

All or Nothing?

Midpoint Credentials for Students Who Stop Short of the Baccalaureate Degree

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Executive Summary

At a time when college completion matters more than ever before, it is important to ask whether students have adequate opportunity to acquire formal markers of achievement—college credentials—as they progress through higher education. This paper contributes new information to the national conversation on college credential attainment. This small-scale study was undertaken to understand the accumulated credits of students who stop short of conferral of their intended credentials, particularly students who depart from universities at or beyond the midpoint of a baccalaureate degree (approximately 60-credits in the typical semester-based schedule). The study confirms that, for students for whom no credential emerges from college course-taking, even after acquiring a substantial amount of credits, college is an “all or nothing” proposition. Based on a literature review, web searches, telephone interviews, and secondary data analysis, the study revealed a significant gap in knowledge about student departure beyond the freshman year. However, some models do exist in the U.S. and internationally, and this paper shows how these models recognize college attainment and facilitate the awarding of credentials to qualified students who depart prior to degree completion.

Ascertaining the scale of college departure among students beyond the freshman year is nearly impossible using existing national datasets with the exception of Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson’s (2009) *Crossing the Finish Line*. They estimate almost 45 percent of student departures occur after the sophomore year, with the rate of departure highest among students attending less selective institutions. Further analysis of this dataset has the potential to address not only the access-to-credential question, but also the equity question – who acquires credentials and who does not? The data systems of a growing number of states offer the potential to quantify the midpoint credential phenomenon, but many states are still not measuring college credit at the point of student departure and therefore unable to identify students who are eligible for midpoint credentials. Some have considered credit accumulation at the time of departure, but only through the freshman year which reflects the prevailing research on college attrition that follows from Tinto’s (e.g., 1975, 1993) student retention theory. However, recent reports from states such as Florida, Oklahoma and Texas document substantial numbers of students depart higher education with over 60 accumulated credits. In these three states alone, tens of thousands of students appear to have left institutions of higher education with substantial credits. There is no reason to believe these states are unique, rather they were chosen because their data systems allowed for measuring accumulated credit at the time of student departure. With more time for additional research, other states could be tapped to provide estimates useful to determining the scope of the “all or nothing” phenomenon.

Exactly where students with substantial accumulated credits go and whether they eventually or ever capitalize on their college credits to secure a degree is difficult to ascertain with cross-sectional data only. Tracking students over time, using longitudinal data, is critical to unpacking the “all or nothing” phenomenon. Besides the limitations of cross-sectional data, it is also critical to remember that whenever data are restricted to students with particular numbers of credit hours (rather than transcript data) that degree requirements are extensive and credit hours are only one factor upon which students’ eligibility for a degree is determined. Whether students who have amassed credits qualify for a credential is essential to keep in mind.

Our study identified several models that attempt to address the problem of students earning substantial college credits but stopping short of degree completion.

- For baccalaureate-seeking students with hours earned toward a bachelor's but insufficient or the wrong credits to be eligible for that degree, the **University-Awarded En-Route Degree** or the **Community College-Awarded En-Route Degree for University Students** models provide an avenue toward an award. The former depends on the university having associate-granting authority; the latter is possible where universities are not able to grant the associate degree but partner with community colleges who can award the university-departing students a degree based on the credits earned at the university. Students whose work is short of the bachelor's but sufficient for the associate benefit from a formal award, made possible through these programs, rather than remaining in the "some college credit but no degree" category.
- For students who have earned nearly enough hours for a degree, but who have not completed specific degree requirements (and who are not likely to ever complete those requirements by obtaining sequential advanced courses in the major), the **Associate Completion Degree** or the **Baccalaureate Completion Degree** models might provide an opportunity to complete a general degree. Students who have left their major or left college with little or no hope of completing a specialized degree might not be as well served in the workplace or in life with a general degree, but may be better served with a completed degree than "some college credit but no degree." This type of program can be implemented by individual institutions or on a coordinated statewide basis through the awarding of a General Studies degree, for example.
- For students seeking career-focused education, the **Applied Degree** option (applied associate or applied baccalaureate) is another option. These programs are growing (Bragg & Ruud, 2011), and they are especially attractive when they adopt the career ladder model where students receive stackable certifications, including an associate degree, along the way to the baccalaureate.
- The **Transfer-Back Degree**, the **Dual Admission Degree**, and the **Traditional Associate Transfer** models are all ways to facilitate community college students' matriculation to a university with the intention of earning the baccalaureate but who leave prior to completion by providing the associate degree option.

This report concluded that the idea of expanding midpoint credentials deserves further consideration. Already some higher education institutions are developing programs to meet the needs of students who have accumulated substantial numbers of credits, particularly 60 or more. New theories of student departure are needed that look beyond the ways initial engagement, acclimation, and integration contribute to attrition and identify factors that contribute to student departure at the upper division of collegiate study. Rigorous evaluation of the impact of different models that attempt to serve students who depart college prior to receiving their sought-after credential is also needed. Before new policy and programs can be formulated, it is also important to know what forms midpoint credentials take; how these credentials are perceived by students, employers and institutions of higher education; and under what circumstances they deliver meaningful benefits. Knowing whether midpoint credentials are valuable enough to warrant their expansion is critical to determining whether they can and should contribute to the nation's college completion agenda.

Introduction

This report presents findings from a preliminary study of mid-point credentials, a phenomenon that has growing importance to the production of college graduates and postsecondary credentials in the United States. This project was conducted during summer 2011 by a research team from the Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with the support of Lumina Foundation for Education. The primary purpose of this project was to better understand the accumulated college credits of students who stop short of conferral of their intended postsecondary credentials, particularly students who depart from universities at or beyond the mid-point of a baccalaureate degree (approximately 60-credits in the typical semester-based schedule). The project confirmed that there is a significant gap in the literature pertaining to the departure of students beyond the freshman year and, in the United States, few examples exist at the state or local levels to convert departing students' credits into credentials. The need for such information is growing, and selected examples of mid-point credentials may point the way to future policies and programs.

Research Questions

The three research questions that guided our study of mid-point credentials were:

1. What does the literature (theoretical, empirical, etc.) say about post-freshman departure and mid-point credentials?
2. What higher education institutions (domestic and international) award mid-point credentials, and what are the characteristics of these degrees? What are key features of the policies and programs? What student groups are targeted and/or enrolled? What are institutional commitments (fiscal, physical and human resources) and other supporting policies associated with mid-point credentials?
3. What datasets (national, state, and institutional) contain information about credit generation prior to student departure and credential attainment beyond the post-freshman level?

Methods

The project involved conducting a literature review focused on college departure and postsecondary credentialing, including literature on both domestic and international higher education institutions that grant mid-point credentials for students who do not complete baccalaureate, associate or equivalent degrees. To conduct the literature review, we searched scholarly databases such as ERIC, EBSCO, WilsonWeb, JSTOR, and Google Scholar using search terms such as “attrition & college”, “retention & college”, “midpoint degree &

education”, “midpoint degree & college”, and others. These searches produced a few articles of relevance to the research questions, due mostly to the lack of search terms that address the midpoint concept directly. Reflecting on the extant literature, it is remarkable how little empirical research exists concerning credit accrual to students who depart higher education beyond the first or second year of college, suggesting the need for additional research.

We also searched the websites of states and higher education institutions to identify models, policies and programs that appeared to align with the midpoint credential concept. We sent e-mail inquiries to administrators and institutional researchers at selected higher education institutions that had implemented models that appear to relate to the midpoint credential concept. Some of these inquiries were fruitful and produced data relevant to our research questions, and some of our outreach to state and institutional leaders resulted in useful responses to the requested information.

In addition to the literature, we examined national databases to identify their potential to quantify post-freshman departure and postsecondary credentialing. Our search included review of documentation and publicly accessible datasets on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) website at <http://nces.ed.gov/>. We also made inquiries to several state-level education agencies to determine whether states had already conducted analysis pertaining to the mid-point credential phenomenon and, if not, whether conducting such an analysis would be feasible. For full details regarding the methods used in the generation of this report, including search engine inquiries, e-mail correspondence and telephone communication, refer to Appendix A.

Findings

Results of the literature review and the state- and institutional-level data analysis identified numerous factors that contribute to post-freshman attrition and provided initial estimates of scope of the “all or nothing” phenomenon by identifying the number and percentages of students having some college credits but no degree. The results also present models operating in the domestic and international contexts, based on web searches, e-mail contacts, and phone interviews.

Literature on Factors that Contribute to Post-Freshman Attrition

Though modest in number, a few studies of college attrition and postsecondary credentialing in U.S. and international higher education institutions provide some rationale for and characterization of post-freshman departure.

- College completion has emerged as a top priority for postsecondary education at both the federal and state levels. Complementary to the President’s agenda, Lumina’s Big Goal is to increase the number of high quality degrees conferred in the U.S. by 60 percent by

2025. The Gates Foundation's Completion by Design and the Complete College America initiative, which is funded by several foundations, set similar targets. These initiatives seek greater productivity from colleges and universities to substantially increase the number of college students obtaining college certificates and degrees. Kelly (2010) of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) estimates meeting the 60 percent goal will require the U.S. to produce an additional 8.2 million graduates with associate degrees or higher between the ages of 25 and 34 by 2020.

