



CWID DATA NOTE

Increasing State Associate's Degree Attainment: The Potential of Reverse Transfer

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Introduction

Credit When It's Due (CWID) is a multi-state initiative that supports the development and implementation of reverse transfer programs and policies that confer associate's degrees to transfer students when they complete the degree requirements while en route to the baccalaureate degree. As the CWID initiative name suggests, reverse transfer policies facilitate the conferral of associate's degrees to transfer students *who have earned* the credits needed for the associate's degree, even after they transferred to a 4-year college or university. Thus, students who receive reverse transfer associate's degrees meet associate's degree requirements similar to students who complete the associate's degree prior to transfer.

The primary beneficiaries of reverse transfer policies are students who receive the associate's degree, but the CWID initiative may also contribute to state college completion efforts. The 12 initial CWID state grantees are in the third and final year of the CWID grant, and this Data Note summarizes associate's degree attainment outcomes during the first two years of the grant. More specifically, it reports the aggregate number of degrees conferred via reverse transfer and estimates the potential of reverse transfer to increase state degree attainment. Because CWID is closely aligned with state college completion efforts (Taylor, Bishop, Makela, Bragg, & Ruud, 2013), it is useful to understand the extent to which CWID may contribute to degree attainment numbers. This analysis is timely as more states pursue reverse transfer, but it is important to note that the influence of CWID may go far beyond the simple counting of associate's degrees. For example, we have written elsewhere (see Taylor & Bragg, 2015) about how CWID policies and practices are influencing broader transfer and articulation policies, and these impacts should be measured and better understood.

The impetus for this Data Note is to update the field on the progress of associate's degree conferral via reverse transfer as part of the CWID initiative. We previously reported that the number of associate's degrees conferred varies considerably by state, and we described factors that influence these numbers (Taylor & Bragg, 2015). The final CWID report, which will be released in summer 2016, will summarize and synthesize the CWID initiative and further explain the factors that relate to state outcomes. For now, we address the following research questions in this Data Note: (1) How many students earned associate's degrees via reverse transfer during the 2013-14 and 2014-15 academic years? And (2) What is the potential of reverse transfer policies to increase state associate's degree attainment?

Methods

Data on the number of students awarded an associate's degree via reverse transfer were collected via the CWID Impact Study, and OCCRL is still actively collecting these data in most CWID states. OCCRL collected student-level as well as aggregate data on the number of associate's degrees conferred in March 2014 and again in June 2015. Results based on the aggregate data are used in this Data Note to approximate the number of degrees conferred during the first year (AY2013-14) and second year (AY2014-15) of CWID implementation, respectively.

To answer the second research question, state data on associate's degree completions were obtained from IPEDS for the three most recent years in which data were available, between AY2010-11 and AY2012-13. We calculated the average number of associate's degrees conferred annually based on a three-year time period. This average allowed us to account for variation in the number of degrees conferred by year. Two simple ratios were then calculated for each state where the numerator was the number of associate's degrees conferred via reverse transfer in AY2013-14 and AY2014-15, and the denominator was the three-year average of the number of associate's degrees conferred annually (using AY2010-11 through AY2012-13). The ratios represent the percentage increase in state's annual associate's degree attainment as a result of reverse transfer.

Limitations

There are two important caveats to this Data Note. First, as we have reported elsewhere (see Taylor & Bragg, 2015), there is large variation in implementation of reverse transfer, and some states have scaled reverse transfer more than others. Because several states have not fully scaled reverse transfer, the results in this analysis underestimate the potential increase in state associate's degree attainment due to reverse transfer policies. Second, the number of degrees conferred via reverse transfer continues to grow and this Data Note only reports degrees conferred during the first two years of the CWID grant period (AY2013-AY2015).

Results

Figure 1 reports results to the first research question for the initial 12 CWID states. During AY2013-14 and AY2014-15, the total number of associate's degrees conferred via reverse transfer in the initial 12 CWID states was 7,352. Figure 1 shows that the number of degrees conferred varied considerably during both years of implementation. The majority of associate's degrees conferred were concentrated in Hawaii, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Ohio. Collectively, these six states conferred approximately 85% of the reverse transfer

