimates were made regarding the State University System.

Technical Institute System personnel have estimated that it will require special funding to convert all the programs offered through that system's 34 campuses to approximately 8,000 courses. The major expense will be for the faculty time needed to develop courses that will be transferable within the system. This project is expected to be completed within five years, provided the resources can be obtained.

An estimate of the expense to develop a statewide common course numbering system would involve an estimate of faculty time required to accomplish the task. In addition, a central office staff would need to coordinate the initial effort and to maintain the system. The statewide effort in Florida took three years to develop. That state's central office now includes four professionals and two support staff. The annual budget for central office personnel is \$260,000, with another \$80,000 budgeted to maintain the computer data base. In addition to these direct costs, there are faculty committees for each of 157 subject matter areas. Committee members meet annually for two to three days to discuss course revisions, deletions, and additions. Unfortunately, less than ten percent of over 70,000 courses have been identified as equivalent.

The California Articulation Number (CAN) system is not a common numbering system. Use of a CAN denotes faculty-approved articulation, that the criteria to participate have been met, and there is campus agreement to accept and use similarly-numbered CAN courses. This means that the burden of costs for developing the system lies with faculty on the campuses of the participating institutions. The central office staff responsible for coordination has an

annual budget of \$200,000 for two professional and two clerical staff. This does not include computer costs. The California system is not mandatory and includes 69 of the state's 107 community colleges and 15 of its 27 public four-year institutions. As of August 1987, participating institutions had submitted 1,647 courses for consideration as part of the system. Only 108 semester and 53 quarter credit hour courses have been identified as equivalent.

CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major issue identified by the task force is how to improve transfer of credit from one post-secondary institution to another. The task force identified some factors that affect transfer and procedures that would improve the transfer situation.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT TRANSFER

Transfer of credits from one institution to another may be impeded by external and internal factors. A major outside factor may be an accrediting body. National accrediting bodies often dictate the curriculum for a specific program, specify the sequence and level in which courses are to be taken, and limit the courses that can be accepted in transfer from another institution.

Internal factors that limit transfer often are based on the planning and activities of faculty. Course requirements, sequence, and credit load at baccalaureate degree granting institutions are developed over time by faculty in a department or college within an institution based on the ideal circumstances of students who begin and complete their post-secondary experience at one institution. Requirements for a given major will, therefore, vary from institution to institution. Not all lower division courses satisfy requirements of other colleges and universities. Accommodating students from outside the original environment may be difficult.

Not all courses fulfill specific baccalaureate degree requirements. Lower division technical courses designed for non-baccalaureate career/occupational programs have specific goals and objectives. They are not primarily designed for transfer, and may not fulfill specific course requirements for a

baccalaureate degree program. A second situation involves lower division courses that fulfill the requirements for some majors but not others. Students who change their educational objective may find that courses no longer fit into their chosen baccalaureate curriculum or do not have equivalent courses in the upper division. This situation is more common with fine arts or specific professional courses than with general education courses.

Students have the primary responsibility for planning their futures. Planning is critical to successful transfer of credit, and failure to plan ahead often provides a major impediment. This includes choosing a major program of study, examining all appropriate documents from the institution(s) that may be attended, seeking advice from appropriate sources, and following procedures. Planning should begin in secondary school. When this planning does not occur, or a student changes educational objectives, credit transfer may be difficult.

PROCEDURES TO IMPROVE TRANSFER

Post-secondary institution personnel have a responsibility to assist students in their planning and to allow movement from one institution to another with the least confusion and credit loss possible. This occurs at three levels -- faculty, institution, and system.

Faculty

Faculty are responsible for developing the curriculum and determining the graduation requirements for each major program of study. The faculty of each institution must assume the responsibility for determining equivalency for the courses accepted for transfer. They actively participate in deciding which

courses will be accepted in transfer toward a degree major through an examination of course content. It is appropriate that faculty from different institutions discuss course content in a given subject area in order to expand transfer opportunities.