- While student aspirations to attend college have risen in the last two decades and more than 70 percent of high school graduates participate in some type of postsecondary education or training within two years of receiving their secondary diplomas (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2004), the percent who complete credentials is alarmingly low. Only about half of full-time enrolled college students finish a credential within six years, with only two in ten receiving an associate degree in three years (Jones, 2011). Lumina estimates over 37 million Americans or more than 20 percent of the working adult population have enrolled in college but not completed a degree (see: http://www.luminafoundation.org/newsroom/news_releases/2010-09-29.html). With respect to race/ethnicity, Whites far exceed the six-year baccalaureate degree completion rate of African American and Latino students, with African Americans being the most likely of all racial/ethnic groups to have accumulated some college credits but no degree (The Education Trust, 2010a, 2010b). These figures suggest the “all or nothing” phenomenon is not distributed equally among student populations, with students of color being disadvantaged relative to White students. No doubt, similar results emerge for low income versus high income students.
- Using national longitudinal data, Bound, Lovenheim, and Turner (2007) studied credential attainment over the last three decades and attributed the falling rate of credentialing to increased rates of enrollment in college among students less-prepared for postsecondary education. They concluded that students who enroll in college without foundational college preparation are less likely to finish a college credential than students who take a rigorous college prep curriculum. Interestingly, Bound et al. found different contributing factors to the extended time to degree phenomenon. With extended time to degree, Bound et al. found students who begin college at less selective public institutions, especially in states that have had rapid growth in the number of college-age students along with diminished public funding for higher education, take longer to complete college credentials than students attending more highly selective institutions.
- The study of college departure has been a primary area of empirical study in higher education for decades. Predominant among the theoretical frameworks used to study college completion is Vincent Tinto's longitudinal study of student departure (Tinto,

1975, 1993) which focuses on the importance of the integration of students socially and academically in order for them to be more likely to persist in college. Because of the centrality of integration (beginning from the time a student enters college), research that stems from Tinto's theory tends to focus on the early stages of college attendance when students either do or do not engage with institutions (and classrooms) in ways that facilitate persistence (Melguizo, 2011). According to Melguizo, the study of college completion has been so heavily influenced by Tinto's theory that it has neglected alternative ways to conceptualize the college completion phenomenon, leaving unanswered questions about how various pathways to and through college affect completion and credentialing, including college departure past the freshman year.

- The few researchers who have studied departure beyond the freshman year have recognized that students drop out at many points in their college experience, especially nontraditional students and those from underrepresented groups (Ishitani, 2006). Sophomore-to-junior attrition has received some attention in the literature wherein the “sophomore slump” is a recognized phenomenon, and there is evidence that attrition rates from the sophomore to the junior year are higher than expected or desired (Yu, Digangi, Jannasch-Pennell, & Kaprolet, 2010). However, almost no attention has been given to departure from the junior to senior year or during the senior year (Allen, Robbins, Casillas, & Oh, 2008) when students have accumulated substantial credits but no degree.
- The size of the student population that departs beyond the freshman year without receiving any degree or credential is very hard to estimate, but some researchers have suggested the number is substantial enough to deserve more attention from institutional leaders and policy makers. Citing previous studies, Wintre, Bower, Gordner and Lange (2006) reported 50 percent of college students depart after the freshman year, but they claimed that this statistic inflated the college departure rate because it did not adequately account for the longitudinal progression of students through various institutions of higher education. Even so, in their widely cited book *Crossing the Finish Line*, Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) reported 44 percent of attrition occurs after the sophomore year, and they urged researchers to use a more nuanced definition of college departure to better understand how attrition can be addressed through improved policy and programs.
- Studies of the impact of college enrollment and credentials on employment, wages and further education and training provide strong evidence of positive effects. Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010) document the importance of college credentials to social and economic mobility, showing the contribution of both bachelor's degrees—the goal of most college aspirants—as well as associate degrees to future income and advancement in higher education and the labor market. Carnevale et al. raise questions about the necessity for bachelor's degrees in the rapidly-changing labor market, arguing that

associate degrees should play a more prominent role in higher education due to their relative economic payoff. However, other researchers question the value of associate degrees and other pre-baccalaureate credentials, particularly ones that are highly job-specific or unknown to employers. Bailey (2011) and others have cautioned against the potential for credentials to proliferate without adequate understanding of their supply and demand or their differential benefits for diverse student groups.

Secondary Data Analysis

Knowing few studies detail the phenomenon of post-freshman departure, we turned to several sources to attempt to ascertain the scope of the problem. Bowen et al.'s (2009) *Crossing the Finish Line* examines educational attainment, particularly baccalaureate degree attainment, in the United States, examining how different factors, such as high school experiences, financial aid, institutional selectivity, and others contribute to students' completion of college degrees. Bowen et al.'s (2009) dataset is detailed later in this report, including its inclusion of 350,000 college students and its importance to determining how college influences persistence and postsecondary credential completion. Most relevant to our study, Bowen et al. reported 44 percent of departures from college occur after the sophomore year, with the rate of departure higher among less selective than more selective institutions. Among state universities with lower selectivity, student departure occurred steadily throughout the six years students were tracked by Bowen et al., with less selective institutions showing a departure rate about twice as high as major flagship universities. Regrettably, Bowen et al. did not report the credits students had earned at the time of their departure, precluding us from knowing the proportion of students who had sufficient credits to receive a postsecondary credential, assuming the academic coursework acquired by the students would qualify them for a degree.

*Trent/George-Jackson Dataset*¹

Creating a secondary dataset drawn from the original Bowen et al. (2009) data (with support from the Andrew W. Mellon foundation), University of Illinois researchers William Trent, Casey George-Jackson and other members of their team are conducting a National Science Foundation (NSF) project entitled *STEM Trends In Enrollment & Persistence for Underrepresented Populations (Project STEP-UP)*; see <http://stepup.education.illinois.edu>). This dataset is being used to examine “issues pertaining to underrepresented undergraduate students in STEM fields at large, public research universities” (C. George-Jackson, personal correspondence, July 7, 2011). It consists of student-level data from eight large public research universities. Using Integrated

¹ University of Illinois researchers William Trent, Casey George-Jackson, and others secured support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to construct a sub-set of the original Bowen et al. dataset. This secondary dataset, which we refer to as the Trent/George-Jackson dataset, includes a relatively large sample of students attending major research universities in the Midwest, and it is the basis for research currently funded by the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Talent Expansion Program (STEP) of the National Science Foundation (NSF; see: http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5488&org=DUE).

Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) classification, the sample comprised 1 Mid East school, 2 schools in the Plains, and 5 Great Lakes schools. The size of the sub-sample that was analyzed for this report was 41,893 first-time, full-time domestic students. Consistent with earlier analyses of Bowen et al. (2009), results are skewed toward completion since the students enrolled at research institutions with higher than average admission selectivity and also higher than average completion rates. These institutions also enroll fewer minority and low income students who have a higher incidence of departure from college than non-minority and higher income students (Bound et al., 2007).

Analysis of the Trent/George-Jackson dataset revealed the number of college credits that students accumulated at the time of their departure from eight mostly highly selective research universities. Of the usable dataset of 40,766 students, 9,497 or 23.3 percent of the sample did not complete and were not enrolled at the end of the 6-year study. Table 1 shows that about two-thirds of the students departed with 60 credit hours or less, with the highest proportion having departed with between 16 and 30 cumulative credit hours (i.e., during the freshman year). The remaining one-third of the sample departed with over 60 credits, and, therefore, may have accumulated enough credits to qualify for a pre-baccalaureate credential, such as an associate degree. These results suggest the incidence of post-freshman departure is non-trivial, even among selective universities.

Table 1. Total Credits Earned on Departure from Eight Selective Public Research Universities

Cumulative Credit Hours Earned	Number	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1-15	1105	11.6	11.6
16-30	2142	22.6	34.2
31-45	1591	16.8	50.9
46-60	1407	14.8	65.8
61-75	960	10.1	75.9
76-90	634	6.7	82.5
91-105	498	5.2	87.8
106-120	475	5.0	92.8
120+	685	7.2	100.0
Total	9497		

It is important to acknowledge a limitation of the Trent/George-Jackson dataset pertaining to our mid-point credential study. Because students were not followed after departure from the initial institution of enrollment, it is not possible to know whether the students completed a credential at another postsecondary institution. Therefore, departure is indistinguishable from transfer to other

institutions, temporary stop-out or other patterns of enrollment/completion are not accounted for in our estimate of departure.

State-level Analysis

In addition to the analysis conducted by George-Jackson, we turned to states known to have longitudinal data systems to determine whether student departure and postsecondary credentials could be performed. Whereas a number of states (e.g., Florida, Illinois, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington) indicated it would be possible to run these data, and a few even indicated they would be running these numbers in the future, as they were interested in exploring the mid-point credential issue as a component of their state’s college completion agenda. However, only a few states (Florida, Oklahoma, and Texas) were able to provide numbers in the short timeframe of our study. Preliminary results from these states follow.

Florida

Representatives from the Florida Department of Education’s Division of Florida Colleges, which represents 2-year institutions as well as the state’s Colleges (formerly 2-year institutions that have since been given baccalaureate-granting authority), drew from existing data on associate-degree seeking students in the 2007-2008 school year to respond to our inquiry. Table 2 details results of this analysis.