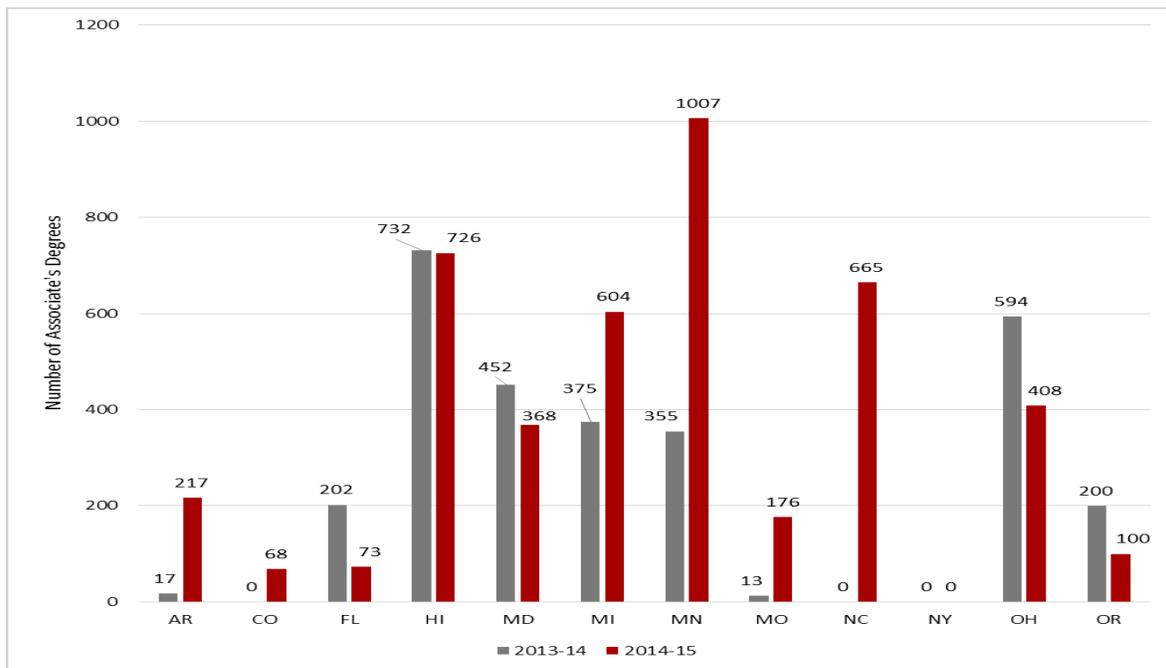


Figure 1: Number of Reverse Transfer Associate's Degrees Conferred in AY 2013-14 and AY 2014-15

associate's degrees. The differences in degrees conferred during the first two years of the CWID grant is explained by many factors, including when implementation began, the number of institutions implementing within the state, program eligibility requirements, and technology used during implementation, among others. Implementation is described elsewhere (see, for example, Taylor & Bragg, 2015), and additional analysis is forthcoming.

Results to the second research question are displayed in Table 1, which includes the average number of associate's degrees awarded annually, the number of associate's degrees awarded via reverse transfer during the first two years of the CWID grant, and the potential increase in state associate's degree attainment due to reverse transfer. The fourth and fifth columns in Table 1 show the percentage increase in associate's degree attainment based on reverse transfer implementation during the first two years of the CWID grant. A few states did not confer degrees during the first year or conferred very few degrees, but several states' reverse transfer efforts resulted in a slight increase in associate's degree attainment. The largest increase was in Hawaii, where new degrees conferred via reverse transfer represent an 18% increase in the average number of associate's degrees conferred annually. The second largest increase was in Minnesota, and the results suggest about a 5% increase the average number of associate's degrees conferred annually. In five other states—Arkansas, Maryland, North Carolina, and Ohio—the results show that new degrees conferred via reverse transfer have contributed about a 1%-3% increase in the average number of associate's degree conferred annually.

Discussion and Implications

This initial analysis informs the ongoing policy and practice dialogue related to reverse transfer. We urge policymakers and educational leaders to elicit lessons from all states involved in CWID but especially states where policy and practice have scaled to a more mature level. For example, results from Hawaii are instructive because Hawaii has scaled reverse transfer policies and processes along several dimensions (Taylor &

Bragg, 2015). Hawaii's public system of higher education has an integrated data system that includes all public institutions; an opt-out consent policy that maximizes the number of students eligible to participate in reverse transfer; an automated process via the "STAR" system that both identifies eligible students and executes preliminary degree audits; a general education system that maps college learning outcomes to college courses so that general education requirements can be fulfilled based on learning outcomes, not just course completion; a reverse transfer policy that allows substitutions and waivers for institutional-specific degree requirements identified as barriers to reverse transfer completion; and leadership commitment to sustain reverse transfer by institutionalizing the process. Hawaii also benefits from a centralized public higher education governance structure that facilitates the implementation of transfer and articulation policies, including reverse transfer policies.

That said, this Data Note illustrates that reverse transfer policies have potential to increase state associate's degree attainment up to at least 18% within only a couple of years, as evidenced by Hawaii. Although many states have not implemented reverse transfer at scale, nor have they fully developed or refined reverse transfer policies, it is important to understand the potential contribution of CWID to state college completion efforts and to monitor results to understand what is possible at scale.

References

- Taylor, J. L., Bishop, C., Makela, J. P., Bragg, D. D., & Ruud, C. M. (2013). *Credit When It's Due: Results from the baseline study*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Taylor, J. L., & Bragg, D. D. (2015, January). *Optimizing reverse transfer policies and processes: Lessons from twelve CWID states*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Table 1. Potential Increase in State Associate's Degree Attainment Due to Reverse Transfer

State	Average Number of Associate's Degrees Conferred Annually (3-year average)	RT Degrees Awarded AY 2013-14	RT Degrees Awarded AY 2014-15	Increase In Associate's Degree Attainment Due to RT in AY 2013-14	Increase In Associate's Degree Attainment Due to RT in AY 2014-15
AR	9,108	17	217	0.2%	2.4%
CO	16,167	0	68	0.0%	0.4%
FL	96,887	202	73	0.2%	0.1%
HI	4,122	732	726	17.8%	17.6%
MD	14,822	452	368	3.0%	2.5%
MI	32,788	375	604	1.1%	1.8%
MN	21,342	355	1,007	1.7%	4.7%
MO	18,875	13	176	0.1%	0.9%
NC	27,135	0	665	0.0%	2.5%
NY	67,915	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
OH	34,035	594	408	1.7%	1.2%
OR	12,617	200	100	1.6%	0.8%

Note: Annual associate's degree attainment data based on three-year average using IPEDS data; estimates include all Title IV eligible postsecondary institutions in the state.

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