Institution

Providing information to students is central to improving transfer of credit. Individual institutions should assist and facilitate student transfer. They should inform students about transfer guides and other available transfer information. Course transfer tables should be available to students, counselors, admission officers, transfer specialists, and registrars. Institutions should publish course syllabi and have them available to students before the first class session.

System

In addition to action taken by individual institutions, the following action within systems and across systems would expedite transfer. First, where educationally sound, institutions within systems should develop common rules governing graduation requirements. Second, written documents should be used to solidify agreements and arrangements that may have been understood to be operating in order to lessen the chances of false perceptions developing. Third, joint admission and concurrent registration agreements can assist a student's movement toward the desired educational objective. Joint admission agreements assure equal consideration of transfer students and students who started at that institution.

The issue of credit and course acceptance has been examined more thoroughly regarding transfer from two-year to four-year institutions than for transfer

from one two-year institution to another two-year institution, or between two four-year institutions. Additional attention needs to be paid to these situations.

CONCLUSIONS

The task force reached the following conclusions:

1. Minnesota should not create a common course numbering system at this time for its systems of higher education because, while having some benefits, it would not achieve a measurably better result for students wishing to transfer than would expanded development and dissemination of transfer guides.
2. A statewide common course numbering system would likely prove costly, cumbersome, and confusing without the benefit of increased transfer opportunities, and would not be worth the cost from the standpoint of improving transfer of credit. The key to improving transfer of credits is the identification and verification of comparable courses between institutions.
3. Other states have found that common course numbering systems are of limited benefit, primarily helping registrars and counselors expedite transfer. Students have not used the systems greatly, and are largely unaware of them.
4. If a common course numbering system's greatest value would be in communicating which courses are interchangeable between institutions, it would be necessary to develop equivalent courses before a numbering system would be valid, and continuous upgrading would be required.
5. Legislative support and encouragement of efforts that will improve credit transfer, such as identifying equivalent courses, are imperative. Progress is being made; accelerating the process will require funds, primarily for faculty and other personnel release time needed to identify and verify comparable/equivalent courses, and to continue to develop course equivalency guides.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE

To Minnesota Post-Secondary Education Institutions:

1. Each institution receiving transfer students should establish procedures and implement a process for determining which transfer courses are accepted as comparable or equivalent to its own.

Rationale: Students need to know not only whether courses will transfer to another institution, but how those courses will be treated. Courses identified as comparable or equivalent to appropriate baccalaureate level courses will be accepted toward fulfilling baccalaureate major requirements. Other courses may be accepted for transfer as fulfilling elective requirements or not accepted at all. By knowing the status of each course and how it will satisfy their needs, students can make a more informed choice of the institution(s) they plan to attend. Institutions need to establish procedures and publish the results of their decisions.

2. All institutions should require current and accurate course syllabi for all courses offered and should make these syllabi available to students and personnel from other institutions upon request.

Rationale: Students need to know in advance the content of courses they may take. Institutions need to identify whether courses are liberal arts and sciences, vocational, professional, religious, or remedial, and whether they will satisfy portions of a four-year degree. A course syllabus would provide the goals and objectives so that students know how the course would fit into individual plans.

3. Institutions that have not developed transfer guides for Minnesota community colleges should do so.

Rationale: Community colleges provide more transfer students than any other system. Student choice would expand if additional baccalaureate institutions would encourage and expedite transfer by developing documents that show students which courses will transfer and how they will apply toward major and graduation requirements. As Minnesota technical institutes convert from clock-hour based programs to credit hour-based courses, this situation will also apply to students in that system.

4. Each post-secondary institution in Minnesota should identify personnel as the transfer specialist(s) on that campus. A major responsibility of these personnel would be to facilitate transfer of credit between and among institutions. These personnel should meet as a group on a regular basis.

Rationale: The responsibility for facilitating transfer too often receives inadequate attention. Increased communication between institutions and between students and counselors is needed. Personnel specifically responsible for clarifying transfer issues are needed at every institution. These individuals could work with faculty to identify and maintain transfer guides, answer questions from students, and work with their counterparts at other institutions to insure the content and integrity of coursework completed by students.