Table 2. Degrees Awarded to Associate-Degree Seeking Students at Florida Colleges (2007-2008) by Cumulative Credit Hours Earned

Cumulative Credit Hours Earned	Associate of Arts (AA)	Associate of Applied Science (AAS)	Associate of Science (AS)	Total
18- 24	8,875	989	2,038	11,902
25- 36	13,237	1,314	3,228	17,779
37- 48	10,723	915	2,720	14,358
49- 60	8,271	729	2,156	11,156
61+	11,859	1,444	5,343	18,646
Total	52,965	5,391	15,485	73,841
(Completers)	37,219	Unknown	12,135	

Surprisingly, 18,646 (25.3%) of the students who departed did so with over 60 accumulated credits. Although the individual courses these students took are unknown, we can assume some of those students departed with enough credits or nearly enough credits to qualify for an associate degree. Over 11,000 students departed with 49 or more credits, making them

candidates for programs that help students re-enroll and acquire needed credits or transfer back credits to attain an associate degree.

Oklahoma

Oklahoma recently added an associate degree completion program to its baccalaureate degree completion program called *Reach Higher*, which involved analyzing data on students who are near completion of associate and baccalaureate degrees. Although analysis of students with 60 or more credits was not possible given the short timeframe, state officials assured us that they would run such statistics, given more time.

In the initial analysis, Oklahoma officials ran a query of students who had not received a credential, but who had acquired 40 or more credit hours and had a grade point average (GPA) of 2.0/4.0 or higher. In the state, 87,386 individuals fit this classification, representing students who are close to meeting the credit hour and GPA requirements of an associate degree or who may already qualify for the degree. The average number of credits for this group of individuals is 75, indicating that most students in this group have over 60 credit hours and may qualify for a mid-point credential such as an associate degree or other certification. The *Reach Higher* program requires students complete some credits at participating colleges, so automatic conferral of associate degrees based on credits attained is not currently a possibility. Further information about *Reach Higher* appears on the following website: <http://www.okhighered.org/reachhigher/>.

Texas

Texas has (as of August 2, 2011) just implemented a baccalaureate degree completion program called *Grad TX* (see: <http://www.gradtx.org/>). This program includes eight participating universities that provide flexible completion programs that take a wide variety of credits and quickly move students to the baccalaureate degree. To examine the problem of students who drop-out or stop-out prior to receiving the baccalaureate degree, we asked staff of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to run an analysis of students at both public and private universities who, within the past five years, had dropped out of their baccalaureate programs and had yet to obtain a credential. We have not yet received the results, due to the short turnaround time of our request; however, a related analysis conducted by the THECB yielded results that are pertinent to our study.

Of particular interest to the officials in Texas were those students who had obtained at least 45 semester credit hours. The number of students who dropped out of universities without a credential and with over 45 credit hours in the past five years was 68,103. Among this group, 10,034 (14.7%) had 46-60 credits, 17,377 (25.5%) had 61-90 credits, 5,391 (7.9%) had 91-100 credits, and 35,301 (51.8%) had over 100 cumulative credit hours. This study reveals a

surprisingly large number of students who are very near the credit hours required to complete of a baccalaureate degree, but who had not completed the degree.

The next section discusses models that may assist students who have substantial credits but no credentials such as the many students noted above in Florida, Oklahoma, and Texas. Some of these examples show how pathways for students with at least 60 cumulative credits, including over 100 cumulative credits, qualify for pre-baccalaureate credentials, including the associate degree. A description of models and programs existing in higher education institutions in the United States labeled “Domestic Models” is presented first, followed by a brief description of models and programs found in the “International Context.”

Domestic Models

Because the journey from matriculation in college to the completion of a baccalaureate degree is quite long and not all students persist through to the end, the question of whether formal markers of achievement exist that students could earn along the way—so that seeking a baccalaureate degree is not an all-or-nothing endeavor—is important. Various ways this is happening can be seen in higher education in the U.S.

The following discussion explains our categorization of the primary ways that students who have earned college credits have attained a degree or certificate short of or including the bachelor’s degree. In addition to a description of each model, illustrative examples of the primary models are provided. We do not advocate for these models as representing exemplary practice. Rather, we present them as real-world illustrations of how these approaches look in selected higher education institutions in the U.S. today. Gaining an understanding of how prevalent the different approaches are is beyond the scope of this project, but would be a useful avenue of future research. Appendix B provides a summary of the major models. Appendix C provides a graphical depiction of the ways different students move through, and out of, the higher education system.

Models are presented in a particular order. First are those that, as we are interpreting the models, most closely address the central concept of this study, namely the importance of providing students who accumulate substantial numbers of college credits but who have not met baccalaureate requirements a formal degree or credential. Moving down the list, models that offer opportunities to students seeking completion or that attempt to support student achievement, but that may not necessarily qualify as mid-point credential programs are included as a reference point for further research and discussion. Links to the programs discussed in this section can be found in the Additional Resources section below.

University-Awarded En Route Degree Model

En-route awards are granted to baccalaureate-seeking students after they have made progress toward the bachelor's degree, but when they are still well- short of fulfilling the requirements for that end point. The awards are part of programs that are structured to ensure that students complete a formal degree or certificate if they have made substantial progress even if they have not completed the bachelor's degree. Students enter the 4-year institution as freshmen and engage in a baccalaureate program. The structure of the degree program is constructed such that students are eligible to receive an associate degree or other formal credential, awarded by the 4-year institution, when the credential requirements are met. Because the requirements of the midpoint degree or certificate are built into the baccalaureate program as sub-requirements, they are completed by students as they progress toward meeting baccalaureate requirements. It may be that the associate degree is awarded automatically or it may be that minor additional paperwork is required to complete the awarding process. Individual institutions may have other names for the award, such as milestone credentials. A student's goal at entry to the program is completion of the baccalaureate, but the award of the associate along the way, which is built into the structure of the academic program, is potentially useful. One such benefit is that students who complete enough of the process to earn the associate but who stop short of the bachelor's have an earned degree. Alternate terms for this model include Midpoint Associate and Milestone Credential.

CUNY Staten Island Associate-to-Bachelor's Structure. The College of Staten Island of The City University of New York is an example of an institution that awards an En Route Associate's Degree to students in baccalaureate programs who complete the requirements for an AA, AS, or AAS degree while they work toward their end-point degree. From the institution's web page, <http://www.csi.cuny.edu/catalog/undergraduate/3501.htm>, "The associate's degree will be awarded to matriculated students who have neither applied for nor been awarded the AA, AS, or AAS degree but who have completed all of the degree requirements including at least 30 credits earned in residence. Students who meet these requirements will be notified of their eligibility for the degree and given the opportunity to decline." Each college in the CUNY system is semi-independent and is able to operate its own programs. The College of Staten Island is unique in that it was created in the 1970s with the merger of a community college (Staten Island Community College) and senior college (upper-division Richmond College, which had been established about ten years earlier to deliver the junior and senior years to transfer students).

Goodwin College Internal 2+2 Program. Another example is provided by Goodwin College's, a small associate-granting institution that is expanding to award bachelor's degrees. The institution modeled self-contained degree programs after common 2+2 programs that are designed to facilitate student transfer from community college to university. At Goodwin College completion of an associate degree is built into those 4-year degree programs. One

Goodwin College administrator shared via email that the motivation for creating the built-in midpoint credential is that it allows students to earn a formal credential on the way to their bachelor's degree. The college can attract students who would have been intimidated by the commitment a full 4-year degree would require. Ideally, these students will be warmed up to college and, although they may think when they begin the program that they will stay only through the associate degree, they will persist through to the bachelor's after experiencing success at college. Students receive formal recognition of achievement in this system well before the ultimate graduation with the bachelor's degree. A Goodwin College administrator said, "Many of our students will still need to experience some kind of 'success' or accomplishment in the pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. One of our objectives is to be a true 'milestone' college and celebrate successes along the way." Because Goodwin is historically an associate-granting institution, building the associate degree into the new bachelor's degree programs was feasible.

Community College-Awarded En Route Associate Degree for University Students Model

This model allows baccalaureate-seeking students, whether they are continuing to make progress toward that degree or have stopped their university studies, apply credits earned at the 4-year institution to a community college degree. Students are eligible for an associate degree if they have made substantial progress that overlaps with associate degree requirements, even if they have not completed the exact associate degree curriculum, as prescribed. Students enter the 4-year institution as freshmen and engage in study in a baccalaureate program. Students who leave the bachelor's program without completing its requirements can apply their earned credits toward an associate degree that would be awarded by a 2-year institution if the associate requirements are met. In some cases, associate degrees are automatically awarded by a 2-year institution to students at a 4-year institution without any additional paperwork required.

West Virginia University-Parkersburg. Programs at West Virginia University (WVU) at Parkersburg illustrate this model. WVU-Parkersburg is a former community college that is still predominantly an associate-granting institution. The school offers a limited number of bachelor's degrees: Bachelor of Applied Science (Business Administration; Child Development; Criminal Justice), Bachelor of Applied Technology, Bachelor of Arts (Elementary Education; Multidisciplinary Studies), and Bachelor of Science (Business Administration) and a Regents Bachelor of Arts. See: http://www.wvup.edu/Catalog_2011_2012/baccalaureate_degrees.pdf. The institution offers a suite of what it calls both "non-traditional programs" and "flexible degrees." These associate degree programs allow students to complete degrees that are not necessarily the ones they sought initially. Following are program names and descriptions quoted from the institution's web page http://www.wvup.edu/Flex_degrees/default.html:

Board of Governors A.A.S.

If you have attended college in the past but never earned a degree, this flexible program can put a degree within reach. This is a flexible degree that offers an opportunity to transform life experience into college credit.

Occupational Development A.A.S.

Labor union members go through an intense apprenticeship program as part of their training. WVU-Parkersburg offers many of the local unions a chance to combine the apprenticeship with general education courses for an Associate in Applied Science in Occupational Development.

Technical Studies A.A.S.

Similar to the Occupational Development Degree, the Technical Studies Degree brings together technical school learning and general education requirements. Learning that takes place outside of the college complements courses taken at WVU-Parkersburg to establish this degree.

Note that other community and technical colleges in West Virginia also offer the flexible Board of Governors Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degrees. Information can be found on the web page of the Community and Technical College System: <http://www.wvctcs.org/bogaas.asp>.

Associate Completion Degree Model

Associate degree students who drop- or stop-out prior to fulfilling the requirements of a degree are awarded a degree based on earned credits or are given an opportunity to finish the degree requirements in the timeliest manner possible. To take advantage of this opportunity, students may need to opt to receive a general associate degree, even if they had previously been working toward a specialized degree. This factor has been identified by the Project Win-Win project at the Institute for Higher Education Policy as a barrier to attracting potential degree recipients: “[T]he default associate’s degree offered or awarded to the student is... [a] standard transfer degrees, whereas some students will be... candidates for an Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) in a particular occupational field, and may resist the offer... on the false assumption that once the A.A. or A.S. is awarded they cannot return to school to finish requirements for the A.A.S.”⁴ The awarding of the general degree has the advantage of allowing students from a variety of educational fields to complete the degree with credits already earned or by completing a minimal number of additional credits.

⁴ http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/PROJECT_WIN-WIN.PDF, pp. 4-5

Reach Higher, Oklahoma. The Oklahoma *Reach Higher* program illustrates this model. Students can earn an Associate in Arts (AA) or Associate in Science (AS) in Enterprise Development through the state's *Reach Higher* program. The program facilitates the use of credits students have already earned toward the associate degree. Two concentrations, general studies and business administration, are available. The programs offer students flexible, year-round enrollment periods and rolling admission (according to the program web page, <http://www.okhighered.org/reachhigher/associate/>, "You can apply any time"). Students select a home institution from among 14 Oklahoma public community colleges and technical branches, which will award the degree. Credits already earned at that institution or elsewhere, and earned online from other participating institutions, can be used to meet degree requirements.

On the program webpage (<http://www.okhighered.org/reachhigher/associate/>), this option is marketed as being "for working adults who want to finish their college degree from a state college or technical branch." Prospective students are told that it is a "second chance to finish your degree - while you keep your normal routine, maintain your normal work hours and still have time for your family." To be eligible, applicants must have already earned at least 18 hours of college credit, have at least a 2.0/4.0 GPA, and have met all remedial education requirements.

For example, one option students can select for their home institution is Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College. Degree requirements are detailed on the institution's *Reach Higher* web page (<http://www.neo.edu/Academics/Support/ReachHigher/tabid/1287/Default.aspx>). The Business Administration option requires 60 hours of credit: 37 hours of General Education and 23 hours of Business Administration Core courses (6 hours of Accounting, 6 hours of Economics, 3 hours of Marketing, 3 hours of Statistics, 3 hours applied internship, and a 2-hour capstone seminar). The General Studies option also requires 60 hours, 37 of which are General Education courses. In addition, students completing this option must earn "23 college-level hours selected from the student's filed of interest."

Note that Oklahoma also has a related *Reach Higher* program for baccalaureate completion, offering a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Organizational Leadership, that would fall under the Baccalaureate Completion Degree model described in this report.

Baccalaureate Completion Degree Model

Baccalaureate students who drop- or stop-out prior to fulfilling the requirements of a degree are given an opportunity to finish degree requirements—perhaps in an alternative, general, degree program—in the timeliest manner possible. These degree options are often mandated by state higher education governing boards but are also implemented by individual institutions. These degrees are often offered/awarded in general fields (e.g., Bachelor of General Studies, Bachelor of Integrated Studies, etc.) so that students from a variety of educational fields can complete the degree by meeting general education requirements and meeting a high number of elective credit

requirements. The high level of flexibility allows students who have accumulated substantial credits, but who may be short numerous specific requirements for their declared major, to apply those credits toward the general degree. Thus, for example, an Engineering major who has over 110 credit hours but lacks a full sequence of upper-division major courses that would take several semesters to complete might be able to meet the requirements of a General Studies bachelor's degree with a single semester's additional work or perhaps even by taking a handful of course online or through another alternative-delivery mode.

West Virginia Regents Bachelor. The West Virginia University Regents BA (RBA) program illustrates this model. This particular program, part of a state-coordinated systemic approach to providing baccalaureate completion opportunities, is designed to assist adult students who have substantial college credits, but no earned degree, to complete a bachelor's degree. It is limited to adult students who graduated high school at least four years prior to matriculation (or earned a GED any time, but whose high school class graduated at least four years prior to matriculation). Students need to have at least a 2.0/4.0 GPA, but for those who do not meet this requirement, grade forgiveness or replacement policies and petition for probationary admission can help them become eligible for admission to the RAB program. It is designed for non-traditional students who can be awarded a degree based on credits from widely varied sources, rather than as a program a traditional college student would enter at college matriculation. It is highly flexible, building on associate degree programs including the Board of Governors AAS degree, but students can also apply credits earned through traditional college courses, credit by exam (including College-Level Examination Program, or CLEP, credit or institutional testing), life experience credit, military training assessed by the American Council on Education (ACE), or by portfolio review. Credits that would not transfer to traditional WVU programs are accepted for RBA students.

There is a limit of 72 hours of lower division credit from community and junior colleges which can count toward the 128 hours needed for graduation. Remedial courses do not transfer, nor do credits earned as credit-by-exam at other institutions. College-equivalent credits are not transferable nor are most credits earned on the basis of articulation agreements between colleges and their local agencies and industries. Aside from these exceptions, almost all satisfactorily completed course work taken at regionally accredited higher education institutions is transferable.

Students do not face any time limit to complete the RAB. The institution's web page notes that "one recent graduate completed her degree 73 years after she started earning college credits" (http://rba.wvu.edu/faq_s). However, students in the WVU RBA Program can only remain active for three years from the time of initial admission to remain continuously enrolled. Those who become inactive must reapply and are then readmitted under the policies in effect at the time of readmission.

Rather than a major, students complete an area of emphasis such as communication studies, business administration, English, sociology, or psychology. Regents BA students must complete a minimum of 128 hours of credit to be eligible for graduation. Students are required earn a minimum of 36 hours of General Education credit hours and to complete a minimum of 39 credit hours of upper-division coursework. The upper-division coursework takes the place of a major and may be taken in any of the optional subject areas or a combination of areas. Students must complete a residency requirement of 24 hours of course work taken at one or more institutions within West Virginia's public higher education system. State Guidelines require that three hours of course work be taken at WVU, but the remainder of required hours may be taken at any one or a combination of the state's public higher education institutions. The three residency hours must be earned by taking regular, graded courses—credit by exam is not eligible to meet the minimal residency requirement. Information about the program can be found at the WVU web page: <http://rba.wvu.edu/>. The Regents BA Program, created by the West Virginia State Board of Regents in 1975, is offered at other public West Virginia Universities as well.

UMass Boston BA Completion in Community Studies. The University of Massachusetts online Bachelor of Arts Degree Completion Program illustrates an institution-specific approach,. In contrast to the system-wide program in West Virginia, the UMass program is an example of a single institution creating a means for students to apply 90 hours of previously-earned credits in combination with 30 additional credits (ten courses) earned through online study to the completion of a BA in Community Studies from UMass Boston. Students must meet UMass Boston General Education requirements, the foreign language requirement, and the diversity course requirement. These might be completed through transfer coursework (or high school coursework or AP scores in the case of foreign language), but might require coursework in addition to the 30 hours of required major credits. Additionally, students must submit a portfolio to meet the institutional writing proficiency requirement.

The primary eligibility requirement is that the applicant must have completed 90 or more credits in a liberal arts, social science or professional-related major at an accredited college or university and must have at least a 2.5/4.0 GPA. The institutional web pages promote flexibility—the online program can be done from anywhere with two or three major courses taken per term—but the program is highly structured with sequential courses spread over four semesters (either fall-spring-summer-fall or spring-summer-fall-spring). The students are expected to complete the program in cohorts ranging from 25 to 100 students. Information about the program can be found on the UMass Boston web page: <http://uc.umb.edu/degree/cpcs/>.

Applied Associate and Baccalaureate Degree Models

Students enroll in an applied associate degree program, which is typically designed to be a workforce-centered degree that provides substantial employment opportunities for students upon

associate degree completion. The applied associate degree has historically been considered a terminal degree, but in the past few decades, an increasing number of institutions have provided direct transfer pathways for graduates of these degree programs into baccalaureate-level course work. Degree programs that incorporate applied associate degrees and course work into a baccalaureate program, or applied baccalaureate degrees, typically require direct transfer, so students must follow a logical “stepping-stone” process to the baccalaureate degree. In some cases, both the applied associate and applied baccalaureate degrees are provided at one institution, particularly due to the growth of the community college baccalaureate (CCB) degree, where 2-year institutions receive authority to award a limited number of baccalaureate degrees. In these instances, the institution requires completion of applied associate degrees before allowing enrollment into the applied baccalaureate program, thereby structurally ensuring that students receive a mid-point credential en route to a baccalaureate degree.

Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology. The Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology’s Applied Baccalaureate programs illustrate this model. A key feature of these programs is the requirement that students who wish eventually to earn a bachelor’s degree must first complete an associate degree. Future baccalaureate students can apply to and enroll in the OSUIT associate program in their intended AB major and, upon successful completion or near completion, apply to move up to the upper-division segment of the program. The degrees are structured such that movement from the associate to the baccalaureate program is smooth. The former is useful as a stand-alone degree, so students who do not matriculate in the baccalaureate program or those who do not finish it have a useful completed credential. For additional examples of this model, please refer Bragg and Ruud (2011) and Bragg, Townsend, and Ruud (2009).

Transfer-Back Degree Model

Colleges sometimes call these “reverse transfer”⁵ programs. In this model, it is the credits that are reverse-transferred rather than the students. Students who enter higher education via community college and later transfer to a university without having completed an associate degree are able to apply credit earned post-transfer toward the completion of the unfinished associate degree. The degree is awarded by the 2-year institution at which the student previously studied, either during or at the conclusion of the baccalaureate program. Those who transfer without the associate degree completed and then drop out of university before completing the

⁵ “Reverse transfer” is used in the scholarly literature on community colleges and transfer to describe the student who starts higher education at a university and then later transfers to a community college. For example, see Townsend (1999).

A *Chronicle of Higher Education* article (“Reverse-transfer programs reward students and colleges alike,” June 19, 2011, by Donna Ekal and Paula M. Krebs) about the use of the term “Transfer-Back” can be found here: <http://chronicle.com/article/Reverse-Transfer-Programs/127942/>.

baccalaureate are left without any completed degree. This model allows such students to have an earned credential regardless of their baccalaureate outcome.

An important consideration is what the motivation is in setting up this system. In some instances it may be that the motivation for developing the transfer back agreement is to help students—the goal is that students who are eligible for at least an associate degree should be sure to have been awarded that degree. In other instances, the objective may be more about institutional cooperation. Especially where funding is performance-based, institutions are motivated to make sure that they have received credit for graduating as many students as possible. These agreements improve the evaluation of community colleges because they result in higher completion rates.

Sam Houston State University. Sam Houston State University’s collaboration with community colleges partners illustrates this model. A Sam Houston State University official told us that the institution “aggressively” transfers courses from the university back to the sending community college so that the community college can then award associate degrees and certificates to qualified former students. He called the program “extremely popular” and noted that benefits to his institution include enhance recruitment and benefits to students include an “emergency fallback” credential as well as more competitive positioning, as degree-holding college graduates, for higher paying student employment while they are working toward their baccalaureate. The college screens students with at least 12 transfer hours and about 60 cumulative hours and informs those who qualify for a degree. The institution also communicates with those who are short by 12 or fewer hours, letting them know that they are close and what they are missing.

Dual Admission Model

Students are jointly admitted to a 2- and 4-year institution. Their completion of the associate degree at the midpoint, when they transfer to degree-seeking status at the university, is built in to their baccalaureate degree program. The partnerships are created to ease the eventual transition and to provide access to resources at both schools throughout the students’ undergraduate enrollment. This model is similar to formal 2+2 agreements between community colleges and universities, but with the critical difference that the students have greater access to both institutions, which provides a blended experience.

Iowa State University. Iowa State University’s Admissions Partnership Program (APP) illustrates this model. Iowa State University admits students with non-degree status as they matriculate at partner community colleges, which includes all Iowa public 2-year institutions. APP students are issued an Iowa State University ID card, receive University academic advising, are eligible to live in University residence halls, are eligible to take advantage of University resources such as student organizations, and are guaranteed admission when they complete

transfer requirements. Due to proximity, students at the nearby Des Moines Area Community College are most likely to take advantage of the full range of APP benefits, but the program offers students throughout the state community college system key benefits—Iowa State University advising and guaranteed admission—that have proven popular across the state. Information about the program can be found at the following link and the associated web pages: <http://www.admissions.iastate.edu/partnership/index.php>.

Traditional Transfer Model

Moving further from the central concept of degrees or certificates that are awarded to students who begin university studies, stop short of baccalaureate completion, and then are awarded a degree or certificate whose requirements they have met, the traditional transfer model is a way that students who begin higher education with the baccalaureate objective earn a formal award along the way. Built into this higher education pathway is a two-step process—first is the completion of the 2-year degree (which many times takes more or less than two years) at a community college, followed by step two, the completion of the 4-year degree (again, the actual time to degree may be different than the name) at a university. Although many traditional transfer students move to the university without having completed the associate degree (see the Transfer-Back Degree model above), the ideal process is that a student will earn both degrees. In this ideal case, all students who complete the first step will have earned a degree, regardless of the outcome of their efforts toward the second step.

Stackable Credentials Model

Stackable certificates provide students a structured pathway toward an endpoint. Unlike a traditional bachelor's program, even a highly structured one with one formal degree at the end, a program built on the Stackable Credentials Model allows students to achieve formal credentials as they complete steps toward the ultimate outcome toward which they are working. The model is characterized by being highly structured—the progressive stackable certificates are developed to connect pre-college academic work to credit-bearing career and technical coursework that leads ultimately to a college degree. The credentials that are earned along the way certify that the student has specific workplace skills that are also needed in the next step in their postsecondary education career. The credentials are ordered, building one upon the next. They have value in the workplace, setting an individual apart from those with no formal credential beyond a diploma (potentially even those with substantial numbers of earned college credits but no formal postsecondary credential), which is useful to students who work as they study as well as to individuals who drop out before completing the degree. For example, ACT, Inc. (2011) describes the National Career Readiness Credential.

Associated with the stackable credentials are the career pathways and programs of study models that are highly identified with occupational-technical preparation for youth and adults. Pathways

and programs of study approaches are designed to enable the participating students to see the sequences of steps required to move from their current situation through college to family-supporting employment. Connections between postsecondary education are explicitly identified, as are connections between the public education system, public support for training (e.g., WIA), and training provided by employers and others in the private sector. Often career pathways and programs of study focus on specific industries and occupational sectors to help students see how their education and training is preparing them for careers (as opposed to repetitive, narrowly focused jobs) (Bragg, Foster & Green, forthcoming)

Dual Credit and Dual Enrollment Models

Students who are still in high school can earn college credit at the same time they work toward meeting high school graduation requirements. These students gain a head start on college. The terms dual credit and dual enrollment both refer to the practice of high school students earning college credits while they are still working toward their high school diploma. Generally, the term dual credit is used to describe the process when students receive both high school and college credit upon successful completion of particular coursework; the term dual enrollment is used to describe the process of students being simultaneously enrolled in high school and college, but without the receipt of credit for both for the same coursework (Andrews, 2004; Bragg, Kim, & Barnett, 2006). Concurrent enrollment is used occasionally in reference to a college-level course taught in the high school (Bragg et al., 2006). Although the terms have different meanings that are subtle, but significant, they are often used interchangeably (Robertson, Chapman, & Gaskin, 2001). Because students taking advantage of the programs are able to make progress toward college degrees before they complete secondary education, the process is loosely related to the central focus of this report.

One of the most developed programs in the nation is the state of Washington's Running Start, a dual enrollment program that allows high school juniors and seniors to take college courses at no cost. The program was piloted in 1990 and then implemented statewide in 1992 (Boswell, 2001). Running Start enrolled 18,167 students (approximately 11,845 Full-Time Equivalent) in the 2008 academic year (SBCTC, 2010). Running Start students are beginning college with a substantial start, often having already earned an associate degree, and, thus, would be at or close to the traditional baccalaureate midpoint as they make the secondary-to-postsecondary transition.

PLA-Based Degree Model

Prior learning assessment (PLA) credit can in some cases be used to earn a college degree. Students gain college credit through demonstrating mastery of material by documenting professional experience, submitting a portfolio for review, taking an exam, or writing essays. Additionally, professional training or certification programs (for example, military training or teacher in-service training) can be converted into college credit by an institution. Additional

information on PLA can be found on the website for Council for Adult & Experiential Learning (CAEL), a leader in PLA-based education, at http://www.cael.org/online_pla_certificate_program.htm.

International Context

Numerous countries' higher education systems have undergone significant changes in the past 20 years in an effort to increase graduation rates and global competitiveness (World Education Services, 2005). European countries have seen an increase in the offering of the U.S. equivalent of an associate degree (Adelman, 2009), while in Australia a greater effort is being made to increase cooperation between the vocational and higher education sectors (Matthews & Murphy, 2010). The United Kingdom has created Lifelong Learning Networks to assist students' progression through the higher education system (Rushforth & Neville, 2004).

A variety of programs are listed below that are designed to increase degree completion in countries outside the U.S. Based on the modest amount of time allotted for this research, this list is not comprehensive, but gives an idea of some potentially viable approaches. Admittedly, language is a challenge in researching international higher education, and there are undoubtedly examples of programs that are not accessible in English. A useful next step in this research involves interviewing education officials in various countries about the strategies and programs they are using to support degree completion. Links to the programs discussed in this section can be found in the Additional Resources section.

Nested Degree and Alternative Exit Award

These degrees have multiple entry and exit points to increase flexibility and have lower level degrees and credentials embedded within a higher degree program, somewhat akin to the idea of "stackable credentials" discussed previously. This flexibility is often used as a selling point for the programs. Generally, students enroll in a bachelor's degree program, but those who do not complete that program are able to earn alternative credentials based on accumulated credits. These alternate credentials are not always awarded automatically as students may need to apply for them upon leaving.