To Systems:

1. Transfer guides should be developed between institutions in the same system with a high frequency of transfer for lower division liberal

education courses, freshman/sophomore pre-major courses, and Associate in Applied Science and Associate in Science degree courses.

Rationale: Transfer guides can assure credit transfer. Institutions within each system should develop documents that inform students which courses will be accepted by other institutions within the system.

2. Faculty in the same discipline should take advantage of opportunities to meet and discuss the content of courses and their applicability toward major and graduation requirements.

Rationale: The only way course equivalency can be assured is if faculty across systems develop the criteria, goals and objectives. Faculty seldom have an opportunity to meet and discuss courses. Annual conferences and other professional meetings might be used to develop working relationships, determine course equivalency, and assure integrity of the process.

To the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board:

1. The Coordinating Board should publish the names of the transfer specialists throughout the state.

Rationale: A central clearinghouse could provide information to all post-secondary institutions regarding transfer. The Board's Transfer brochure could include the name and phone number of each institution's transfer specialist.

2. The Coordinating Board should annually collect information on the number of students who transfer into and out of Minnesota post-secondary institutions.

Rationale: The Board could annually collect, publish and distribute information regarding students who transfer. This information would clarify statewide trends in transfer activity and movement between specific institutions.

3. The Coordinating Board should continue the standing advisory committee on transfer established in 1985.

Rationale: The seven-person advisory committee includes representatives from the state's public and private post-secondary systems and a student member. It provides a court of last resort for students who are dissatisfied with their credit transfer treatment, and provides an opportunity for a discussion of transfer issues.

To the Minnesota Legislature:

The Minnesota Legislature can best promote ease of student transfer by encouraging and supporting the development and dissemination of transfer guides through appropriations to support release time for faculty and other personnel charged with developing and distributing these guides. The legislature should reaffirm its mandate to the public institutions and its encouragement to the private colleges to complete transfer guides no later than September 1, 1990 and

appropriate special funding to help public and private institutions defray some of the personnel, computer and publication costs entailed in producing and maintaining these documents.

Rationale: Transfer tables can be developed and maintained at a relatively low cost in comparison to a statewide common course numbering system. Improving transfer through the development of transfer guides that identify comparable or equivalent courses, however, would require additional resources. Faculty and other personnel need to be reimbursed for the time required to develop and compare courses, the essential first step in the process of improving transfer. Personnel would need to be compensated for their time, travel, and communication expense. Institutions would need additional funds for transfer specialists, for documents that would be widely available to students, high school and post-secondary counselors, and for computer resources to maintain current information.

APPENDIX A. LEGISLATIVE MANDATE ESTABLISHING THE TASK FORCE

Subdivision 1. {ESTABLISHED} A task force on common course numbering in post-secondary education is established. The purpose of the task force is to study and report on the benefits to students, the cost, and the feasibility of implementing a common course numbering system.

Subd. 2. {MEMBERSHIP} The task force consists of 25 members as follows: one system level administrator experienced in transfer of credit issues, one campus level administrator experienced in curriculum development issues, two faculty members appointed by each of the public post-secondary systems and the private college council, and one student representative from each post-secondary system appointed by the student advisory council. Task force members shall serve without compensation, except that the post-secondary systems must provide for the expenses incurred by their student representatives.

Subd. 3. {DUTIES} The task force shall study and make recommendations on the expected outcomes and benefits of expanded course equivalency, a common course numbering system for higher education, more accessible transfer information, and students' opportunities for completion of their undergraduate educations. The legislature expects that the AVTIs will be included in these recommendations when they convert to a course credit hour basis.

Subd. 4. {HECB ROLE} The task force study and report must be coordinated by the Higher Education Coordinating Board. The Board shall provide necessary staff assistance and information to the task force.

Subd. 5. {REPORT} By December 15, 1987, the task force shall submit its report to the Higher Education Coordinating Board for review and comment. By February 1, 1988, the task force shall submit its report and recommendations to the higher education policy, appropriations, and finance divisions or committees of the legislature. The task force terminates on June 30, 1988.