In Australia these degrees are fairly common at the graduate level, but the practice appears to be moving to the undergraduate level as well. The term "nested" is used in Australia, while the term "exit" is more commonly used in the United Kingdom and Canada. An example of one of these degrees is Australian Victoria University's Health Sciences program, which is structured as follows (Wheelahan, 2000):

- Semester 1 Certificate II in Health Science (Patient Transport Attendant)
- Year 1 Diploma of Health Science (Emergency Care)
- Year 2 Advanced Diploma of Health Science (Paramedic)

- Year 3 Bachelor of Health Science (Paramedic)

Nested Degree and Alternative Exit Award	Multiple entry and exit points with formal credentials/degrees are embedded within higher degree programs to increase flexibility.
Additional or alternate terms	nested diploma, nested award, nested credentials, exit awards, exit points
Degree sought	Bachelor's
Degree(s) earned	Varies: Often a certificate and associate first, working toward an eventual bachelor's degree.
Pathway	The student enrolls in the baccalaureate institution, which awards all degrees.
Objectives	Students' goal entering the program is completion of the baccalaureate, but lower credentials can be earned along the way in a process that is built into the structure of the academic program. Students who complete enough of the process but who stop short of the bachelor's degree depart with an earned credential.
Example Countries	Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, Sri Lanka
Example(s)	Charles Darwin University, Australia; Australian Catholic University (associate level), Red River College, Canada; Robert Gordon University, UK; Bournemouth University, UK military; University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka)

Open Degree

Open Degrees are similar to nested degrees in that they have multiple entry and exit points. They are also designed to be flexible with less structured programs of study, allowing students more input on their courses. The degree programs that we have found in this category are almost entirely online. Open degrees are offered by the Open University in the United Kingdom, with some of their programs reaching throughout the European Union. In Australia, the Open Universities are linked with other universities in the country who provide the programs.

Open Degree	Similar to nested degree, but more flexible. Tend to be online.
Additional or alternate terms	nested diploma, nested award, nested credentials, exit awards, exit points

Degree sought	Bachelor's
Degree(s) earned	Varies
Pathway	The student enrolls in the baccalaureate institution, which awards all degrees, unless student has previously earned a lower credential at another institution.
Objectives	Students' goal entering the program is completion of the baccalaureate through flexible study. Students may earn lower credentials along the way.
Countries	United Kingdom, Australia, Hong Kong
Example(s)	The Open University (based in UK, operates throughout Europe), Open Universities Australia, The Open University of Hong Kong

Degree Completion

These programs are designed for students who have already earned some sort of credential, generally at the associate degree level, allowing them to earn the additional credits needed to receive a baccalaureate degree. These programs often last one year, depending upon whether the student is enrolled part- or full-time. Universities in the United Kingdom and Australia actively promote these programs in Hong Kong.

Degree Completion	Designed for students who have already earned some sort of credential, and allows them to earn the additional credits needed to receive a baccalaureate degree.
Additional or alternate terms	Top-up degree, Conversion degree, Attestation programs
Degree sought	Bachelor's
Degree(s) earned	Varies
Pathway	The student enrolls in the baccalaureate institution, bringing with them the credit they earned at a different institution.
Objectives	Students' goal entering the program is completion of the baccalaureate, often in a truncated time period.
Countries	Australia, Hong Kong, Canada, and the UK
Example(s)	Bournemouth University, UK (Top-up); Victoria University, Australia (Conversion); Dawson College, Canada (Attestation)

Credit for Experience

A process of converting experience to college credit is designed to help students who have significant work experience, thus reducing the time it will take those students to complete a degree. How experience is transformed into credits varies by nation. This process is internal to institutions with the college awarding the credit in Canada and the UK, whereas the process is external in Australia, where independent companies seem to be more involved awarding the credit. These international programs appear to be very similar to the domestic service offered by American Council on Education (ACE) called College Credit Recommendation Service (CREDIT)⁶.

Credit for Experience	Students who have significant work experience can earn college credit for that experience.
Additional or alternate terms	Recognition of prior learning (RPL), Accreditation of prior learning (APL)
Degree sought	Varies.
Degree(s) earned	Varies.
Pathway	Work done outside the formal education system is converted to college credit, and then students earn degrees through a combination of application of that credit and credit earned through more traditional coursework.
Objectives	By earning credit for prior experience students reduce time to degree.
Countries	Australia, Canada, UK
Example(s)	Red River College, Canada; Easy RPL, Australia; University of Gloucestershire, UK

National Datasets

A potentially useful way to document college departure, including drop-out/stop-out, in postsecondary education is through the analysis of large-scale databases that follow (track) students through various pathways to and through college. Whereas understanding how many credits students have earned before departure can lead to useful insights, even more important is understanding, through a detailed analysis of departing students' transcripts, what courses

⁶ For information about ACE's CREDIT, see <http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=CCRS>.

students have taken, how many credits they have accumulated before dropping out, and whether these credits could be applied toward pre-baccalaureate or baccalaureate-level credentials. Understanding the importance of this analysis, we reviewed national datasets to understand their potential to determine credit accumulation and credential conferral among students who have accumulated substantial credits but no degrees.

Crossing the Finish Line

Crossing the Finish Line (Bowen et al., 2009) details the analyses conducted as part of an extensive data collection project, sponsored by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The participating institutions were sorted into two different groups: state flagship universities and state system universities. These institutions provided student-level data for a period of six years for their entering freshman cohort in 1999. Data added to these datasets include educational attainment, fields of study, high school history, financial aid, and institutional characteristics of colleges attended, to provide a relatively complete picture of the tenures and educational outcomes of students in a variety of institutions. In all, approximately 375,000 students are represented by the data collection effort, 125,000 for flagship institutions and 150,000 for state system universities. Transcript data are available for all students due to the agreements made with the participating institutions. However, these data are typically not accessible to other researchers unless a compelling argument can be made for their release. The Trent/George-Jackson dataset is an exception. Through Mellon Foundation support and the agreement of selective Midwest research universities, a secondary dataset was created by William Trent, Casey George-Jackson and colleagues to answer questions about participation and outcomes in STEM at the undergraduate level, particularly for traditionally underrepresented students (i.e., women, students of color, and low-income students).

One particular finding of importance to our midpoint study came from Bowen et al. (2009) who observed, “contrary to the claims of those who emphasize the importance of the first few semesters (which are of course highly consequential), *nearly half (44 percent) of all withdrawals occur after the second year* [emphasis in original]” (p. 35). Within flagship institutions, nearly 14 percent of all students withdrew at some point; approximately 6 percent of these withdrew after the second year. Among institutions classified as having the lowest selectivity, nearly 30 percent of students withdrew within six years; about 10 percent of students withdrew after the second year. These results reveal that, at all types of institutions including selective research universities but particularly at less selective ones, students depart throughout their college experience, not just during their first or even their second year.

NCES Datasets

NCES provides a number of databases that may be helpful in examining college departure and midpoint credentials. The databases are listed according to their potential to contribute to further research on midpoint credentials.

Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS). The Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) database consists of a group of three datasets built by following students from their initial enrollment in postsecondary education (cohorts 1990, 1996, and 2004) through their tenure in college. Researchers followed cohorts and tracked educational outcomes, demographic characteristics, financial aid information, and other variables providing the datasets that are available for analysis. The first BPS cohort (approximately 8,000 students) consisted of first time students enrolled in 1990 and who were measured again in a 1994 follow-up study. Data comprising the second cohort's (approximately 12,000 students) dataset is derived from questionnaire research done in 1996 and 2001. Data about the most recent BPS cohort, comprising observations based on following almost 17,000 students, documents the experience of students who first enrolled in 2004 and includes data from follow-up surveys conducted in 2006 and 2009.

Transcript data for the first two BPS cohorts (BPS 1990 and 1996) are currently available to qualified researchers as part of restricted-use datasets. For the most recent cohort (BPS 2004), transcript data will be made available in fall 2011, making this dataset a prime target for further analysis, including credit-by-credit analysis. These BPS datasets may provide the most complete picture available regarding college student departure, as a vast majority of the variables in the datasets relate to postsecondary enrollment including comparative analysis based on students' characteristics, financial aid, and other variables.

National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS). The National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) began with a sample of students in eighth grade in 1988; researchers followed that cohort for 12 years. The original sample consisted of approximately 26,000 students. Follow-up surveys were conducted in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. Data include educational performance, personal and professional goals, experiences, and scores on achievement tests administered to participants. For this dataset, researchers collected college transcript data in 2000. Transcript data are available to qualified researchers as part of the restricted-use dataset, access to which requires an application process and is contingent in part upon the researchers having specific hardware and software. Although the transcript data are fairly dated, the large size of the nationally representative sample could help provide a relatively complete picture of when students depart from college in the U.S., even if it is interpreted as an historical trend.