MINNESOTA HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

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OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: POLICY COMMITTEE

FROM: DAVID A. LONGANECKER *DL*
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON COMMON COURSE NUMBERING

DATE: JANUARY 11, 1988

BACKGROUND

The 1987 Legislature established a task force on common course numbering to study and report on the benefits to students, the cost, and the feasibility of implementing a common course numbering system in Minnesota. The task force was asked to submit its report to the Coordinating Board for review and comment by December 15, 1987, and to the legislature by February 1, 1988. The attached copy of the report was adopted by the task force December 15, 1987.

The task force consisted of system level administrators experienced in the transfer of credit, campus level administrators experienced in curriculum development, faculty, and students. The major issue identified by the task force is how to improve transfer of credit from one post-secondary institution to another. The task force also identified some factors that affect transfer, and procedures that could improve the transfer situation.

The report was discussed by the Higher Education Advisory Council January 7.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE TASK FORCE

The task force concluded that a system of common course numbering would not be in the best interest of Minnesota post-secondary students at this time, and would not improve the transfer situation for students as much as would expanded development and dissemination of transfer guides. A statewide common course numbering system would be costly, cumbersome, and confusing without the benefit of increased transfer opportunities, and would not be worth the cost from the standpoint of improving transfer of credit.

Other states have found that common course numbering systems are of limited benefit, primarily helping registrars and counselors expedite transfer. Students have not used the systems greatly, and are largely unaware of them. If a common course numbering system's greatest value is to communicate which courses are interchangeable

Pursuant to 1987 Laws, ch 401

between institutions, then it is necessary first to develop equivalent courses. The key to improving transfer of credits is the identification and verification of equivalent courses between institutions.

The task force recommended that action be taken by the institutions and systems, as well as by the Coordinating Board and Minnesota Legislature.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The task force makes the following recommendations:

To Minnesota Post-Secondary Education Institutions:

1. Each institution receiving transfer students should establish procedures and implement a process for determining which transfer courses are accepted as comparable or equivalent to its own.

RATIONALE: Students need to know not only whether courses will transfer to another institution, but how those courses will be treated. Courses identified as comparable or equivalent to appropriate baccalaureate level courses will be accepted toward fulfilling baccalaureate major requirements. Other courses may be accepted for transfer as fulfilling elective requirements or not accepted at all. By knowing the status of each course and how it will satisfy their needs, students can make a more informed choice of the institution(s) they plan to attend. Institutions need to establish procedures and publish the results of their decisions.

2. All institutions should require current and accurate course syllabi for all courses offered and should make these syllabi available to students and personnel from other institutions upon request.

RATIONALE: Students need to know in advance the content of courses they may take. Institutions need to identify whether courses are liberal arts and sciences, vocational, professional, religious, or remedial, and whether they will satisfy portions of a four-year degree. A course syllabus would provide the goals and objectives so that students know how the course would fit into individual plans.

3. Institutions that have not developed transfer guides for Minnesota community colleges should do so.

RATIONALE: Community colleges provide more transfer students than any other system. Student choice would expand if additional baccalaureate institutions would encourage and expedite transfer by developing documents that show

students which courses will transfer and how they will apply toward major and graduation requirements. As Minnesota technical institutes convert from clock-hour based programs to credit hour-based courses, this situation will also apply to students in that system.

4. Each post-secondary institution in Minnesota should identify personnel as the transfer specialist(s) on that campus. A major responsibility of these personnel would be to facilitate transfer of credit between and among institutions. These personnel should meet as a group on a regular basis.

RATIONALE: The responsibility for facilitating transfer too often receives inadequate attention. Increased communication between institutions and between students and counselors is needed. Personnel specifically responsible for clarifying transfer issues are needed at every institution. These individuals could work with faculty to identify and maintain transfer guides, answer questions from students, and work with their counterparts at other institutions to insure the content and integrity of coursework completed by students.

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1. Transfer guides should be developed between institutions in the same system with a high frequency of transfer for lower division liberal education courses, freshman/sophomore pre-major courses, and Associate in Applied Science and Associate in Science degree courses.