Education Longitudinal Study (ELS). For the ongoing Education Longitudinal Study (ELS), researchers began following a sample of students in 2002. Starting with their sophomore years in high school, the students will be followed for ten years, with researchers charting students' progress to high school graduation, into the workforce, enrollment in postsecondary education, and other outcomes. After an initial survey in 2002, participants received follow-up surveys in 2004 and 2006. A third follow-up is planned for 2012. The initial survey was completed by approximately 15,400 students, and follow-ups were completed by approximately 14,000 students. This dataset could provide substantial information regarding students who attend and depart college. Firstly, since it starts with high school sophomores and includes additional background characteristics, relationships can be examined between college participation rates and these background variables to see which areas of high school participation have bearing on attrition and retention. Furthermore, college transcript data will be collected in the 2012 follow-up, allowing for analysis of cumulative credits. At present, analysis could reveal when students depart, but for this cohort, even students who entered college immediately after graduation would only have been in college for two years at the time of the most recent follow-up.

Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B). NCES researchers have been developing the Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B) databases by examining post-college behaviors such as employment and graduate work following students' completion of their baccalaureate degrees. These databases are constructed longitudinally by conducting follow-up studies on the same three samples of students. The first B&B cohort (approximately 11,000 students) graduated college in 1993 and participated in follow-up studies in 1994, 1997, and 2003. Researchers followed up once on a second cohort (approximately 10,000 students), which graduated college in 2000, with a survey in 2001. The third cohort (approximately 19,000 students) consists of students who graduated college in 2008. This cohort has been surveyed once in 2009 and will receive a second survey in 2012. This dataset seems of less importance to our mid-point credential study because the sample comprises college graduates, but it does provide a high level of detail regarding students who have completed baccalaureate degrees, as well as providing post-graduation outcomes, a necessary analysis for determining why completion matters.

Summary

At a time when college completion matters more than ever before, it is timely and important to ask whether students can acquire formal markers of achievement—college credentials—along the way rather than having an all-or-nothing experience. This report presents findings from a preliminary study of midpoint credentials, a phenomenon that has growing importance to the production of college graduates and postsecondary credentials. The primary purpose of this research was to better understand the accumulated college credits of students who stop short of conferral of their intended postsecondary credentials, particularly students who depart from universities at or beyond the midpoint of a baccalaureate degree (approximately 60-credits in the

typical semester-based schedule). Based on a multi-methods approach involving a literature review, web searches, and telephone interviews, the project confirmed that there is a significant gap in knowledge about student departure beyond the freshman year. A search of higher education systems in the U.S. and internationally identified a few models that convert departing students' credits into college credentials or in other ways facilitate the awarding of formal degrees to students who drop out. These examples provide insights for future policies and programs.

Ascertaining the scale of college departure among students beyond the freshman year is nearly impossible using existing national datasets with the exception of Bowen et al.'s (2009) *Crossing the Finish Line*, which estimates that 44 percent of student departures occur after the sophomore year, with the rate of departure higher among less selective than more selective institutions. Analysis of this rich dataset has the potential to yield real insight into who is leaving where and when. Because those data have been analyzed to answer research questions other than the ones guiding this report, it is difficult to pull information from existing publications that address our questions. However, it appears that the data to answer highly-focused research questions in addition to what Bowen, et al. investigated are part of the dataset. The BPS dataset also offers potential to address our questions, and we recommend that Lumina support analysis of the dataset when it becomes available later this fall.

State data systems offer some potential to quantify the phenomenon, but at present most states have not measured accumulated college credit at the point of departure. Some have not considered departure past the freshman year, assuming, based on the prevailing research on attrition that follows from Tinto's (e.g., 1975, 1993) groundbreaking student retention theory, that almost all attrition occurs before the students acquire 30 or so semester-equivalent credits. However, data from states such as Florida, Oklahoma and Texas confirm that this assumption is not valid in today's higher education context; recent reports document substantial numbers of students depart these higher education systems with over 60 accumulated credits. Florida found over 25 percent of associate-seeking students who departed did so with over 60 hours. Although nailing down precise data in a short time was not possible, in these states tens of thousands of students are known to be leaving institutions of higher education with well over 30 credits (for example, 68,103 students dropped out of Texas public universities in the past five years with over 45 hours and no earned bachelor's degree from any Texas public or private university; over a ten-year period, 87,386 students left Oklahoma institutions with at least 40 hours, a 2.0 GPA and no credential). It is critical to remember that whenever data are restricted to students with particular numbers of credit hours (rather than transcript data) that degree requirements are extensive and credit hours are only one factor upon which students' eligibility for a degree is determined. For those students with substantial numbers of hours, various programs can help them convert their credits into a formal credential.

It is not possible to point to one solution to the problem of students earning substantial college credits and stopping short of the degree completion, but we can identify approaches that work in particular situations.

- For baccalaureate-seeking students with hours earned toward a bachelor's degree but insufficient or the wrong credits to be eligible for that degree, the **University-Awarded En-Route Degree** or the **Community College-Awarded En-Route Degree for University Students** models provide an avenue toward an award. The former depends on the university having associate-granting authority; the latter is possible where universities are not able to grant the associate degree but partner with community colleges who can award the university-departing students a degree based on the credits earned at the university. Students whose work is short of the bachelor's degree but sufficient for the associate degree benefit from a formal award, made possible through these programs, rather than remaining in the "some college credit but no degree" category.
- For students who have earned nearly enough hours for a degree, but who have not completed specific degree requirements (and who are not likely to ever complete those requirements, such as sequential advanced courses in the major), the **Associate Completion Degree** or the **Baccalaureate Completion Degree** models might provide an opportunity to complete a general degree. Students who have left their major or left higher education with little or no hope of completing a specialized degree might not be as well served in the workplace or in life with a general degree, but certainly would be better served with a completed degree compared to, again, remaining in the "some college credit; no degree" category. This type of program can be implemented by individual institutions or on a coordinated statewide basis in any system in which the awarding of degrees with few major requirements, where the creation of, for example, a General Studies degree, is allowed.
- For students seeking career-focused education, the **Applied Degree** option (associate or baccalaureate) might be attractive. These programs can be constructed with awarding of certifications, including a degree, along the way toward completion of the end-point degree.
- Many students begin their work toward a bachelor's degree at a community college. The **Transfer-Back Degree**, the **Dual Admission Degree**, and the **Traditional Associate Transfer** models are all ways to facilitate this process while ensuring that even those students who transfer to a university with the intention of earning the baccalaureate but who then leave prior to completion will have an earned associate.

This report concluded that the idea of expanding midpoint credentials deserves further consideration. Already some higher education institutions are developing programs to meet the needs of students who have accumulated substantial numbers of credits, particularly 60 or more. New theories of student departure are needed that look beyond the ways initial engagement,

acclimation, and integration contribute to attrition and identify factors that contribute to student departure at the upper division of collegiate study. Rigorous evaluation of the impact of different models that attempt to serve students who depart college prior to receiving their sought-after credential is also needed. Before new policy and programs can be formulated, it is also important to know what forms midpoint credentials take; how these credentials are perceived by students, employers and institutions of higher education; and under what circumstances they deliver meaningful benefits. Knowing whether midpoint credentials are valuable enough to warrant their expansion is critical to determining whether they can and should contribute to the nation's college completion agenda.

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For Further Information about Examples of Domestic Models

Institution: Arkansas State University – Jonesboro

Model: University-Awarded En Route Degree

Link: <http://www.astate.edu/a/registrar/associate-degree-information.dot>

Institution: CUNY College of Staten Island

Model: University-Awarded En Route Degree

Link: http://scholar.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/business/assoc_degree.html

Institution: Evergreen State University

Model: Applied Degree

Link: <http://admissions.evergreen.edu/upsidedown.html>

Institution: Goodwin College

Model: Dual Admission

Link: <http://www.goodwin.edu/majors.asp>

Institution: Iowa State University in partnership with all Iowa community colleges

Model: University-Awarded En Route Degree

Link: <http://www.admissions.iastate.edu/partnership/index.php>

State: Kentucky Public 4-Year Institutions

Model: Baccalaureate Completion Degree

Link: http://knowhow2goky.org/transfer/transfer_completer.php

Institution: Northeastern Oklahoma A&M

Model: Associate Completion Degree

Link: <http://www.neo.edu/Academics/Support/ReachHigher/tabid/1287/Default.aspx>

Institution: Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology
Model: Applied Degree
Link: <http://www.osuit.edu/academics/>

State: Oklahoma Reach Higher
Model: Associate Completion Degree
Link: <http://www.okhighered.org/reachhigher/associate/>

State: Oklahoma Reach Higher
Model: Baccalaureate Completion Degree
Link: <http://www.okhighered.org/reachhigher/bachelor/>

Organization: Institute for Higher Education Policy
Model: Associate Completion Degree
Link: Project Win-Win institutions;
<http://www.ihep.org/projectwin-wininstitutions.cfm>

Institutions: Sam Houston State University with partner community colleges
Model: Transfer Back Degree
Link: <http://www.shsu.edu/prospects/transfer/>

Institutions: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in partnership with Parkland College
Model: Dual Admission
Link: <http://admissions.illinois.edu/parklandpathway/index.html>

Institution: University of Massachusetts
Model: Baccalaureate Completion Degree
Link: <http://uc.umb.edu/degree/cpcs/>

Institution: University of Missouri-St. Louis
Model: Dual Admission
Link: http://www.stlcc.edu/Admissions_and_Registration/Dual_Admissions/

Institution: University of West Virginia Board of Governors AAS degree
Model: Associate Completion Degree
Link: http://www.wvup.edu/Catalog_2011_2012/associate_degrees.pdf

State: West Virginia
Model: Associate Completion Degree
Link: <http://www.wvctcs.org/bogaas.asp>