RATIONALE: Transfer guides can assure credit transfer. Institutions within each system should develop documents that inform students which courses will be accepted by other institutions within the system.

2. Faculty in the same discipline should take advantage of opportunities to meet and discuss the content of courses and their applicability toward major and graduation requirements.

RATIONALE: The only way course equivalency can be assured is if faculty across systems develop the criteria, goals and objectives. Faculty seldom have an opportunity to meet and discuss courses. Annual conferences and other professional meetings might be used to develop working relationships, determine course equivalency, and assure integrity of the process.

To the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board:

1. The Coordinating Board should publish the names of the transfer specialists throughout the state.

RATIONALE: A central clearinghouse could provide information to all post-secondary institutions regarding transfer. The Board's Transfer brochure could include the name and phone number of each institution's transfer specialist.

2. The Coordinating Board should annually collect information on the number of students who transfer into and out of Minnesota post-secondary institutions.

RATIONALE: The Board could annually collect, publish and distribute information regarding students who transfer. This information would clarify statewide trends in transfer activity and movement between specific institutions.

3. The Coordinating Board should continue the standing advisory committee on transfer established in 1985.

RATIONALE: The seven-person advisory committee includes representatives from the state's public and private post-secondary systems and a student member. It provides a court of last resort for students who are dissatisfied with their credit transfer treatment, and provides an opportunity for a discussion of transfer issues.

To the Minnesota Legislature:

The Minnesota Legislature can best promote ease of student transfer by encouraging and supporting the development and dissemination of transfer guides through appropriations to support release time for faculty and other personnel charged with developing and distributing these guides. The legislature should reaffirm its mandate to the public institutions and its encouragement to the private colleges to complete transfer guides no later than September 1, 1990 and appropriate special funding to help public and private institutions defray some of the personnel, computer and publication costs entailed in producing and maintaining these documents.

RATIONALE: Transfer tables can be developed and maintained at a relatively low cost in comparison to a statewide common course numbering system. Improving transfer through the development of transfer guides that identify comparable or equivalent courses, however, would require additional resources. Faculty and other personnel need to be reimbursed for the time required to develop and compare courses, the essential first step in the process of improving transfer. Personnel would need to be compensated for their time, travel, and communication expense. Institutions would need additional funds for transfer specialists, for documents that would be widely available to students, high school and post-secondary counselors, and for computer resources to maintain current information.

HECB COMMENT

The Coordinating Board could take one of two approaches to the issue of a statewide common course numbering system. One approach would insist that Minnesota post-secondary institutions develop and implement a statewide common course numbering system that would assure transfer of credit between institutions. The other would encourage institutions to continue their efforts to develop and publish guidelines for students that inform them which courses taken at one institution are accepted by other institutions for program and graduation requirements.

Experience indicates that the key to successful transfer is planning by students and relationships between institutions that assure acceptance of courses. These relationships may involve joint registration, transfer guides, or formal arrangements. Students often receive more credits through negotiation than might be possible with a more structured, stratified common course numbering system.

Moving toward a statewide common course system would not be cost effective nor a good use of limited resources. It would be difficult to justify the resources required to develop and maintain a statewide inventory of comparable courses. Rather, individual institutions and public systems should identify comparable courses within a given institution and system and determine whether those courses are equivalent to those offered by other institutions.

HECB STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the review of the report and the task force recommendations, I RECOMMEND THAT:

1. The Board commend the task force for the quality of the report and recommendations, and completing the study within the narrow time constraints provided by the legislative mandate and with available resources.
2. The Board recommend to the legislature the adoption of the report and implementation of its recommendations.
3. The Board and post-secondary education systems assess the cost implications of the task force recommendations when developing their 1989-91 budget requests.

RATIONALE: To advise the Governor and legislature appropriately, the Board, in developing its next biennial budget request, must examine these recommendations, and their associated costs, in the context of the full array of state post-secondary funding needs and resources.

DELL:dw

**Minnesota Higher Education
Coordinating Board**

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