Institution: WVU-Parkersburg
Model: Associate Completion Degree
Link: http://www.wvup.edu/Catalog_2011_2012/baccalaureate_degrees.pdf

State: West Virginia Regents BA
Model: Baccalaureate Completion Degree
Link: http://rba.wvu.edu/faq_s

International Examples

Institution: Australian Catholic University (associate level)
Model: Nested Degree/ Alternative Exit Award
Link:
http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/publications/handbooks/handbook_2011/faculty_of_business/coursecampus_tables/undergraduate_courses/associate_degree_in_business_administration_aboriginal_and_torres_strait_islander_studies2/

Institution: Bournemouth University (UK) (military)
Model: Nested Degree/ Alternative Exit Award
Link:
http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/futurestudents/flexible/courses/moving_up_the_ranks.html

Institution: Bournemouth University, UK
Model: Top-up
Link:
<http://courses.bournemouth.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate-degree/international-business-management/none/1432/>

Institution: Charles Darwin University (Australia)
Model: Nested Degree/ Alternative Exit Award
Link: <http://www.cdu.edu.au/studentportal/alternative-exit-award.html>

Institution: Dawson College, Canada (Attestation)
Model: Degree Completion
Link: <http://www.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/continuing-education/aec-programs>

Organization: Easy RPL, Australia
Model: Credit for Experience
Link: <http://www.easyrpl.com.au/>

Institution: Open Universities Australia

Model: Open Degree

Link: <http://www.open.edu.au/public/future-students/getting-started/why-oua>

Institution: Red River College (Canada)

Model: Nested Degree/ Alternative Exit Award

Links:

<http://me.rrc.mb.ca/Catalogue/ProgramInfo.aspx?ProgCode=CONMF-DG&RegionCode=WPG>

<http://www.rrc.ca/rpl>

Institution: Robert Gordon University (UK)

Model: Nested Degree/ Alternative Exit Award

Link: <http://www4.rgu.ac.uk/social/courses/page.cfm?pge=53807>

Institution: The Open University (based in UK, operates throughout Europe)

Model: Open

Link:

<http://www3.open.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/open-programme/index.htm>

Institution: The Open University of Hong Kong

Model: Open

Link:

http://www.ouhk.edu.hk/WCM/?FUELAP_TEMPLATENAME=tcSingPage&ITEMID=CCETP

[UCONTENT_56820005&lang=eng](http://www.ouhk.edu.hk/WCM/?FUELAP_TEMPLATENAME=tcSingPage&ITEMID=CCETP_UCONTENT_56820005&lang=eng)

Institution: University of Gloucestershire, UK

Model: Credit for Experience

Link: <http://resources.glos.ac.uk/apply/apl/index.cfm>

Institution: University of Moratuwa (Sri Lanka)

Model: Nested Degree/ Alternative Exit Award

Link: <http://www.codl.lk/codl/programmes/bit/pathway.php>

Institution: Victoria University, Australia (Conversion)

Model: Degree Completion

Link:

<http://www.vu.edu.au/courses/bachelor-of-health-science-paramedic-conversion-degree-hbpa>

Appendix A: Methods

To identify scholarly literature related to the phenomenon of midpoint credentials, team members used resources provided by the University of Illinois Library including academic databases that provide access to scholarly literature. Team members searched EBSCO Academic Search Premier, ERIC, JSTOR, and WilsonWeb. Keywords for searches were: attrition & college; retention & college; midpoint degree & education; midpoint degree & college; attrition & college; retention & college; midpoint degree; midpoint degree & education; midpoint certificate & education; midpoint certificate & college; alternative certificate & college. While substantial scholarly literature was found on topics such as general college attrition and freshman-to-sophomore year departures, articles addressing attrition beyond the freshman year were much more difficult to locate.” These searches yielded substantial scholarly literature about college attrition in general. Articles addressing the attrition of students after the freshman year were also located, but the most fruitful area of publishing in college student attrition research is focused on freshman-to-sophomore year departures. Empirical studies of the models described in this report were not found. It could be that these innovations are relatively scarce and in many cases new, and, thus, have not been studied as a higher education phenomenon.

To first identify and later describe programs that provide the opportunity for students who have college credit short of meeting baccalaureate degree requirements to earn a degree or credential, team members searched the internet using both general Google search and Google Scholar. We followed up with e-mails to administrators at institutions that had promising programs in the United States that appeared to fit our definition of a mid-point degree.

Terms used in web searches, using both general Google and Google Scholar internet search tools (quotation marks and specific country names were often added to these terms when searching):

Consolation degree
Consolation degree credential
Midpoint degree
Midpoint credentials
“When do students drop out of college”
Pre baccalaureate certificate
Reverse transfer
University parallel program
En route degree
Degrees en route to bachelor’s
Milestone degree
Stepping stone degree
Momentum point(s)
Reverse transfer

Community College Transfer Student Degree Completion Program
Reverse articulation agreement
Dual admission program
Short-cycle degrees
Short-cycle credentials
Medium-cycle education
Postsecondary intermediate degree
Intermediate credentials
Built for completion model, college
College comebackers
Nested degree, college
Pre-baccalaureate certificates
Australia short-cycle credentials
Top-up degree program
Top-up degree programmes
Top-up undergraduate degree programmes
Further education colleges
Open degree, Europe
Foundation degree
Career ladder
Vocational ladder
Subdegree education
Sub-baccalaureate degree
First-cycle degree
Second-cycle degree
Nested credentials
Nested degree
Nested diploma
Nested certificate
Advanced Diploma
Attestation of College Studies
Degree exit points
Alternate exit degree
Conversion Degree
Upside down degree

In addition to web searches, a call was put out to colleagues via the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) transfer listserv. Readers may contact the authors of this report for copies of correspondence concerning these data requests.

Appendix B: Models for Awarding Midpoint Credentials

United States

Model	Summary	Example
University-Awarded En Route Degree	<p>Students' goal entering college is baccalaureate completion, but completion and awarding of the associate is structured into the academic program as a midpoint accomplishment. This allows students who complete enough of the process but who stop short of the bachelor's degree to have an earned degree.</p> <p>Students' enrollment path is to begin at a baccalaureate institution and earn the midpoint associate degree from the baccalaureate institution. This is an award that is planned by the institution as part of a structured program, but is something incidental to students, rather than a goal they actively seek.</p> <p>Alternate names include: Midpoint Associate, Milestone Credential</p>	<p>CUNY Staten Island http://scholar.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/business/assoc_degree.html</p>

<p>Community College-Awarded En-Route Degree for University Students</p>	<p>The credits of students who stop short of earning a baccalaureate are repurposed on an ad hoc basis to be applied toward an associate degree, awarded by an associate-granting institution.</p> <p>Students' enrollment path is to begin at a baccalaureate institution, but then to earn the midpoint associate degree from a community college. This is an award that is made on an ad hoc basis with repurposed student credits. It is not a goal students initially seek.</p> <p>Alternate names include: Midpoint Associate, Milestone Credential</p>	<p>University of West Virginia-Parkersburg (a predominantly two-year institution) www.wvup.edu/Flex_degrees/bog1.htm</p>
<p>Associate or Baccalaureate Completion Degrees</p>	<p>Students who make substantial progress toward a degree but stop short or lack specific major requirements might be eligible, or nearly eligible, for an alternate degree in something like general studies. Credits earned while the student pursued the original objective can be repurposed and, perhaps with minimal additional coursework, applied to meet a more general or less prescribed degree's requirements.</p> <p>Students' enrollment path is to begin at either an associate or baccalaureate institution seeking a specific degree, but then to earn the completion degree, usually a general degree, from that institution. This is an award that is made on an ad hoc basis with repurposed student credits. It is not a goal students initially seek.</p> <p>Alternate names include: Completer Degree</p>	<p>Oklahoma Reach Higher Associate Completion www.okhighered.org/reachhigher/associate/</p> <p>West Virginia University Regents BA http://rba.wvu.edu/</p>

<p>Transfer-Back Degree</p>	<p>Students who start at a community college and who transfer before associate-completion can be awarded the associate, with the application of university credits, post-transfer. Whether these students eventually complete the baccalaureate or not, they will have an earned associate degree.</p> <p>Students' enrollment path is to begin at an associate institution and then to transfer to a baccalaureate institution before associate completion. The associate is later awarded by the associate institution, applying both native credits and multi-purposed credits earned post-transfer. This is an award that is made on an ad hoc basis. It is not a goal students initially seek.</p> <p>Alternate names include: Reverse Transfer Degree</p>	<p>Sam Houston State University (with partner community colleges)</p> <p>www.shsu.edu/prospects/transfer/</p>
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International

Model	Summary	Example
Nested Degree/ Alternative Exit Award	Degree programs with multiple entry and exit points increase flexibility and have lower level degrees/credentials embedded within a higher degree program. Students enroll in a bachelor's degree program, but are able to earn alternative credentials based on accumulated credits.	Charles Darwin University (Australia) www.cdu.edu.au/studentportal/alternative-exit-award.html
Open Degree	Less structured than nested degrees, open degree programs have multiple entry and exit points and are highly flexible, allowing students more input on their courses. These degrees tend to be offered in primarily online environments.	The Open University (UK) www3.open.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/open-programme/index.htm

Appendix C: Degree-Completion Decision Paths

Not all students move through college in standard ways. Some start working toward one goal, but then shift focus. What are the possible pathways and outcomes? A couple of paths, with decision points, appear below.



